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Digital school groups during the COVID-19 pandemic in Cuba

Grupos escolares digitales durante la pandemia por COVID-19 en Cuba

Grupos escolares digitais durante a pandemia de COVID-19 em Cuba

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ABSTRACT

The research focused on the study of the school group. It transcended its traditional treatment and focused on its operation in virtual environments, as a consequence of the global health crisis and the containment measures applied. The objective of the research was to characterize structural elements of virtual school groups for middle and high school that functioned in the 2020-2021 school year during the COVID-19 pandemic in Cuba. For this, a quantitative methodology was followed with the application of an online questionnaire. The final sample was made up of 436 students and 82 middle and high school teachers. The results revealed the characteristics of the structural elements of these groups, which were generally identified by formality, low interaction, lack of norms that efficiently regulate the functioning of the group, and low levels of integration and significance of belonging to these groups. Significant differences were also shown in terms of teachers and students and the levels of middle and high school education that marked a diversification in the findings. The study included a projection towards future research that addresses in greater theoretical and methodological depth the relationships between the school group and virtuality and its possible edges in terms of the student-teacher relationship and methodological challenges of distance education.

Keys words: school group; virtual groups; virtuality; group structure; virtuality.

RESUMEN

La investigación tuvo como centro el estudio del grupo escolar. Trascendió su tratamiento tradicional y se enfocó en su funcionamiento en entornos digitales, como consecuencia de la crisis sanitaria global y las medidas de contención aplicadas. La investigación tuvo como objetivo caracterizar elementos estructurales de grupos escolares digitales de enseñanza media y media-superior, que

funcionaron en el curso escolar 2020-2021, durante la pandemia de COVID-19 en Cuba. Para ello, se siguió una metodología cuantitativa con la aplicación de un cuestionario en línea. La muestra final quedó conformada por 436 estudiantes y 82 profesores de enseñanza media y media superior. Los resultados revelaron las características de los elementos estructurales de estos grupos, que de manera general se identificaron por la formalidad, la baja interacción, la carencia de normas que regulen eficientemente el funcionamiento del grupo y bajos niveles de integración y significación de la pertenencia a estos grupos por parte de sus miembros. Se mostraron, igualmente, diferencias significativas en cuanto a docentes y estudiantes y los niveles de enseñanza media y media-superior que marcaron una diversificación en los hallazgos. El estudio incluyó una proyección hacia futuras investigaciones, que aborden con mayor profundidad teórica y metodológica las relaciones entre grupo escolar y espacio digital, así como sus posibles aristas en cuanto a la relación estudiantes-docentes y retos metodológicos de educación a distancia.

Palabras clave: grupo escolar; grupos digitales; estructura grupal; virtualidad.

RESUMO

A pesquisa centrou-se no estudo do grupo escolar. Transcendeu seu tratamento tradicional e se concentrou em sua atuação em ambientes digitais, como consequência da crise sanitária mundial e das medidas de contenção aplicadas. O objetivo da pesquisa foi caracterizar elementos estruturais de grupos escolares digitais de ensino fundamental e médio, que funcionaram no ano letivo 2020-2021, durante a pandemia de COVID-19 em Cuba. Para isso, seguiu-se uma metodologia quantitativa com a aplicação de um questionário online. A amostra final foi composta por 436 alunos e 82 professores do ensino fundamental e médio. Os resultados revelaram as

características dos elementos estruturais desses grupos, geralmente identificados pela formalidade, baixa interação, ausência de normas que regulem eficientemente o funcionamento do grupo e baixos níveis de integração e pertencimento a esses grupos. Seus membros. Da mesma forma, diferenças significativas foram evidenciadas em relação aos professores e alunos e aos níveis de ensino médio e médio superior que marcaram uma diversificação nos achados. O estudo incluiu uma projeção para pesquisas futuras, que abordem com maior aprofundamento teórico e metodológico as relações entre o grupo escolar e o espaço digital, bem como suas possíveis arestas na relação aluno-professor e desafios metodológicos da educação a distância.

Palavras-chave: grupo escolar; grupos digitais; Estrutura de grupo; virtualidade.

INTRODUCTION

The Cuban school, like many other institutions, is under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this health crisis, in order to continue learning and mitigate its impacts, among many other alternatives, greater use of digital tools and digital environments was assumed (Torralbas & Batista, 2020). This movement of education towards the digital dimension imposes raising new questions about the study of the school group and its manifestation in the digital environment.

The school group is the primary unit of preparation for adult life and subjective content of a social nature is reproduced from it. Its enormous potential to transform social phenomena in need of change is one of the main reasons why studies on the phenomenon are increasingly abundant. (Batista & Torralbas, 2019). The group is understood as:

A relatively stable formation that supposes a permanent and direct form of communication that has a certain structure of interaction determined by the characteristics of the joint activity, which, in turn, will permeate all the processes of organization and internal dynamics arising in this joint activity a certain unit of objectives, interests, attitudes and value orientations (Fuentes, 2004, p. 9).

School groups, as a mirror of society and the context that frames it, reproduce in them elements and social processes of everyday life that are often not the most favorable for the development of individuals in coexistence. Proper management of them certainly contributes to reversing this condition and promoting developing practices and worldviews (Forsyth, 2021; Torralbas & Batista, 2020).

The introduction of the digital dimension in the teaching-learning process contains several advantages and risks. Among its advantages are the possibilities of synchronism and asynchrony in networks, communication between people from different geographical locations and greater possibilities of access to information, unlimited interactivity, and information management facilities for large groups, among others. Among its risks and challenges, it is usually pointed out the lack of means and infrastructure in the centers and outside them, the need to use a new methodology that involves updating pedagogical and curricular approaches, the risks of privacy regulations and their ethical implications and the preparation of families to assume this modality (Vialart, 2020; Buxarraís, 2016; Pérez *et al.*, 2015; Cabero-Almenara & Marín-Díaz, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the physical distancing health measures led to an

accelerated use of the digital for the continuity of teaching and, also, to maintain contact with students. From the first months of the pandemic in Cuba, strategies were put in place to guarantee the continuity of the school year. Although the main platform used for teaching turned out to be television, and the use of other resources such as the CubaEduca Portal and the MiClaseTV application are recognized, reality and access to the field have shown that social network platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram have been a complement used to give continuity to the educational process. Therefore, it is necessary to explore what happened to the school group in the digital context.

The study shown is novel, in that it studies the school group in the midst of an atypical national situation and in a space, little studied for the exercise of training basic education students in our country. Also, it can contribute to outlining the impact of distance study continuity measures on students and teachers. It offers an initial description of the expression of groups and its structure in the digital environment, which is the beginning of the study of a reality that will be increasingly present in the Cuban school context.

The general objective of this work is to characterize the structural elements of digital school groups of middle and high school that worked in the 2020-2021 school year, during the COVID-19 pandemic in Cuba.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A non-probabilistic sample from chains or networks was used. The final sample was made up of 436 students and 82 teachers. Of these, 112 students and 21 teachers participated in subsample 1 of secondary education; in subsample 2 of secondary-higher education, 312 students and 56 teachers did so.

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<https://mendive.upr.edu.cu/index.php/MendiveUPR/article/view/2841>

Survey digital platform, was used as a technique. His access was online, through a link and with the necessary Internet connection. The participation was anonymous, safeguarding the identity and confidentiality of the information of the volunteer subjects. The questionnaire had 12 questions and a sentence completion. The filling of the questions was carried out in an approximate time of 15 minutes. The instrument was applied between the months of May, June and July 2021.

The research design was non-experimental cross-sectional, with an exploratory-descriptive scope. This choice is due to the fact that the object of study has been little addressed and its characterization is intended, the definition of its particularities and forms of expression in the selected context.

For the processing and analysis of the information, the Statistical program Package for Social Sciences was used (SPSS) 21. Descriptive statistics (measures of central tendency) and non-parametric tests (Chi-Square) were used. A content analysis of the open questions was also carried out, whose coding contributed to the statistical analysis. Sentence completion was analyzed with qualitative tools.

RESULTS

Typical characteristics of the activity of these digital school groups

The results indicate that 87.0% of the sample affirms the existence of digital groups made up of students and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 9.0% respond negatively, while 4.0% declare that they do not know about the subject. These findings indicate the extension of the use of the digital for the operation of these groups as an alternative to the suspension of face-to-face teaching activities. In secondary-higher

education, a greater use is shown (92.40%), in relation to secondary education (72.20%).

They worked mostly through WhatsApp (97.0%) and to a lesser extent on Telegram (24.0%). Both platforms are, in reality, messaging applications belonging to the large group of what is considered Social Networks. The use of Telegram was notably higher in high school (29.3% and 3.2% in high school).

The main creators of these groups were teachers (67.1%) and/or students (58.9%); the role of managers as creators of the groups is low (17.6%) and family members also emerge as creators of the groups (3.1%). Greater participation of students as creators of these groups is observed in middle-higher education; the directors show more connection with the creation of the groups as the grades of both teachings advance; and the emergence of relatives as creators is fundamentally in the 7th grade, at the beginning of the incursion into secondary education.

Table 1 shows the objectives that are declared for these groups. It is observed that the shared perception is that these groups are the space that satisfies the need for a minimum connection with the educational context to clarify uncertainties. To a lesser extent, it seeks to give continuity to the teaching-learning process through socialization, interaction, carrying out exercises and evaluations, and teaching classes.

Table 1- SEQ Table * ARABIC Declared objectives of digital groups by students and teachers

Objectives	Student	teacher
Provide information about the school	70.8%	75.3%
clarify doubts	51.1%	76.7%
Offer information about the degree	44.3%	57.5%
Share and socialize all members	35.7%	41.1%
Guide and deliver evaluations	35.9%	32.9%

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take classes in one or more subjects	22.2%	42.5%
guide exercises	1.4%	1.4%
Others	1.1%	0.0%

Teachers declare a wider range of objectives. Only one objective emerges where there are greater criteria on the part of the students: guide/deliver evolutions. This reflects those students, unlike teachers, continue to see the educational process with more evaluative rigor than training, especially in middle-higher education.

It is important to point out that dissociation occurs in at least two aspects. High school teachers place greater emphasis on teaching and clarifying doubts, while it is the students who declare socialization as a purpose to a greater extent; In secondary-higher education, an inverse process occurs, students seek in these spaces less socialization than what teachers propose and more teaching aspects.

As Table 2 shows, the most frequent activities consist of teachers sharing materials and information and exchanging doubts. The rest of the more interactive activities obtain medium-low frequencies. It is observed that teachers continue to have a more active role than students, that unidirectional communication and knowledge transmission actions prevail over others of comprehensive education that include those of an informal and/or affective nature.

Table 2 - Activities referred to in digital groups by students and teachers

Referred activities	Students	teachers
Teachers share materials and information	70.0%	67.1%
doubts are exchanged	45.9%	86.3%
Teachers and students share materials and information	28.3%	71.2%
Memes and/or videos are shared	17.9%	8.2%
Talk about personal matters	16.0%	11.0%
Any	1.1%	0.0%
Others	0.8%	0.0%

These groups were found to interact relatively infrequently, ranging from at least once a day (25.3%) to once a week (21.7%). None of the possible interaction frequencies reached an acceptance of more than 50%, which indicates diversity in the functioning of these groups. There is less frequency of interaction in secondary - higher education, since in this the teachers seek more interaction; a greater link was reported in secondary education, especially by students. This shows that high school students seek greater meeting space in these groups; in middle-higher education it is done by the teachers.

Identification of operating standards

In these groups there is no clarity about the rules that should regulate their operation. The results show that all the norms that emerged are shared by the subjects below 40%. A 30.3% of lost responses were found, a fact that acquires greater representativeness when reading the results in terms of the bewilderment responses of the subjects. In this sense, 8.9% explicitly refer that there are no norms, 4.3% do not know whether or not there are established norms; everything makes up a significant 46.2%, a figure that exceeds the norm of greater representativeness found.

Table 3 shows the operating standards stated by students and teachers. Two preponderant norms were found: adjusting to the academic task and non-exchange of an informal, personal, commercial, political, religious or sexual nature (including memes and stickers). In the expressions of the subjects "criteria about the subjects can be shared, doubts can be asked and clarified; the group should not be used to disseminate political or religious content or to commit offenses", "it cannot be used to establish conversations, or to send anything that is not teaching".

Table 3- Norms of digital groups enunciated by students and teachers

Rules	Students	teachers
Adjust to academic task	36.3%	47.5%
No exchange of an informal, personal, commercial, political, religious or sexual nature (includes memes and stickers)	18.4%	37.3%
Good coexistence in the chat	18.0%	18.6%
Restricted participation by teachers	19.2%	10.2%
Appropriate use of language and other forms of expression	7.3%	22.0%
there are no rules	10.2%	3.4%
interact openly	8.6%	0.0%
I dont know	5.3%	0.0%
Respect and not question the figure of the teacher	3.3%	0.0%
Student-teacher interaction	1.6%	5.1%
Do not edit group information	1.2%	0.0%

The most significant particularities are related to the difference in roles. Teachers place greater emphasis on adjusting the academic task, maintaining a merely formal exchange, using language appropriately and other forms of expression: "it is only to talk about classes", "they are only for clarification of doubts and to order activities".

On the contrary, the students find that participation in the groups is restricted by the teachers, and consequently they do not find it a norm to be able to exchange with them in the groups. This finding supposes a conflict between the members of the group, influencing its poor functioning and the meaning that it has for the subjects: "what cannot be done is to interact directly with the teachers in the group, doubts must be clarified by the private one", "write unless the teacher wants", "we have symbols through emojis to ask for permission to speak, you can only speak until the teacher grants it", "we cannot start talking about personal things and send memes , which means that there is no interaction with other colleagues ever. One of the groups is blocked

for students, only teachers can post information, classes are not constant, luckily when we give classes in the other groups we can ask questions and clarify things, and if you get along with the teacher you can ask for more information or more exercises to achieve greater skill".

It is declared that the norms of these groups are regulated mainly by the teachers in almost 50% of the cases, of which 18.4% are also administrators of the digital groups.

Description of the significance of belonging for students and teachers to these digital school groups

The significance of belonging to these groups is analyzed from a more qualitative perspective. This analysis focuses on students and teachers separately, the meaning is described from an attitudinal dimension towards belonging to groups, an affective dimension that describes the main feelings and emotions that arouse in the subjects and an evaluative dimension based on the advantages or disadvantages of the group and the exploration of the space of desire that describes the mobilization of the subjects in relation to the group.

Teacher perspective

Membership is moderately significant. A moment of construction of meanings is perceived that is not yet fully rooted, but emerges in a positive way. They find more attractions than rejections; they have a positive assessment of the groups, although it is not remarkably elaborated. Their emotional involvement has greater projection and is characterized by referring to the favorable bond with students in pursuit of academic exercise and their self-perception as teachers focused on the distance process.

Attitudinal dimension: teachers' belonging to digital groups is described, first, by a favorable attitude towards them. They

express greater sympathies than rejections, essentially directed to the task of the group and to a lesser degree to social relationships. Their favorable attitude towards belonging to these groups is largely based on the benefits they find: continuity of the educational process (55.8%); affective dynamics and assertive communication (9.1%); distance contact (9.1%); provides new opportunities to the educational context (7.8%); school-home relationship (2.6%).

Regarding the continuity of the educational process, the main benefit found, they refer to three fundamental elements: the exchange of information, the deployment of a tutoring function or accompaniment to the student in the teaching-learning process and the interaction with the students: What are the main benefits of these groups?: "the orientation of information regarding the course, as well as the orientation of activities and information about classes and jobs"; "I can keep them active to find out how they are working, clarifying any doubts they have, orienting them on the teleclass schedule, teaching them how to navigate CubaEduca. And, above all, carrying out self-assessments in which the progress or setback of the group is shown".

Affective dimension: their emotional involvement towards the groups is positive and they identify feelings or emotions with greater projection, referring to the favorable bond with the students and their self-perception as teachers involved in the distance education process. The digital groups make them feel... "busy, working and following up with my students"; "a different teacher"; "Very useful during this stage, by strengthening the school-family relationship."

Evaluative dimension: their evaluation of the groups is characterized by a positive vision, but with concise and ambiguous elaborations. The antipathies found were few and they are related to aspects such as the low efficiency of the groups for the exercise of the task, which is modeled by the

difficulties of access; the challenge that they pose for the exercise of the teacher's work from the point of view of methodological competences and in terms of their role as a companion of the student in their teaching-learning process: digital groups... "They do not work as well as I would like"; "they are not very productive"; "they are not very interactive"; "They need other initiatives." Digital groups make me feel... "I'm a lousy teacher"; "that they do not work as they should so that they study"; "As if I were talking to a wall."

In this sense, they declare as main challenges: inequality of access opportunities (26.0%); distance education methodology (19.5%); active participation of the student body (18.2%); limitations due to inefficient infrastructure (9.1%); coordination of chat dynamics (6.5%).

Regarding the inequality of access opportunities, the subjects refer to the different socioeconomic conditions of the students and of themselves to access the platform, say having a device from which to access and pay for internet access with the purchase of data packets or other ways to have a connection: "the access of some to them due to economic difficulties"; "as good as these are, not all students have access to them, which has caused them not to have the same level of information about the school and in some way they are behind the rest."

Regarding the distance education methodology challenge, teachers declare difficulties in finding the tools that allow them to explain, transmit and evaluate the contents and promote a motivating and interested attitude in the student body in a digital environment: "explaining a subject is complicated"; "maintain student interest"; "the difficulty in explaining what they mean in the teleclass since the meaning in which it is explained has to be completely changed".

The challenges in terms of the demand to use new distance education methodologies and

the active role that students must play in the construction of their own knowledge and training, are notably more valued by secondary-higher education teachers. While the limitations due to inefficient infrastructure, referring to quality of connection and coverage, are mostly perceived by high school teachers. It is interesting that, being this a new medium to carry out a task as complex as the educational process, very few teachers find coordination of the dynamics of the chat a challenge, which is consistent with the fact that these groups are a space of very little exchange and dynamics.

There is a willingness and interest in improvements in the group, which favor it from the functional and affective. As a consequence, their expectations and motivations towards the groups cover three main aspects: interpersonal relationships with greater dynamism and socialization, the concern to find in the students greater motivation and interest in the task and the exchange, and the possibility that all students can have access to the groups and that they be given a better use of the platform: I would like that in these digital groups... "interaction and dynamics were essential"; "the exchange was better"; "students stay motivated"; "there is a kind of motivation to learn" ; "I wish all students had the opportunity to participate in the group"; "were more interactive such as using videos or videoconferencing".

Student Perspective

For students, belonging to digital groups does not acquire a high meaning, because there is an ambivalence notably marked by negative aspects, associated with an average of positive (33.8%), negative (23.1%) and neutral (7.7%) meanings.) that account for this and, an important silence (35.4%) in the projective answers of the completion of sentences, which points to a more unfavorable than optimistic attitude towards belonging.

Attitudinal dimension: the favorable elements are limited to the benefit of receiving the information they provide about the school (44.4%), receiving materials for the classes (38.3%) and clarifying doubts (34.5%). Still, to a lesser extent, the possibilities of interaction, both among peers and with teachers, are considered attractive.

Of the total number of students, 37.3% did not provide any projective elaboration and 35.1% valued them positively. The figures corroborate that the attractiveness towards the groups is an affected component for the students. Half of these subjects with a favorable attitude towards the groups give a remarkably superficial and concise elaboration ("they are good"). The rest place greater value on social relationships and recreation, and few support their evaluations with the fundamental task of the group, in which case they respond that their contribution is to keep them informed of school affairs: the digital groups in my classroom... "they are to talk about us, share and on a few occasions share some study material"; "we help each other where we can and talk for a while"; "They're fun at times, that takes the stress out of worrying about guidelines or doubts."

19.3% value them negatively, alleging that in general they are very inactive in terms of homework, their use is deficient and unproductive and with respect to social relationships they present with very low interaction: the digital groups in my classroom... "They are not useful Not at all"; "they are useless and hardly speak"; "they do not contribute anything"; "they hardly fulfill the function for which they were created".

What students in these groups like least is, in the first order, the prevailing need to have the internet to keep up to date about school (68.3%), that some classmates cannot access (45.1%) and that they send many messages (37.5%). It is important to highlight that the percentages found in terms of dislike are higher than those of

attractiveness. All this generates an unfavorable attitude towards belonging to the groups, awakening more discontent than satisfaction for the students.

From another point of view, the greatest representation of those dissatisfied with digital groups is on the part of high school students, differing from high school students with more notoriety in terms of internet access and cost and the difficulty of interacting with the teachers; on the contrary, high school students pay more attention to relationships with peers.

Affective dimension: as a consequence, the emotional impact that these groups have for the students does not reach a significant degree of affectivity (32.5%). Among them, the brevity with which they reflect feeling "good" prevails. Secondly, they show greater sympathy for finding calm in the groups regarding the exercise of the task and a smaller group of subjects are emotionally mobilized by social relationships: digital groups make me feel... "quite integrated as long as I can participate in the debates that interest me"; "that I am part of something that is going to help me understand teleclass"; "happy because that way I can interact with my friends"; "part of the group again, as if we were all in class again".

25.5 % of students state that this is an emotionally negative component. Their reasons are based on the deficiency of the groups, facing the educational process, the low quality of relationships with teachers and between students and the impact that overload, nonconformity, confusion, feelings of bewilderment, overwhelm and anxiety have on each individual frustration for developing school activity in a non-face-to-face and unfamiliar context: digital groups make me feel... "Overwhelmed, I feel like I'm not making progress. I am left with doubts when I answer the exercises"; "as if they put a gag on my mouth"; "frustrated, because I feel like I've lost this year"; "I need face-to-face classes".

Students express the need for active and functional accompaniment by teachers, which provides them with greater clarity regarding the academic task. Expectations of greater interaction, participation and dynamism emerge, faculties that exist at very low levels. In the third order, a certain conformity emerges due to how the groups have worked, which really translates into indifference or disinterest and, ultimately, it was obtained that belonging to these groups supposes an economic cost that does not contribute favorably to the meaning of belonging. Under this circumstance, the accompaniment of the teacher and the interactive and collaborative functioning of the group have greater relevance for the student: I would like that in these digital groups... "they would give classes and the teachers would care more"; "could interact and that the teachers were more attentive and interested in our future"; "let us write"; "there will be more student-teacher interaction"; "interactive activities were carried out"; "be accessible to all students."

The differences between students and teachers are evident. For teachers, it is described by a moderately significant subjective impression, with greater attractions than rejections and a positive emotional assessment and involvement. The significance of their membership is influenced by the disagreements regarding the possibilities of access of the members, and the expectations of a better performance of their role and that of the students.

For the students, the attractiveness towards the groups is affected, finding more rejections, silences and/or displeasure. The degree of significance acquired by belonging is low. Their sympathies are very poorly elaborated and with low emotional involvement, without becoming highly regulatory of their functioning, since they do not manifest themselves relevantly in the behavior of the members, and remain in a discursive and expectation plane. The rejection of groups is based on their lack of functionality to respond to the main activity

and on the low levels and possibilities of exchange and development of the affective sphere.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained show that there are structural elements to speak of a group in the digital dimension. The existence of these translates into a relatively stable formation, with a form of communication whose interaction structure is determined by the characteristics of the joint activity. Despite the structural conditions, the construction of meanings associated with groups has not been clearly recreated, but is precisely in its formative moment.

The activity of these groups, the core of their existence, is evidence of this lack of production, since they are still in a moment of subjective-individual appropriation characterized by very low levels of appropriation and integration (Fuentes, 2004). The activity acquires a personal meaning for the members, with little intrinsic value, which is formally included in their individual life project, almost in a mandatory way.

This element conditions typical characteristics with still predominant marks of verticality and authority that define the relationship patterns between two types of essential roles: students and teachers. Therefore, the reality of these groups is characterized by ambiguity and this peculiarity identifies all the structural elements explored, as well as the significance that belonging to these groups has for the subjects.

The most affected structural element is the standards. Its condition, which is to support the structural framework of the groups, defines with very little flexibility the dynamics of each process of influence, communication and interaction. The shared

frame of reference that should regulate the functioning of the group is not effectively elaborated and what exists is an ambivalence of the established norms that reflect the dissociation between the two main complementary roles of said groups (students and teachers). In this sense, a close relationship is established between norms and roles, starting from the fact that every position is associated with a set of common beliefs regarding its function, and these beliefs represent a system of norms. This is manifested in norms that constitute expectations of some members with respect to others and vice versa, such that they ratify certain dysfunctional behaviors in both roles, with which the norms cease to be effective regulators in these groups, and hinder their success, the process of interaction and identification with groups.

The disfunctionality that emerges from these structural elements is explained by a clear dissociation between the interests of students and teachers in relation to the activity of the group and its objectives. Added to the low elaboration of the norms, the deep-rooted style of vertical and unidirectional communication that gives rise to the absence of negotiation between students and teachers, to explain and agree on interests, objectives and build shared evaluations.

This dissociation is manifested due to the intersection of interests that marked the diversification of the results found, in terms of the roles mentioned and the levels of education. Within secondary education, students and teachers have a greater proximity of interests, while students sought more that space for interaction that teachers declare exists, even though they are teachers focused on the task. Meanwhile, high school students are further away from sharing space with teachers at this level, since their zone of interaction and formation of connections or bonds is outside the school group shared with the teacher.

Teachers consider, to a greater extent, that the groups have the objective of maintaining greater exchange in the face of the continuity of the educational process and, accordingly, they consider that they work properly, with the distinction that students must modify their attitude towards study so that the result is more fruitful. However, this is not related to the real need that the students in said groups need to satisfy; it translates, mainly, into staying informed. It does not go beyond the reception of information and content, mainly because it does not perceive the possibility of something else, because the established regulatory framework frames the activity precisely from those two counterproductive roles, a sender and a receiver without feedback.

So, it is logical to find demands of one another that will never be fulfilled. This evidences the reproduction of certain phenomena in the digital plane; the reference is about the lack of articulation between the functioning that the school should have from the institutional point of view and the one that it really has. It is appreciated with other results obtained in related investigations that what is regulated is not effectively complied with. On the one hand, it is not required and, on the other, it is not internalized, since there is no interest in understanding its importance (Torralbas, Batista & Naranjo, 2020).

Another element that significantly influences the functioning of the groups has to do with the territory in which they are developed: the digital space, specifically the WhatsApp messaging application. It should be noted that the essence of social networks has a very clear social function. Its purpose is to provide an interactive place where users share, collaborate, cooperate and exchange, thus acting as an instrument of socialization and entertainment. However, in the field of education, this function of social networks converted into educational platforms offers the opportunity to redirect the communication style traditionally established between the actors of the teaching process

and provide it with a more collaborative and interactive character. However, social networks by themselves do not guarantee this result, but rather are the door to it, but opening it is an intentional act of the subjects.

Despite this, research has shown that the operation of digital groups has been a challenge for all members due to dissimilar factors and has not been formed as a functional complement to education. It is about "a being without being", which confuses and disrupts the development of the group and generates a certain ambiguity in relation to belonging to this space, since the members do not find the familiarity of this new territory with the school activity. This makes sense, since the use of social networks in education was never intended to replace the school as the space par excellence of the teaching-learning process; The digital nature of these groups reflects how the immediacy that characterizes social networks, including WhatsApp, is not compatible or efficiently adjusted to this process, unless its usefulness and use is resignify around education.

The intentional and focused act of the actors in the process mentioned above refers precisely to this resignification of the digital space. How to achieve this is based on the construction of a negotiated normative framework, which at least serves to ensure a safe territory of minimum access for the development of the group and, in addition, provides uniformity and organization to the processes of interaction and organization of activities of these groups.

This is related to the fact that the first condition for the formation of these groups was the need to continue the teaching process driven by the circumstances of the health crisis. The promptness and accelerated pace of moving the classroom to WhatsApp show that it is necessary to manage the digital classroom in a complementary way with the face-to-face classroom, since the potentialities of the

teaching space can be multiplied in both environments, including some elements that do not find their expression in the physical classroom can have output in the digital space.

Another element that has influenced the evolution of these groups is the individual-group-society dialectical relationship. The group emerges as its own reality together with the influences of the individual subjectivities of each member and, in this case, there is a subjective construction of the school as a space of displeasure that is widely shared by its members, which has marked the reality of the group.

In this sense, it happens that the character of these groups is essentially formal, as well as improvised. The activity, attractions, organization and interaction revolve around the academic task and, at a very low level, social relationships. To this is added that the digital trait of these groups affects their task in all its aspects and, therefore, the greater "attraction" it has for the members. Therefore, the reproduction of the phenomenon of displeasure towards school, already manifest in schools even before the impact of COVID-19, is revealed as a result.

On this, it is declared that learning and study have a negative valence. Although perhaps not to the same extent, the field of social relations framed in the educational context also escapes the space of pleasure for these groups. This reduces the mobilizing and influencing capacity of these instances, compared to others such as Facebook or Instagram, and even WhatsApp, but in the informal groups to which they belong. Torralbas & Batista (2021) illustrate that this phenomenon has been propitiated, to a large extent, by the rigidity with which life is structured at school and how distant its total functioning is from the daily life of the student body, which has been reproduced in the digital context as already explained.

The results also show many hopeful signs and potential. They reveal that there is a positive starting point between students and teachers. The desire space of these groups is shared by a large part of their members. A better teaching-learning process is desired, better relationships are expected, and tasks that awaken greater attractions, functional roles that complement each other efficiently are expected. The primary obstacle lies in explaining and agreeing on interests in a common space, establishing congenial and functional norms and organizing the activity from a more horizontal interaction process. All this on a new platform that certainly has the potential to become an effective complement to education.

The essential contribution of this study is to contribute to reflect from investigative findings to a new type of reality. Glimpsing the structure of the group, the integration and the attractiveness of the members has been the first step to verify other group processes of cohesion, development and influence; factors that give important clues about how to work group dynamics in order to achieve higher performance, develop students and prepare them for their future life.

The fundamental limitation of the study lies in the need to explore other structural elements, for example, the types of roles. Also, some other dynamic aspects that the remote application was limited to address. However, it opens the way for future research that will surely incorporate these elements.

The research reveals gaps in the functioning of digital groups, which are a reality not only in times of pandemic. They have arrived in our school system and we must promptly attend to the insertion and coexistence of face-to-face education and digital education. This will make it possible to serve it at the institutional level and provide training to school actors. The result will surely be a greater use of technological resources, overcoming cost and infrastructure obstacles

that influence, to some extent, everything described in the research, and a better use of socio-emotional factors conditioning this activity.

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