

# **“Collaboration with parents isn’t a burden. It’s just a natural part of my work.” - Parental Involvement in Switzerland – An Analysis of Attitudes and Practices of Swiss Primary School Teachers**

**Jan Egger**

Pädagogische Hochschule der FHNW  
Solothurn, Switzerland

**Jürgen Lehmann**

Pädagogische Hochschule der FHNW  
Solothurn, Switzerland

**Martin Straumann**

Pädagogische Hochschule der FHNW  
Solothurn, Switzerland

The subject of home-school relationship is normatively charged and has increasingly become the focal point of pedagogical discourse in the past years. The article reports results of the project “Home-School Cooperation”, which was supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation. This qualitative study examines, how teachers shape their interaction with parents. The main research question is, which habitualised background convictions guide the interaction of teachers with parents. The data was collected in 10 Swiss primary schools. 39 interviews with teachers and headmasters were transcribed for case reconstructions. They were analysed using sequence analysis according to the method of objective hermeneutics (Oevermann, 2000, 2002a) and interpreted in the tradition of the “Deutungsmusteranalyse” (analyses of patterns of interpretation) (Dewe, 1984). We refer to Oevermann’s theory of professionalisation (Oevermann, 1996, 2002b). Main results are: Teacher–parent cooperation differs as follows: active vs. passive focus on action; dominant client focus; the way the school’s interests is enforced on parents. Teachers show three different interpretations on school–family relationship. “Schools and families as unconnected agents of socialization”; “schools and families as disparate actors of socialization” and “cooperation as a partnership in a professionalised work alliance”. Moreover, seven super-individually interaction patterns can be reconstructed.

**Keywords:** home - school cooperation, practice of teachers, attitudes of teachers in primary schools

## **Introduction**

The concept of parents as “actors” in the educational context is increasingly becoming a topic in Switzerland’s educational policies and pedagogical discourse (cf. Ditton, 2009; Eggert-Schmid Noerr, 2011; Wild & Lorenz, 2010). The relationship of school and parents is influenced,

problematised and re-shaped by many societal and organisational factors, as well as by educational policies. Among these factors we may name: the pluralisation of society; increasing awareness of equal opportunities in education; the knowledge that there is a connection between family characteristics and educational success (Becker & Lauterbach, 2008; Jeynes, 2010); changing work conditions; as well as the new demands of parents to the school. Especially since the results of the PISA 2000 study (OECD, 2001) were published, the role of the family in the educational process of children has become the focal point of current specialist discourse. Follow-up investigations of PISA 2000

---

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jürgen Lehmann, Pädagogische Hochschule der FHNW, e-mail: juergen.lehmann@fhnw.ch

concluded that the extent to which children are to profit from the educational process is highly conditional on their home environment and therefore on the specific familial habitus conveyed by it as well as the pre-existing social, cultural and economic capital in the family home. (Falter, 2012; R.-T. K. Kramer, 2002; Neuenschwander, 2005; Ramseier & Brühwiler, 2003).

This increasingly makes parents the focal point of educational and social policy and has led to a new definition of the relationship of school and parental home. In German-speaking areas we have therefore seen a semantic shift of the term "collaboration with the parents" towards the term "pedagogic and educational partnership" (Bauer, 2006; Haase, 2012; Sacher, 2008, 2014). According to Stange (2013, p. 15) parents and teachers collaborate in true pedagogic and educational partnerships *"in a comprehensive, systematic and binding way, they act in concert, cooperate intensively in educational and pedagogic matters on an equal footing, in the interest of the child's positive development. Parents and professionals are thus equals, leaving behind the classic asymmetric patterns in relationships between parents and professionals. All bear equal responsibility and collaborate in an egalitarian and balanced partnership."* So far there hasn't been an empirical investigation to establish whether this discursive new evaluation of school-parent relationships is mirrored by a radical change of the teachers' attitude and a realignment of their interaction with the parents. This study which is an analysis of current teacher-parent interaction practices (Straumann, Egger, & Lehmann, 2014b), aims to close part of this research gap.

This paper reports on selected results of the study focussing on the depiction of reconstructed interaction patterns. During the study 39 teachers and school administrations in two Swiss Cantons were questioned in open interviews. The interviews were analysed using sequential analysis and then searched for common behaviour and interpretation patterns.

The article is structured as follows: The first part explains the methodical approach with the methodological references. Then the seven intrinsically logical action patterns found will be presented. They, in turn, will be assigned to one of the three reconstructed interpretation patterns of the teachers about the task and function of school and family.

### **The Interaction Patterns of Teachers and Parents: Remarks on Content and Method**

The article is based on the results of the project "Home-School Cooperation" (Egger, Lehmann, & Straumann, upcoming; Straumann, Egger, & Lehmann, 2014) which was financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The study examines how teachers and school administrations shape their interaction with the parents based on the following research questions: How do teachers shape their interaction with the parents and what would they like to achieve? What events lead to direct or indirect contact? Which problem areas are addressed? Great importance was given to the question of habitualised background convictions which guide the interaction of teachers with parents.

The data was collected in 10 primary schools in the two Swiss Cantons of Basel-City and Solothurn. The provisions for the involvement of parents are different for the two Cantons. The schools were selected according to contrasting socio-economic criteria and differing school cultures<sup>1</sup> concerning parental participation. 32 non-standardised interviews were conducted with primary school teachers (1 - 3 year) and seven interviews were made with the school principals. Within the scope of the study was the whole spectrum of contacts of teachers and school administrations with parents.

First of all it should be mentioned that the interaction between teachers and parents is very diverse. It takes place in various settings. They range from whole class events to spontaneous individual talks in passing; from mandatory yearly parents' evenings that follow a pre-determined procedure to crisis-talks with no pre-determined structure at all. This great diversity of events and problem areas, which characterise the interactions of teachers with parents, shows super-individually identifiable and reproducing behavioural patterns that can

---

<sup>1</sup>According to Helsper (2009) school culture is the sum of all symbolic systems of discourses, interactions, practices and artefacts that each shape the school in a different way. This also includes individual and collective interactions with parents taking place in the school as well as participatory relations concerning the parental home.

be reconstructed. These behavioural patterns are rooted in an intrinsically logical system of meaning and reasoning. We shall refer to these behavioural patterns as interaction patterns. We were able to reconstruct seven intrinsically logical interaction patterns of teachers that will be described in this article. These interaction patterns were not only described but also investigated to find latent structures of meaning that shape and structure the interaction.

With its theoretical references the project therefore follows the tradition of interpretation pattern analysis (Meuser & Sackmann, 1992). Interpretation patterns are stocks of knowledge structuring our lives as "theories of everyday experience" (Oevermann, 2001) and that therefore form the basis for the habitualised latent background convictions that shape our interactions.

The interviews were analysed using sequential analysis according to the method of objective hermeneutics (Wernet, 2000) and were transcribed for case reconstructions (Kramer, 2000) to reconstruct interpretation and interaction patterns. The reconstructed cases were analysed for similarities and differences and a typology of interaction patterns was compiled (Ecarius & Schäffer, 2010; Kelle & Kluge, 2010).

The analysis of the interviews showed three contrasting characteristics:

- The first characteristic is *active* or *passive focus on action*: Do teachers actively include the parents in their interactions or do they tend to avoid contact with the parents?
- The second characteristic is *client focus*: Are the teachers' actions and legitimation patterns geared towards the interests of the pupils, the parents, their own personal interests or the interest of the school?
- The third characteristic is *legitimation*: How do teachers enforce the interests of the school against the parents? Which patterns of legitimation do teachers use to bring their arguments to bear on the parents?

The interaction patterns therefore reflect different characteristics of teacher-parent interaction. What we call interaction patterns are exaggerated ideal types. The sample does not contain persons who consistently embody just one interaction pattern. Each individual teacher always displays different interaction patterns, which dominate individual aspects of their interaction

with the parents and therefore can be reconstructed as dominant behavioural patterns.

The interaction patterns are shaped by different interpretations and ideas about the tasks and functions of school and family. This is why we analysed teacher-parent interactions and interaction patterns to find common and differing latent meaning which guides the interaction. The analysis shows three central interpretations of the relationship of school and parental home, which cannot only be reconstructed as explicit and implicit stocks of knowledge guiding the interaction. They can also be found in different facets in other contexts, for example in scientific theories:

- Firstly, there is the interpretation of school and family as two contrary, unconnected agents of socialisation complementing each other, but characterised mainly by their differences. On the whole the relationship is harmonious, since the differences are deemed to be constructive for a successful socialisation. In general the need for cooperation is not considered to be important. This is why the interaction between teachers and parents limits itself to the statutory duty to provide information, which is fulfilled in a very formal way. This interpretation of relatively unconnected institutions of differing functional orientation can be found i.a. also in Parsons (2005), in Wernet (2003) and Luhmann (2004).
- Secondly, some teachers interpret school and family as two overlapping socialisation agents that interact and mutually influence each other (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Melzer, 1987; Neuenschwander, 2005). It should be noted that the negotiation processes are determined by the balance of power and that one institution always tries to influence or even overrule the other. The boundaries of the relationship are therefore always blurred in one way or another (cf. blurring of the boundaries of school: Nerowski, 2015).
- Thirdly, we were able to reconstruct an interpretation of the relationship where teachers and parents cooperate on an equal footing without intending to interfere in an invasive way. This interpretation can be categorised as separate from the other two in so far as the two socialisation agents are perceived as different, but this difference is viewed as the basis for cooperative actions

which are constitutive for the learning and educational processes of the child. This is an interpretation which school pedagogics discusses and demands in the form of a pedagogic and educational partnership (Bauer 2006; Sacher 2014) and which comes close to a professionalised work alliance (Combe 2009; Oevermann 2009) with pupils as well as with parents.

These three interpretation patterns are mirrored in the accounts of the interviewed teachers as ways of thinking which shape the interaction in a decisive way.

In what follows, the seven interaction patterns are grouped into the three interpretation patterns. The three groups of interaction patterns are therefore connected by a common interpretation of the relationship of family and school.

### **Education and socialisation in separate living environments**

The following two interaction patterns are alike in that the teachers have *"almost no contact"* with the parents, as one of the teachers puts it. If there is an interaction it happens mainly because of mandatory or organisational requirements in the form of parent's evenings or progress discussions with the parents. Whenever possible further contact is avoided. This scarce interaction with the parents can be traced back to the interpretation that school and family are two separate and unconnected living environments. The two interaction patterns differ mainly in the way the school's interests are enforced and in the concept of why these two living environments are separated and unconnected.

#### **Interaction pattern 1: Interaction based on a traditional concept of school**

Interactions of teachers with a traditional concept of school and family are shaped by their perception of school and family as two separated worlds existing alongside each other. The relationship is determined by a clear division of labour. The school is defined as a place separate from the parental home, where teachers are in charge and where there is no place for parents. The teachers assume that the adults share a common definition of the educational process of the child, which is shaped by traditional values. This is why it is assumed that not a lot of

alignment between the two places of learning is needed.

As a consequence they do not attach great value to the interaction with parents. Loyalty towards the school compels them to accept the mandatory yearly parent's evenings as a duty which they fulfil with a certain inner distance. Parent's evenings are used on the one hand to give parents *"kind of general information about the school building, the running and organisation of the school"*. On the other hand they are an opportunity for parents to voice *"their existing fears"*. These teachers would like to *"counteract that in some way and to prepare the parents a little bit for what we expect"*. They try to ease the parents' insecurities and pressures at their children's enrolment by *"not voicing too many expectations"*. This way parents are *"dealt with at whatever stage they may be"*. Moreover, in preparation they are *"shown in a kind of diplomatic way (...) how school life works"*. The goal of all this is to show the parents *"how one, how we see it ourselves, how I as a teacher see things"*. It is therefore all about making the parents understand the school's viewpoint. This is necessary, since from the viewpoint of the teachers the relationship of parents and school is characterised by latent distrust.

The asymmetric distribution of power between school and parental home is not only accepted by teachers with a traditional concept of school, but also seen as constructive for the relationship. Hierarchies remain unchallenged since the teachers' superior position of power belongs to their traditional role. This indicates an old-school idea of the relationship between school and parental home which states that teachers are to be regarded as authority figures whose statements and decisions are not to be challenged. One of the teachers puts it this way: *"Well, twenty years ago no-one was interested, what we, well, what one does in detail. These children just went to school and that was it."* Teachers with these kinds of attitudes face increasing difficulties since authority is eroding: *"Looking at today's parents, they are a lot more critical. Well, that has changed a great deal. And they challenge a lot more, there is certainly also a connection with the loss of (...) authority."*

Homework is almost the only interface between school and family. It almost demands

some kind of cooperation. This then takes the form of parents becoming supervisors for example. They get the *"task to supervise: Did the child do all his homework? Is it neat?"*

In summary we can state that teachers with a traditional interaction pattern shape their interaction with the parents based on an old-school definition of roles and relationships. This hierarchical relationship leads to a great distance between the school and parental home, which is considered normal. Parents and the school have their respective fields of responsibility in the socialisation process of the child, whereby the school lays claim to the higher defining power. Parents are tasked with the supervision and discipline of their children and are to support the school in its educational efforts.

### **Interaction Pattern 2: Bureaucratic Interaction**

The following interaction pattern describes actions that mainly use *routines* as a basis. It is in principle a bureaucratic way of interacting, a relationship where teachers act within their limited competencies and hierarchical structures of the school following prescribed rules (cf. Weber, 2005, p. 157).

In this sample there are teachers who scarcely see room for shaping their interaction with the parents and when describing and justifying their interaction mostly refer to the school as a formal organisation with its guidelines and procedures. Whenever possible there is only a minimum of contact with the parents and spontaneous contact is avoided. One teacher says: *"I don't believe that at twelve o'clock I have to be there for the parents out of principle"*. If there is any contact, this is mostly initiated by the parents. The interaction with the parents is based on request, it is reactive and avoids relationships. Difficult topics and bigger problems are – whenever possible – delegated to internal or external experts like school social services or school psychologists. The teachers declare themselves not responsible whenever possible: *"And I really believe that there are a lot of school issues and topics that have to be solved outside the school"*.

The few contacts are necessarily overburdened. That is why *"the first parent's evening is of course too much for the parents"*. Although this way of putting it shows a certain understanding for the situation of the parents which is considered unacceptable, it does not go so far as to justify changing anything.

Often, this impersonal way of interacting is also due to a lack of confidence when dealing with the parents. A lack of distance and an unclear definition of their profession inevitably go hand in hand with it. This results in routine actions as a form of protection. Questions or inquiries by parents are often interpreted as personal criticism and rejected: *"Because I have to be able to distance myself, there are moments when I don't want to have anything to do with work, least of all with some of the parents."* Avoiding relationships therefore means avoiding problems. If a contact cannot be avoided, the problem is traced back to the parental home. The parents then receive *"a concrete task that they have to fulfil within a certain period of time"*. Or there is possibly *"an agreement and a date for follow-up is set"*. At times contact with some parents is completely avoided. *"Well, I'm trying to establish certain boundaries which children and which parents I would like to establish new contacts with"*.

Thus, the relationship with parents is highly formalised. The actions are anchored in a structure in which teachers see themselves as implementing agents of the school authorities and where there is almost no room for their own discretion or self-determined actions. There are numerous parallels to the traditional interaction pattern. Here school and family are also strictly delimited areas. The school is responsible for conveying knowledge while the family is responsible for education. Classroom teachers are committed to the school as a formal organisation.

Differences can be seen mainly in the kinds of interactions and in the legitimisation patterns used. While the traditional way of interacting is based on the natural authority of the teachers, this kind of interaction is legitimised and shaped decisively by the guidelines, obligations and constraints of the formal school system.

In summary we can state, that this interaction pattern is shaped by a high degree of routine when dealing with the parents. Minimising effort is a determining factor. Relationships are avoided. When there is no other option the interaction with parents is reactive and based on request. The main goal is a smooth interaction whenever possible. Beyond that there is almost no initiative and empathy for the pupils' and parents' situation, especially if there is a crisis. The crisis

component of the educational process is only perceived when a "problem case" needs to be dealt with. Mostly the solution is to delegate the problem to other experts or institutions like school social services or to the parents. On the whole teachers who display this interaction pattern show almost no initiative when it comes to cooperating with the parents.

This kind of interaction is characterised by strongly formalised and routine-oriented actions based on a hierarchy with clearly defined limits and responsibilities, which corresponds to the characteristics of a bureaucratic organisation. The school is mainly a public authority.

### **Education and Socialisation in Overlapping Living Environments**

The following four interaction patterns are characterised by the teachers' view that the two agents of socialisation i.e. school and families are overlapping. These four interaction patterns share the fact that the actors try to influence their counterparts and change their behaviour. Therefore there is a latent pattern of blurring of boundaries and interference.

#### **Interaction Pattern 3: Interaction as a Service to the Parents**

The interaction pattern *school as a service to the parents* can be categorised in-between the passive interaction patterns that try to avoid a relationship and the interaction patterns that actively try to establish a relationship. It is characterised by the fact that teachers feel strongly committed to the parents. However, unlike in the bureaucratic interaction pattern, their actions are not justified by citing the interests of the school or formal obligations as a pretext. Rather, the actions of these teachers are shaped by the constant pressure to prove to the parents their worth as experts and teachers. They shy away from possible confrontations with the parents, since they feel they are dependent on them. Parents perceive them as omnipresent, they are *"like helicopters watching everything"*.

The teachers interpret their role in such a way that the primary professionalised work alliance is forged with the parents and not with the pupils. Following this logic, homework - for example - is not only seen as a pedagogic tool. It is mainly also a *"bridge"* to *"show the parents what the children have learned so far"*. Its central function is to inform the parents about what is going on at

school. The profession is perceived as an ongoing challenge *"not to be unnerved by very demanding parents who have very high expectations of their children and the school."* These teachers usually don't feel confident enough in their professional role to stand their ground against the parents. *"Swiss families or those who have a connection to education, or may think that they know something about it and who maybe feel like they know a thing or two about it. [...] Maybe they have been successful at school themselves, they maybe know what a good school could or should look like [...]. I then get the impression that they want to win me over to their side."* This often results in the teachers adapting to the parents' ideas, whose wishes are fulfilled whenever possible, even if they contradict the teachers' own convictions. One of the teachers did not hold a child back a year even though this contradicted her professional opinion, because *"the parents believe that the child will have a breakthrough after all"*. The teacher accepts that this is *"painful"* for the child, *"because somehow the child does suffer."*

These teachers want to be well *"received"* by the parents and under no circumstances do they want to be perceived as those who *"do old stuff"*. In the relationship they try to *"have an open ear for concerns"*. They need a *"bigger repertoire, to be able to assess the parents, what they need and how I can best reach them."*

The relationship of these teachers with the parents is characterised by caution. Parents are perceived as very *"invasive"* because *"they are in a clear position of power."* To be on the safe side, a lot of comprehensive information is given and discussions are transparent and target-focused. Regular information is important. Individual teachers inform parents on a weekly basis about the behaviour and work ethic of their child and have the parents sign the information to confirm that they have seen it.

Often these teachers are critical both towards the parents and the school. However, due to practical constraints they tend to yield to the school just as they yield to the parents.

In summary we can state that that this interaction pattern is shaped strongly by fractures and conscious and subconscious contradictions. The teachers intuitively recognise precisely where the specific

problems of pupils and parents are to be found. Often they display both empathic intuition and analytical focus when dealing with an individual case. However, in their actual interaction with parents and pupils they are often compelled to act against their convictions and fulfil the expectations of the parents instead. It's difficult for these teachers to strike a balance between justified demands and interfering claims of the parents. To be on the safe side, the relationship with the parents is highly formalised due to a lack of professional confidence. All of this leads to actions mainly geared towards adjustment and conformity.

#### **Interaction Pattern 4: Interaction with the Parents to Serve the Pupils**

This interaction pattern shares some common traits with the previous one. Both display empathic and analytical understanding when dealing with the individual case of the pupil. Both hint to the parents exerting a lot of pressure on their children.

However this interaction pattern is characterised by the teachers justifying their actions by looking out for the good of the child because the parents are exerting too much pressure. It is therefore supported by the latent conviction that the parents are not treating their children in a child-friendly way: *"Yes, these are children that I feel very sorry for, where I get the feeling that they are missing out on part of their childhood."* Their image of childhood is characterised by the idea that it is a purely protective space, a carefree time of happiness. Therefore the teachers believe that school has to compensate this by becoming the protective space which the children are not offered at home. Teachers displaying this interaction pattern feel committed to the child. This can mean that they oppose parents *"always pushing their children further"*, *"squeezing every last drop of performance out of them"* or *"optimising them, as an economist may say"*. One teacher reports that she tries to *"Remove the parents' stress that [at their child's enrolment] everything has to be there already"*. She demands that *"the child is given more time"*. For her this time also means that the over-demanding parents do not need to be informed about everything right away. *"They don't have to know everything. Some things are a process. It might just upset them."*

The pupils are seen as children with an autonomous personality that has to be respected

by the parents. One of the teachers instructs their pupils accordingly: *"And when someone enters then they're a guest and you open the door. (...) And the child should decide if the parents are allowed to look at his homework."*

In summary we can state that this interaction pattern is shaped by the teachers' perception that the parents are over-ambitious. The teachers try to influence the parents in such a way that the child is relieved from the pressures of the parental home. Often cultural pessimism is used to legitimise the interaction: Parents' loss of child-rearing skills, migration issues or a loss of values in society. Parents are perceived as deficient. Therefore it becomes the teachers' and school's task to counteract this tendency for the good of the child. The teachers act as advocates of the children's well-being. Teachers choosing this interaction pattern try to create – at least partly – a compensatory protective space in their classes. As a result, parents are often perceived as a disruptive counterpart.

#### **Interaction Pattern 5: Interaction with the Parents Geared Towards Communitisation**

Among the teachers who attach great value to including the parents there are also those who want to offer a great deal and organise a lot of projects. The numerous events are organised to enable social interaction. The goal is what we call a "communitisation" of school and parental home. In the process the educational process of the pupils sometimes recedes into the background. *"But somehow there is an enormous togetherness and cooperation between school and parents."* Relationships are often informal, on a first-name basis with the parents<sup>2</sup>, a lot of opportunities for contact are created. *"Then you're not simply the teacher in the classroom anymore. (...) That has brought me a lot closer to a lot of parents."*

The boundaries of the teachers' professional role are blurred which goes hand in hand with their definition of teaching as a task not necessarily in need of professional expertise. Parents get a leading role without being prepared for it. Several teachers describe that

<sup>2</sup> This is not common in Switzerland. The relationship is usually formal.

they plan classes in such a way that the parents' cooperation is a prerequisite. One teacher describes how she lets the parents work with the children during the lessons while she herself assumes the role of an observer. *"And we [the teachers] are just present."*

This blurring of the boundaries of the roles goes hand in hand with a devaluation of the teachers professional qualifications as a whole. The dilemma thus created can only be solved by the teachers becoming parents themselves to be able to carry out their pedagogic task and collaborate with the parents in a positive way. *"Well for me, it's decisive that I am the mother of several children myself. I taught before that, before I had children, but my view of teacher-parent collaboration was totally different (...). Well, I perceived that [teacher-parent collaboration] as very positive as a mother myself. And then I (...) started to attach great value to teacher-parent collaboration, simply because of my own experiences."* Therefore the encounter with the parents mainly takes place from mother to mother, establishing a relationship from person to person rather than from role to role. System and role boundaries are blurred. Professional distance gives way to an amicable or familial closeness.

The relationship to the pupils is also described a familial one. *"Well, at the parent's evenings I told them [the parents] sometimes that I almost adopt these children for two years".* Socialisation in school and family merges together. Parents become guests at the school who get to see during their visit *"where the child stands, how they're doing here."*

These teachers are characterised by a high level of commitment which can sometimes extend far beyond their responsibilities as teachers. Blurred boundaries lead to parents approaching the teachers with *"Things that are not necessarily about the child (...), just simply because they get the feeling that there's someone who takes the time, someone who listens."*

In summary we can state that teachers showing this interaction pattern merge the educational tasks of the school with the socialisation tasks of the family: The classroom becomes an enlarged living room. This interaction pattern is less legitimised by the professional qualifications of the teachers and more by their own life experience, their experience as parents and their charisma. What results is an action and experience-focussed collaboration with the

parents. Parents are mainly included to enable common experiences and establish a friendly relationship. On the whole, the interaction with the parents is geared towards communitisation and to some extent the teaching methods are not based on targeted pedagogic actions that aim to fulfil educational duties. This kind of interaction inevitably leads to a sharing of the parenting tasks for which not all parents want to or can use their time resources. These teachers tend to leave those parents behind who do not want to or are not able to live up to their requirements.

### **Interaction Pattern 6: Interaction Serving the Modern Methods of Education**

In the previous interaction pattern pedagogic, didactic and targeted actions receded to the background. This interaction pattern is strongly influenced by psychological, pedagogic and also therapy-based theories and models which lead to an interaction focussing on conveying techniques derived from them. The goal of the relationship with the parents is that the parents use these methods or "techniques" to adapt their educational efforts to the educational efforts of the school.

These teachers are characterised by a very pronounced sense of mission. They see themselves as part of an *"avant-garde"* who already today are role models of the modern methods of education and the *"future"*. Traditional definitions of teaching are to be left behind to pave the way for innovation. These teachers are looking for followers both among parents and fellow teachers.

They use their status as experts of education and their role as teachers to influence the way the parents bring up their children. They want to help the parents support the socialisation process of their children at school and in the family. There is a tendency to turn collaboration with into education of the parents. In fact there is an actual pedagogic education of the parents: For example these teachers show a lot of voluntary commitment and organise regular parent's evenings focussing on educational topics (e.g. pocket money) or school-topics like effectively helping children with their homework.

These teachers also offer consultations to *"find a common basis with the parents to*



*create enough trust so they dare look behind the veneer with me"*<sup>3</sup>. Again and again problems at school are psychologised and families pathologised. The teacher tries to change family dynamics and therefore becomes a family therapist.

In summary we can state that teachers showing this interaction pattern show a high degree of commitment and a well-meaning attitude towards the parents, however this goes hand in hand with a certain tendency towards interference. To put it pointedly, parents are used as an extension of the school. Moreover, parents are quickly attributed the responsibility for crisis situations and therefore pathologised without questioning the actions of the school or the teachers. This logic also demands unilateral changes in the family. In doing so, promising (educational) methods like constructive dialogue or systems of reward and punishment based on individual psychology are used which parents are supposed to adopt.

### **Education and Socialisation in Living Environments Fostering a Cooperative Partnership**

A professionalised work alliance successfully strikes a balance between request-based offers and interfering influence. Contrary to the previous interaction pattern this is an exchange on an equal footing where coordinated efforts revolve around the child's educational process. The teachers recognise the parental home as a socialisation milieu and include it into the educational process as a fair actor.

### **Interaction Pattern 7: Interacting with the Parents in a Professionalised Work-Alliance**

Teachers showing this interaction pattern see cooperation with the parents as a natural part of their professional tasks and don't see it as *"an additional burden. It's just a natural part of my work"*. They hold the parents in high esteem. It's important for them to create the context for trusting cooperation. One teacher voluntarily established regular consultation hours for parents where she was present *"reliably"* at the school. Another teacher arranges the number of *"parent's events according to the need of the parents"* because there can be too few possibilities for contact or *"it could be too much"*. Parents are asked what topics would be important for them. If needed, home visits are made<sup>4</sup>

These teachers believe that the interaction with the parents should go beyond and not be restricted to school topics. They have a clear idea about the different actors' contribution to training and education and try to align these contributions. The teachers acknowledge that there can be crises during the educational process. They are aware that today's *"school is alien"* to a lot of parents and therefore they try to make it accessible to parents. One teacher tells us for example that she tries to put the material for a whole school year *"into a workshop so that the parents can experience for themselves what working in groups and solving different tasks really means"*.

The interaction is shaped in such a way that the children cannot pit school and parental home against each other. For example when there are problems with doing the homework one of the teachers does not want the parents to be mere *"homework supervisors"* knowing that this could only lead to *"terror"* in the parental home. Instead, she herself simply stays *"half an hour longer"*, so that the pupil can do her homework at school. These kinds of concerted practices do not delegate the solution of problems caused by the school to the parental home nor does it look for them there. The constructive differentiation between the tasks of school and parental home is recognised and bridged by the successful establishment of boundaries.

These teachers are interested in all the needs, educational possibilities and the entire personality of their pupils, even if some of it cannot be used in a school context. One teacher reports that it is not enough for her if the parents are just interested in the child's grades. She explains how she and the parents looked for possibilities to support a boy's skills and interests *"that are not much asked for at school (...) and to find a common denominator"* with the performance requirements of the *"system that is the school"*. This kind of interaction focuses on individual cases and demands dialogue that cannot be led according

<sup>3</sup> What is meant here is the veneer of the children refusing to do their homework, but behind that excuse there are family-problems burdening the children.

<sup>4</sup> In Switzerland home visits are an exception and are usually just made when parents refuse to cooperate otherwise.

to the book. She therefore assumes that parents in general have an intrinsic interest in the training and education of their children.

If there are problems, the focus is on the pupil and not on the incident or the problem. The dialogue with the parents is not led by the teacher as a simple, prescriptive and paternalistic talk according to standardised routines but as a dialogue where both sides can embark on a search together to find answers to complex questions and to do justice to the individual case.

These teachers also feel committed to the common good. One teacher reports that she invites not only the parents to concerts or theatre plays but *"other people are allowed to come, too. Those who know about it are allowed to come, are welcome"*. She does not consider these kinds of voluntary additional activities to be part of teacher-parent collaboration but *"important public-relations work"*.

In summary we can state that the cooperation between school and parents is perceived as a challenging task: Various interests and tasks have to be combined. Cooperation is a successful tightrope walk where different interests have to be satisfied without acting in a one-sided, directive and paternalistic way or negating one's own position. These teachers forge several work alliances that have to be carefully balanced out: They are committed to the pupils and the wellbeing of the child as a whole. They have a holistic understanding of the child but at the same time they are aware of the "particularity" of their professional relationship and the limits of their pedagogic actions. They also forge a working alliance with the parents of their pupils since they perceive the child as a part of the family as a generative organization in which the parents are tasked with the comprehensive care and well-being of their offspring. This work alliance is characterized by mutual respect and appreciation. They do not only forge an alliance with the pupils and their parents but also with the general public. This is abstractly expressed in the teachers' intrinsic commitment towards society and the community as a whole. This goes far beyond fulfilling their teaching responsibilities. They are loyal towards the school as an institution and act within the constraints presented by its formal structure. However they make use of the sizeable room for manoeuvre which – compared to other professions – is available in the teaching profession. A striking and probably compelling prerequisite for these multiple working alliances is

that the interactions of these teachers go hand in hand with a critically reflective distance to their own actions, the teaching profession and to the school as a formal organization.

### **Conclusions and Perspectives: Teacher-Parent Cooperation – A Need for Professionalisation**

The analysis shows that teacher-parent interaction can be described as full of tensions and ambivalence. Despite increasing regulation and formalisation, teachers still have a high degree of freedom when it comes to shaping their concrete interactions with the parents. The interactions seem to be relatively stable regardless of the political, systemic and/or organisational framework. The way teachers shape their cooperation with the parents in the sense of a stipulated pedagogic and educational cooperation depends at first from the habitualised background convictions of the teachers towards the parents. Other decisive factors are the teachers' confident use of possibilities, limits and rules of parental involvement as well as their readiness to approach the parents with genuine interest and to see them as equal partners in conversation. Moreover, it transpires that cooperative actions depend largely on the ability and readiness of the teachers to challenge their own interaction with the parents. Contrary to our original hypothesis there is only a marginal connection between school culture (cf. Helsper, 2009) and school structure (e.g. parents' councils) on the one hand and individual interaction with parents on the other hand.

The interaction pattern "Interacting with the parents in a professionalised work-alliance" comes close to the postulated pedagogic and educational partnership (cf. Bauer 2006). On the whole teachers who show this kind of pattern tend towards professionalisation: There is an authentic interest in the parents, coupled with appreciation for the family as a unique agent of socialisation that is undergoing a crisis in its educational and socialisation process. Furthermore it is shown that these teachers forge a multiple work alliance with both the pupils and the parents. Acting in this work alliance means acting in an intervention-centric and client-centric way which corresponds to lending "help to help

themselves" (cf. Oevermann, 2009). Finally teachers showing this kind of interaction pattern exhibit a critically-reflexive habitus both towards their own actions and towards the school as an organisation. Moreover they are able to strike a good balance between crisis and routine actions.

In this sense the reconstructed interactions can be seen as an expression of the lack of professionalisation of the teachers' actions in the sense of structural professionalisation theory

(Oevermann, 2009; Wagner, 1998). On the other hand they can also be seen as indications that the teaching profession is in need of professionalisation (Oevermann, 2002). At the same time the reconstruction of the interaction pattern tending towards professionalisation shows that teachers are able to act in a professional way when working with parents.

## References

- Bauer, P. (2006). *Elternpädagogik von der Elternarbeit zur Erziehungspartnerschaft*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Lambertus.
- Becker, R., & Lauterbach, W. (2008). *Bildung als Privileg. Erklärungen und Befunde zu den Ursachen der Bildungsungleichheit* (3. Auflage ed.). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften / GWV Fachverlage GmbH Wiesbaden.
- Ditton, H. (2009). Familie und Schule - eine Bestandesaufnahme der bildungssoziologischen Schuleffektforschung von James S. Coleman bis heute. In R. Becker (Ed.), *Lehrbuch der Bildungssoziologie* (pp. 239-258). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Ecarius, J., & Schäffer, B. (2010). *Typenbildung und Theoriegenerierung. Methoden und Methodologien qualitativer Biographie- und Bildungsforschung*. Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich.
- Egger, J., Lehmann, J., & Straumann, M. (im Erscheinen). Die Praxis von Lehrpersonen mit Eltern. Eine Analyse der Deutungs- und Praxismuster. In C. Knapp & M. Bonanati (Eds.), *Eltern. Lehrer. Schüler. Theoretische und empirische Betrachtungen zum Verhältnis von Elternhaus und Schule sowie zu schulischen Kommunikationsformen*. Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt.
- Eggert-Schmid Noerr, A. (2011). *Elternarbeit. Ein Grundpfeiler der professionellen Pädagogik*. Giessen, Lahn: Psychosozial-Verlag.
- Epstein, J. L., & Salinas, K. C. (2004). Partnering with Families and Communities. *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 12-18.
- Falter, J.-M. (2012). Parental Background. Upper Secondary Transitions and Schooling Inequality in Switzerland. *Swiss Journal of Sociology*, 38(2), 201-222.
- Haase, K. (2012). Erziehungs- und Bildungspartnerschaft von Familie, Schule und Kinder- und Jugendhilfe im Kontext der Schulentwicklung. *Pädagogische Rundschau*, 66, 29-44.
- Helsper, W. (2009). Schulkultur und Milieu - Schulen als symbolische Ordnungen pädagogischen Sinns. In W. Melzer & R. Tippelt (Eds.), *Kulturen der Bildung. Beiträge zum 21. Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft* (pp. 155-176). Opladen: Barbara Budrich.
- Jenzer, C. (1998). *Schulstrukturen als historisch gewachsenes Produkt bildungspolitischer Vorstellungen. Blitzlichter in die Entstehung der schweizerischen Schulstrukturen*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Jeynes, W. (2010). *Family factors and the educational success of children*. London: Routledge.
- Kelle, U., & Kluge, S. (2010). *Vom Einzelfall zum Typus. Fallvergleich und Fallkontrastierung in der qualitativen Sozialforschung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.
- Kramer, K. (2000). *Die Fallrekonstruktion. Sinnverstehen in der sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

- Kramer, R.-T. (2002). *Schulkultur und Schülerbiographien. Das "schulbiographische Passungsverhältnis"*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Luhmann, N. (2004). Sozialisation und Erziehung. In N. Luhmann & D. Lenzen (Eds.), *Schriften zur Pädagogik* (pp. 111-122). Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Melzer, W. (1987). *Familie und Schule als Lebenswelt. Zur Innovation von Schule durch Elternpartizipation*. München: Verl. Deutsches Jugendinstitut.
- Meuser, M., & Sackmann, R. (1992). *Analyse sozialer Deutungsmuster. Beiträge zur empirischen Wissenssoziologie*. Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Nerowski, C. (2015). *Die Grenze der Schule*. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa.
- Neuenschwander, M. P. (2005). *Schule und Familie. Was sie zum Schulerfolg beitragen*. Bern: Paul Haupt.
- OECD. (2001). *Knowledge and Skills for Life. First Results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000*. Paris: OECD.
- Oevermann, U. (2002). Professionalisierungsbedürftigkeit und Professionalisiertheit pädagogischen Handelns. In M. Kraul (Ed.), *Biographie und Profession* (pp. 19-63). Bad Heilbrunn/Obb.: Klinkhardt.
- Oevermann, U. (2009). Theoretische Skizze einer revidierten Theorie professionalisierten Handelns. In A. Combe & W. Helsper (Eds.), *Pädagogische Professionalität* (pp. 70-182). Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Parsons, T. (2005). *The social system* (2nd ed.). [Abingdon]: Routledge.
- Ramseier, E., & Brühwiler, C. (2003). Herkunft, Leistung und Bildungschancen im gegliederten Bildungssystem. Vertiefte PISA-Analyse unter Einbezug der kognitiven Grundfähigkeiten. *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Bildungswissenschaften*, 25(1), 23-58.
- Sacher, W. (2008). *Elternarbeit. Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten und Grundlagen für alle Schularten*. Bad Heilbrunn: Verlag Julius Klinkhardt.
- Sacher, W. (2014). *Elternarbeit als Erziehungs- und Bildungspartnerschaft Grundlagen und Gestaltungsvorschläge für alle Schularten* (2., vollständig überarb. Aufl. ed.). Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt.
- Stange, W. (2013). *Erziehungs- und Bildungspartnerschaften Praxisbuch zur Elternarbeit*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Straumann, M., Egger, J., & Lehmann, J. (2014). *Die Kooperation von Schule und Elternhaus. Eine Analyse der Praxis von Lehrpersonen. Interner Schlussbericht zuhanden der interviewten Schulleitungen und Lehrpersonen*. Solothurn. <http://www.fhnw.ch/ph/ivu/professuren/theorie-der-schule/forschungsprojekte/abgeschlossene-projekte/kooperation-schule-und-elternhaus>
- Wagner, H.-J. (1998). *Eine Theorie pädagogischer Professionalität*. Weinheim: Beltz Deutscher Studienverlag.
- Weber, M. (2005). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*. Frankfurt/Main: Zweitausendeins.
- Wernet, A. (2000). *Einführung in die Interpretationstechnik der Objektiven Hermeneutik*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Wernet, A. (2003). *Pädagogische Permissivität. Schulische Sozialisation und pädagogisches Handeln jenseits der Professionalisierungsfrage*. Opladen: Leske+Budrich.
- Wild, E., & Lorenz, F. (2010). *Elternhaus und Schule*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.