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A conversational analysis of school parent meetings – how meeting topics constructs a parent's school identity

Analiza konwersacyjna zebrań z rodzicami w szkole – jak tematyka zebrań konstruuje tożsamość szkolną rodzica

Abstract

Aim. The purpose of the research I have undertaken on parent meetings is to reconstruct the ways in which the meetings affect the institutional (school) identity of parents. The specific goal is to seek answers to the question: what conversational strategies occur during the meeting, and what might be the effects of the strategies used during the meeting?

Materials and methods. The research was conducted using the conversational analysis method (Silverman, 2009b; Perakyla, 2009). Through the prism of the topics taken up during meetings with parents, a reconstruction of the conversational strategies taken up during the meeting was made.

Results and conclusion. The leading topics of the meeting were extracted: student achievements, trips, parent council elections, signatures, and fees. Five strategies of pro-

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fessional action of teachers during meetings were reconstructed; the strategy of teacher monologue, the strategy of ironic naming of students, the strategy of obliging the parent to continually uphold the school at home, the strategy of involving parents in the "economic" issues of the classroom and school. The conclusions will present the institutional identities of parents constructed during the meeting conversation: parent as a spectator of the school performance, parent of the whole class, fearful parent, parent in a conflict of (dis)loyalty to their own child, parent in the role of students, parent helper, parent unnecessary expert.

Keywords: conversation analysis, parent-teacher meetings, conversation strategies of meetings with parents, parents' institutional identity constructed during parent meetings, professional conversation.

Abstrakt

Cel. Celem podjętych badań jest rekonstrukcja sposobów oddziaływania zebrania na tożsamość instytucjonalną (szkolną) rodziców. Celem szczegółowym – poszukiwanie odpowiedzi na pytanie: jakie strategie konwersacyjne występują podczas zebrania oraz jakie mogą być skutki stosowanych podczas zebrania strategii? Przedmiotem badań są strategie konwersacyjne występujące podczas badanych 22 zebrań z rodzicami klas I–III nagranych w latach 2017–2020.

Materiały i metody. Badania prowadzone są metodą analizy konwersacyjnej (Silverman, 2009b; Perakyla, 2009). Szczególnie interesujące było to, co się wydarza „między" uczestnikami zebrania. Właśnie analiza konwersacyjna AC, zapoczątkowana przez Harveya Sacksa i jego współpracowników Emanuela Schlegloffa i Gaila Jeffersona, umożliwiła analizę interakcyjnego wymiaru zebrania. Dodatkowym argumentem za jej wyborem był fakt, że w badaniach instytucji ta perspektywa jest praktycznie nieobecna (Granosik, 2013). Przez pryzmat podejmowanej podczas zebrań z rodzicami tematyki zostanie dokonana rekonstrukcja strategii konwersacyjnych stosowanych w trakcie zebrania. Materiał badawczy stanowiły nagrania 22 zebrań z rodzicami.

Wyniki i wnioski. Wyodrębniono wiodące tematy zebrania: osiągnięcia uczniów, wycieczki, wybory do rady rodziców, podpisy i opłaty. Zrekonstruowano pięć strategii działania profesjonalnego nauczycieli podczas zebrań: monologu nauczyciela, ironicznego nazywania uczniów, zobowiązywania rodzica do kontynuowania szkoły w domu oraz włączania rodziców w kwestie „gospodarcze" klasy i szkoły. W konkluzjach przedstawiono tożsamości instytucjonalne rodziców skonstruowane podczas konwersacji. Są to: rodzic jako widz szkolnego występu, rodzic całej klasy, zalękniony rodzic, rodzic w konflikcie (nie)lojalności wobec własnego dziecka, rodzic w roli ucznia, rodzic-pomocnik, rodzic jako niepotrzebny ekspert.

Słowa kluczowe: analiza konwersacyjna, zebrania z rodzicami, strategie konwersacyjne zebrań z rodzicami, tożsamość instytucjonalna rodziców konstruowana podczas zebrań, rozmowa profesjonalna.

Meetings with parents

For more than a century, parent-teacher meetings have been the most common way in Poland for schools to collectively interact with parents (Łobocki, 1985; Lulek, 2021). They consist of a sequence of events and practices that are systematically repeated: greeting, communication of general school information, communication of student achievements, collection of fees (Lulek, 2021). Parent-teacher meetings are given a high profile in building the relationship between the family and the school. Mieczysław Łobocki believes that they are of key importance in the development of cooperation, and "properly organised and held systematically [...] can contribute in no small measure to the better functioning of school and family as mutually complementary educational environments" (Łobocki, 1985, p. 77).

Collective meetings with parents were initiated during the Second Republic for economic reasons. The need to organise them emerged from the increase in the number of pupils covered by compulsory education. Henceforth, instead of individual meetings, "the hours of collective meetings called 'wywiadówki' were adopted" (Janota-Bzowski, 1930, p. 9). The name "parent-teacher interview" – "wywiadówka" was in the past the obligatory and only term for a collective working meeting with parents (Łobocki, 1999). Nowadays the term is being replaced by a "parent-teacher conference" or the increasingly popular name "parent-teacher meeting" (Bańko, 2011).

Social dimensions of a meeting

The parent-teacher meeting is a pedagogical practice that aims to maintain the existing order and preserve tradition (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2018). In the course of it, real social life is realised in the space of the "in-between," in which "all interpersonal activities with objectifying effects" take place (Woroniecka, 2010, p. X). At the same time, it is a formal institutional event necessary for the functioning of the school. To call a meeting formal, it must be attended by people who represent the organisation in question. The meeting is indispensable in "transferring information, improving communication, improving cooperation and control within the organisation" (Rancew-Sikora, 2007, p. 97). The space of social relations of the meeting is also a kind of social organisation, during which sets of normative regulations of patterns (Woroniecka, 2010) or patterns

of behaviour are reproduced. A meeting, as a form of work adopted in an organisation, follows the organisation's internal rules. One of these is the specificity of conversation. Unlike in everyday conversation, participants have the opportunity to speak, which is formalised by internal rules and regulated by the person leading the meeting. Opportunities to go beyond the rules and allow free speech between participants are also regulated by the facilitator (Rancew-Sikora, 2007). To participate in a meeting is also to discover the inner rules of the social order adopted in the school, to participate in the social group, its culture, language, values, to interact with other conscious human individuals (cf. Goffman, 2000). The gathering introduces community members to the order of the organisation, socialises them into specific behaviours and constructs participants (Bruner, 2010). The gathering is also a Foucaultian educational device through which a deeper analysis of educational reality is possible (Chutoranski, 2013).

Research method

Harvey Sacks writes that when ethnographers study social reality, they cannot take for granted what they think they see. He or she must proceed cautiously, wishing to investigate the methods by which participants in social life produce observable and describable actions (after Silverman, 2009a). Central to the research on parent-teacher meetings undertaken was the conversational nature of the meeting. Douglas Maynard argues that "micro-social order can be appreciated by fully exploring how conversation and other face-to-face behaviours constitute reality in the actual everyday situation" (after Silverman, 2009a, p. 105). Thus, the question of how the conduct and form of the meeting constructs its participants became of interest in the study of the meeting. Who in the school do the parents of the students become during the meeting? What school identity(s) do they acquire during the meeting? David Silverman's research process proposes to narrow the ethnographer's focus to how participants in social life do certain things. The ethnographer cannot see people as reconciling with a given reality, but as those who actively construct it (Silverman, 2009a). I was interested in what happens "between" the participants in a gathering. It was the conversational analysis of AC, pioneered by Harvey Sacks and his colleagues Emanuel Schlegloff and Gail Jefferson (Perakyla, 2009), that made it possible to analyse the interactional dimension of the gathering. An additional argument for choosing conversational analysis was the fact that this perspective is virtually absent in the study of institutions. The aim of conversational analysis is to reconstruct communicative patterns and strategies, their variants and conditions ("professional tricks," strategies of degradation, status achievement, group control). In a professional conversation (discussion), the strategies of professional action of its

participants, representatives of the institution, are revealed (Granosik, 2013).

In my research, I aimed to reconstruct the ways in which the parent-teacher meeting influences the institutional (school) identity of parents. I sought answers to the questions:

– What conversational strategies occur during the meeting?
– What might be the effects of the conversational strategies used during the meeting?

The empirical basis for the research developed in conversation analysis is natural[*] material recorded in audio or video form (Perakyla, 2009; Granosik, 2013). In my study I was only allowed to make audio recordings[**]. The data on which I worked was so-called non-evoked data, i.e. ethnographic records of actions and interactions recorded in audio mode (Rapley, 2013). I conducted my research of parent-teacher meetings just before the pandemic, in the still most classic organisational order[***] of the meetings. I attended 22 meetings with parents of grades I-III in public schools. The selection of the sample was purposive. The choice of classes I–III was based on the results of research (e.g. Mendel, 1998), which presents the period of early childhood education as the best for building relationships with the school. Maria Mendel describes it as a "golden time" for the development of parental co-participation in school (Mendel, 1998). The parental "golden time" is a time of willing cooperation, of many ideas for improving and transforming school reality. As M. Mendel in the conclusion of her own research writes, "parental participation in children's schooling is highly developed and continues uninterrupted within the 1st to 3rd grades" (Mendel, 1998, p. 165). This model of the involved parent, occurring in the aforementioned classes, allowed me, I believe, to avoid distortions resulting from tensions that build up over time in the relationship with the school.

During the collection of research material, I came to every parent meeting[****].

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[*] Natural – assuming no interference from the researcher (Granosik, 2013).

[**] Questions about the possibility of recording parent-teacher meetings for research use at school were met with exceptional resistance from school principals, teachers, and parents.

[***] After the pandemic, the schools partially maintained the meetings using the new technologies. The study of the post-pandemic meeting would already be a different meeting, and its inclusion in the parent-teacher meetings registered before the pandemic would be incomparable in many aspects.

[****] It is customary for schools to hold all parent meetings on the same day. Usually classes I–III have earlier meeting times, while older classes have later ones. Parents who have more than one child in the same school experience difficulties in attending meetings held at the same time. During many of the recorded meetings, it happens that a parent "drops in" out of breath mid-meeting (or leaves mid-meeting) with the excuse that he/she has to attend the other child's parallel meeting

My entrance to leave the recording equipment* was preceded by permission from the principal, teacher and parents. Many schools, principals and teachers refused to allow me to conduct the research. They justified this on the grounds of the secrecy of the meeting, the danger of revealing personal information, the reluctance of parents and teachers to be recorded. In the end, I recorded 22 meetings that took place between September 2017 and February 2020. I recorded the majority of them (19) in community locations (up to 5000 inhabitants). Three meetings were recorded in towns (between 50 000 and 150 000). In addition, I personally asked the parents for permission to record the meeting at the beginning of each meeting. In three cases, the parents did not agree to the recording, despite the agreement of the principal and teacher**.

After transcribing 22 collections, I obtained over 600 pages of material for analysis. With the use of computer programmes to support the analysis of qualitative data (CAQdas tools), I coded the collected material using the Atlas Ti tool. After coding, the research material amounted to over 900 pages. Thus prepared, I proceeded with the conversational analysis. I identified four research areas occurring during the gathering: structure, themes, spaces and interactions of the gathering. I planned three dimensions of analysis: report analysis, i.e. "what?" – what happens during meetings; semantic analysis, i.e. "how?" – what conversational strategies occur during meetings; and interpretive analysis, i.e. "with what effect?" – what school identities of parents are constructed.

In this paper I will present only a small section of the research material developed, namely the topic area of parent meetings. I will seek to answer the question of how meeting topics model conversational strategies. In the conclusion, I will present parent identities constructed by school strategies.

Topic of the meeting

The topics of the meeting are the content context of the conversation. The topics discussed during the meeting make up the content of the institutional conversation (Rancew-Sikora, 2007). Their analysis will embed the study of strategies in the specific "action"

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* After leaving my equipment, I left the classroom, wanting to avoid any changes to the meeting caused by my presence.

** In each of the three meetings, I was refused recording by one of the participants. Despite the consent of the majority and despite assurances of agreement from the principal and teacher, as well as assurances of anonymity and the use of the recording for research purposes, in these three cases individuals did not consent to be recorded and to attend the meeting at all.

areas of the gathering, present, as D. Silverman proposes, the initial context of the study (Silverman, 2009b) or, as Tim Rapley calls it, the conditions under which statements are produced (Rapley, 2013). Introducing the topic of conversation means outlining its context. This avoids a mechanical description of the conversational system (Silverman, 2009a).

I have arranged the topics addressed in the meetings according to the attendance analysis, from most to least frequent. Below I provide a summary of the extracted topics addressed by the teacher during the parent-teacher meeting.

Table 1
Attendance analysis of topics discussed during parent-teacher meeting

Topics	Number of lines of the transcription
Individual student achievement	7684
Class achievements of pupils	2067
Trips, outings, school events	1962
Parent council elections	582
Fees/subscriptions	100

Source: Own study.

Individual and class achievements of pupils

At each meeting, the opening topic was student achievement. Teachers spent a lot of time on the results (tests, exams, term grades) achieved by the pupils, often presenting them in the context of the average (percentage, points) of the class. Parents were told about the average grade of the class, what percentage of pupils had achieved the maximum score, etc.

> T: The children coped very nicely with this command, I don't think there was y, anywhere one, I think, two children who had problems with understanding. All the children in the class did very nicely on their own, they completed these sentences nicely, so one should be happy; it is important that they understand first of all what they are reading, and that is very important (Meeting 1; 32).

In this section, the teacher spoke, generalising, often giving percentages of test and examination results or his own impressions of how the class had performed. The parental audience thus witnessed a teacher's performance in which the class is presented in detail, the average price, sometimes the class against the school, sometimes the class against the test results achieved at the provincial or national level. Parents in this part of the meeting did not get detailed information about their own child.

T: It's much better at the moment, because I would say that, like in math for ex-
ample, there is (*counts from a list, from a piece of paper?*) one... two... three...
four... five people have over 90% of the skills, six people are at the level of four,
and there is practically only one person who has very poor skills in mathc, in ad-
dition, subtraction to 100 and the multiplication table, but it is a girl who has been
ill for 3 weeks and has not practically caught up with the material yet, so I will
still work with her and I will make up with her (Meeting 7; 229).

Grades are therefore given fundamental importance. It is the result obtained that in-
dicates the success or otherwise of the class. For the teacher, as can be seen, it is also
a measure by which he or she can discover the strengths and weaknesses of the class.
The grades in the teacher's statement are a testimony to the effectiveness of teaching.
This means that those who receive higher grades have "mastered the material," while
those who receive lower grades have "gaps."

T: Some people got ones and they have, you can see that there are some gaps
in those, in that material, and I asked that if anyone has such a grade – one, two
– that they should improve to a positive, at least a three (Meeting 5; 81).

When presenting class achievements, teachers presented the results, linking
them to side themes – class behaviour, class events and accounts of the everyday
life of the school classroom. Sometimes this provided a context for the assessment,
sometimes it was a free-form narrative of what was going on in the school. Teachers
used phrases when discussing whole-class achievement: "the class," "average results,"
"pupils achieved," "they are still struggling," "almost everyone did well," etc. Usually,
the teacher himself initiated the topic of pupils' achievements. Parents rarely took part
in the conversation during this part. If they did speak up, it was in terms of asking about
points or statistics of correct answers. Instead, they often expressed their emotions
when discussing class achievements: "Oh, I'm scared," "We're scared," "You better
not tell," "Talk fast, because we're nervous," "We're gonna have bad marks only!" etc.
The parental comments when discussing the results were accompanied by a noticeable
tension of waiting "for the verdict" – the result of their own child.

Occasionally, teachers discussed in detail how some pupils worked; at the third meet-
ing, a teacher talked with undisguised passion about how the children worked in class:

T.: [The children] had the task of writing a letter to inform a friend, a colleague
or someone from their family that they got a pet... And Maciek sat, we were not
in his class, Maciek sat in the last bench and he was licking his lips all the time
and he was just licking his lips all the time and he was writing and writing and he

wrote a paper of more than a page without a single mistake, without a single mistake (Meeting 3; 345).

When discussing class performance, teachers also commented on individual children's attitudes to school tasks. This was done through examples or by "non-committal" addressing parents and discussing their child-pupil's individual approach in the lesson. This was often of a critical or ironic nature.

T: Well with Julia it's a pattern. Well, but with her there is always a pattern. There was, there is and this. Amelka nicely there... Well, but Maja....
P (unintelligible 0:59:18)
T: Martynka nicely there.
P: Maja... I don't know how she is at home (unintelligible 0:59:21), but she'll write the same way and then there's crying, she'll leave, she doesn't do.
T: Yeah, yeah. And like I sometimes, I say, Maja, one on top of the other it's....
P: Terribly. I say, Maja, how can you (unintelligible 0:59:28) (Meeting 8; 865).

In only one meeting did a teacher ask a question about whether a parent allows an example of a child's work to be given to the assembled parents.

T: [Children] They were tasked with writing, but... (*turning to mum*) can I say? (Meeting 3; 343).

Occasionally, outspoken information about individual pupils' achievements was associated with an emotional reaction from parents, which the teacher tried to silence: "[...] let mummy not cry"* (Meeting 9; 205).

After discussing the collective performance of the class, teachers often moved seamlessly into discussing individual achievement. This thread was the most frequently recorded topic of conversation. More often than not, individual conversations took place after the meeting, during the individual conversation between parent and teacher. Usually, parents were asked to stay after the meeting. Sometimes the conversation was initiated by the parent who wanted to ask for details about the child, both regarding academic performance and behaviour. When initiating the topic of their child's individual performance, parents would ask how they were doing, whether they had improved recently or "what else do you have for (here the child's name)...". Sometimes they lamented their own child's inappropriate behaviour, admitted their

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*The parent's crying reaction in the example in question was due to emotion following praise expressed publicly about the child.

own busyness, lack of time or lack of ideas to support their child. The parents who remained in the classroom after the meeting,* waiting for their turn, were silent witnesses to the teacher's individual conversations with the parents. In the one-to-one conversation, the teacher mobilised the parents by saying: "You need to repeat, you need to talk to your child," etc. In many discussions he obliged the parent to "influence" the child: "Please talk to her so she doesn't talk in class." The effect was to make the parents promise to talk, to explain, to look at the textbooks more often and to work more with the child. Teachers, seeing such a committed attitude from parents, reassured: "We will still practice this at school."

Often, the conversation about the student's individual achievements went on at great length. In it, parents talked about details from their lives, their thoughts, their child's and family's everyday home life. Sometimes it was the teacher who took up side threads, often not directly related to discussing the child's progress. The longest individual conversation, precisely with side threads, lasted longer (60 min) than the common part of the meeting (50 min).

Trips, outings, school events

A lot of time during the meetings was devoted to trips, outings and excursions. This included both teacher (or school) planning and forum planning, when the teacher left it up to the parents to decide on shorter trips or outings:

> T: OK, also I would ask, maybe with this Children's Day we could arrange something?
> P: A trip!
> T: We already had a trip, and on the first of June....
> P: Another one, to the ponies...
> T: Oh, it's hard, I'd love to, but on the first of June I don't think there's much point in going there, because it's generally...
> P: The same, it would be the same, like the theatre, the same, about 15 zloty, right?
> T: Yes, yes.
> P: Yes, yes, but something like that (hum, conversations between parents) (Meeting 1: 129-136).

Teachers spend most of their time on longer trips, especially during the spring meetings. In the autumn meetings, on the other hand, a lot of time is spent discussing and deciding where the class would go on the trip this year. The March, April and May meetings dealt with issues related to the immediate organisation of the trip. More often than not, the teachers read out the offers made by the travel agency to the parents:

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* After the main part of the meeting.

T: And right... we are planning a school trip to the Tricity. The Tricity, ZOO, Hel and feeding the seals, that is the programme of the trip: we will leave for Gdańsk and Hel, at 10.00 when we get there, and leave at 5.00 in the morning. At 10.00 we'll be on site – sightseeing in Hel and going up to the lighthouse on Hel, then at 11.00 the Sealarium, feeding the seals, so that's Hel next. We'll participate in the seal feeding, the staff will give us details of the seal conservation programme in the southern Baltic, we'll buy souvenirs and go to Gdynia. Er... We'll be in Gdynia around twelve o'clock, by thirteen o'clock we'll be walking around Kościuszko square, where we'll see the, er... warship ORP "Błyskawica." Getting acquainted with the fauna, flora in the Gdańsk Oceanarium, buying souvenirs, then at 2 p.m., ymm, by 3 p.m. there will be a boat trip to Sopot, a walk on the pier in Sopot. Around 4pm, arrival at the Zoological Garden in Gdansk and a ride on an exaggerated retro train, the journey will be made more enjoyable with very detailed information and animal history. And finally, a ride back to Gdansk with a break for a meal, and at 19.00 departure for the return journey. I will copy for you (Meeting 14; 113).

Parents asked for details – what the children were to take with them, what they were going to use as a means of transport for different stages of the trip, safety, sobriety checks on the drivers and the efficiency of the bus. The teacher asked for making decisions on organising an integration day or deciding on a meal for the children[*]; these topics tended to dominate the other topics of the meeting.

Parents' council elections
Elections to the so-called ward parent council were a topic taken up at three meetings recorded in September. The election was conducted by the teacher or the parents themselves. The teacher set the rules and left the classroom for the vote itself.

T: If there will be an acceptance from them and also from you that they can perform this function, if any of these ladies have any reasons that they would like to possibly resign, will there be any changes then, so we will leave the class here with Ms Anna for a while, and the ladies will carry out this, these elections (Meeting 5; 7).

I noticed a regularity: if elections were held in the second or third year, the composition of the parent council from the previous year was recreated. The evidence

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[*] The teacher asked at the third meeting for parents to decide whether it should be a traditional lunch or fast food at a popular chain. The parents unanimously decided on fast food as a more attractive meal for the children.

of the elections was prepared extremely carefully, as if to prove their democratic nature, authenticity and reliability. All the rules relating to record keeping were observed, the number of voters, the persons elected, the validity of the votes and even the time of the vote were recorded.

> P: Mrs Margaret can you read so as not to prolong?
> P1: Meaning?
> P: This protocol.
> P1: There was Mrs Emilia (*name*), Mrs ... and Mrs Bogusia (*names*).
> T: Also, the team of three volunteer parents are made up of the same people as last year, i.e. Mrs. Emilia is the president of it.
> P: Yes, only here the number of votes cast will be entered and there will be minutes.
> T: OK, good, we have fifteen people here, yes? Thirteen, Mrs. Emilka fourteen, so ladies accept, yes?
> PP: Mhm.
> T: This membership works, the ladies accept this choice.
> P: Yees…
> T: The council proved itself in the second class then now in the third class too and it will prove itself now, so… So, I will come to this point... (Meeting 5; 37).

When the election was for the first grade, the teacher entered the nomination process by proposing known parents (parents of students from previous grades or parents who were friends of the teacher) to the council.

> T: You will need help, I will help. You will need support, I will support (*laughs*).
> *Asia, based on an old acquaintance, can I sign you up? (laughs)*
> *PP (laughs)*
> P: *I just thought it would be like this....*
> T: *Once we have moved on with this one person, it will now move on, yes?*
> *(Laughter)* (Meeting 21; 120).

One got the impression that, for those attending the meeting, this was an element that involved "catching" the candidates for the so-called ward (class) parent council (with the chairperson being the class representative on the school's parent council). When the election was over, everyone, parents and teachers alike, expressed joy at the conclusion of this point in the meeting:

> T: Yes, here, here, here. As a second person. Well thank you very much. The elec-

tion is done, so congratulations to the three volunteer parents team[*].
P: Thank you.
T: Mrs Asia, Mrs Ewelina, and Mrs Barbara (*laughs*). *I'm very happy for them.*
It went very smoothly, so I will…
P: *Without much resistance (laughter)* (Meeting 21; 274).

Elections were something official, a duty that was approached with reluctance by both teachers and parents. At the last meeting, parents tried to withdraw from being on the ward council. The teacher argued for so long that he would help them that they gave in to his pressure. Those who were proposed by the teacher or from the reconstitution of the previous year were unanimously accepted by other parents. When they inquired about what would need to be done, the teacher would reply: "Sometimes come to school to sign something, collect money, buy something." During the "around the election" conversation, he assured them that he would help the parents elected to the ward parent council with all their duties.

Signatures and fees
A ritual of each meeting was the signatures of the parents. These involved multi-topic attestations. At each meeting, parents confirmed their attendance with their signature.

> T: OK, Ms Sylvia, you're going to sign for me in here some more, please... yes? (Gathering 2; 55).

Signatures were also used to authorise permits:

> P (A.'s dad): I'll just say one more thing, but if there's no parent, that can happen, and the child if they're on their own, no one will get on the boat if they don't have a parent's signature, yes? (Meeting 4; 210).

The signature was also a proof that the textbooks had been collected from the school:

> T: Yes, please... (*footsteps can be heard*) here is the receipt for textbooks and exercises (Meeting 6; 144).

With their signature, parents also gave permission for their child to participate in nutrition programmes in which the school was involved:

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[*] The teacher uses an incorrect name that has not been in use for years.

T: And here I ask, erm, that here you agree that Marcelka should be given fruit and vegetables, milk (Meeting 6; 148).

The ritual of collecting signatures also involved "paper communication." Teachers handed out and collected paper notes during the meeting. Often in their speeches they referred to accounts of their lessons, saying that they handed out paper notes (to parents) to the children. They lamented that the children were so "scatterbrained" and it was unclear what they were doing with those paper notes and whether they were sure they were going to the parents. Along with the signatures and paper notes, fees were also collected – for trips, the swimming pool, the class fund.

In summary, the themes of the meetings with parents closed in a fairly short list of topics discussed during the meetings. These were related to pupils' achievements and the need to support them in achieving the highest possible results. During each meeting, topics related to organising trips or events were also discussed. Elections to the parents' council only took place at the first meeting in September. The course of discussing the topics was also repetitive at each meeting; the teachers focused on the performance of the class, the average, the grades achieved. During the monologues, they called for parents to be involved in their child's learning by supervising, explaining, controlling. They left it up to the parents to organise the Children's Day, prepare the dishes for the class Christmas Eve or do the shopping for the class.

Professional action strategies

In this part of the analyses, I will present the professional strategies of teachers' activities occurring during each meeting. The extraction of models of strategy is the aim of conversation analysis. It is also an attempt to find "some order" in the interactions under study (Rapley, 2013, p. 192). The recurring communicative strategies identified within the thematic context of the meeting are the result of an attempt to interpret the importance of interaction in the creation of the social world (Rancew-Sikora, 2007) of the parent-school relationship. I will supplement the author's strategy names with paraphrases of teachers' statements or metaphors.

The teacher's monologue strategy – "I will now introduce you to..."
At each meeting, the teacher gave a long speech in the main part of the meeting. He would read out the educational plans for the whole school year,

provide days off, discuss the school's grading system or make announce-
ments.[*] The interaction of by far the longest part of the meeting took the form
of a performance, a monologue, a lecture or a longer introduction to the topic
of the pupils' class performance. During this time, parents listened attentively
to the teacher's statements.

A strategy for communicating all class assessments – "what happened to our class"
During the meeting, a lot of attention was paid to averaging class results.
Parents were not told directly what results their child had achieved. The meet-
ing was meant for everyone, so the teacher felt obliged to present the results
in general.

> T: As far as (*grunt*) teaching is concerned, we have dropped a little bit
> in the level of attainment, erm, two pupils, erm, dropped from a grade like
> between a five and a six was, and dropped to between a three and a four.
> Other than that, most of the children are making progress (Meeting 8; 18).

Discussing class results did not involve the parent obtaining information about
their own child. Nor was the parent always given their own child's tests or grade
sheets (semester or mid-semester) for review. Sometimes the teacher mentioned
that he had posted the grades in Librus[**]. Thus, he discussed the students' overall
performance, test results or tests, which the parents did not see (while discussing).
The parent did not receive a message about the reality of the child's situation,
he guessed how his child was ranking. Sometimes later, after the meeting, he
stayed to inquire about the child's individual performance[***]. Often parents would
leave, politely asking: "Is there anything else for me?" And after an equally polite
answer from the teacher ("No, nothing"), they were relieved to leave.

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[*] In the recorded meetings, I noted the custom of preparing school announcements that were
the same for the whole school, either on a piece of paper or as a presentation. The teacher
would receive these from the principal and announce this before presenting the informa-
tion ("I will now present the announcements of the principal").

[**] This is the so-called electronic diary. The teachers I interviewed have different posi-
tions when using Librus; there are those who do not use it, preparing slips for the par-
ents, there are teachers who enter all the marks in Librus, but there are also those who
enter some marks in their notebooks and – "in order not to repeat themselves" – do
not enter these in the electronic diary. Another issue is the parents' proficiency in using
the programme.

[***] Parents wishing to find out their own child's detailed results remain after the general meet-
ing for a one-to-one meeting with the teacher.

The strategy of ironically or sometimes ridiculously calling students – "oh, those kids!"

The classroom achievement reports show teachers' strategies for speaking about students. When presenting the situation related to class achievement, teachers named the pupils in a rather specific way; statements abound in casual terms, which are, as it were, the embellishment of the meeting, the reason for jokes and stories. There are, for example, statements with a mocking, ironic or even negative tone: "giant," "our class favourite," "little chatterbox," "well... he's good, he's clever!" At times, teachers also made casual comments about student behaviour: "some of them are lazy," "Kuba does what he wants, he takes it easy." At one of the meetings, there were also expressions of a positive nature, in a way rewarding the pupil: "He was so proud of his text. Clever boy" It is clear that teachers were more likely to use phrases that described children negatively, although there was one case of a teacher who spoke positively about children in his narrative.

Strategy for committing the parent to continue the teaching tasks of the school at home – requests to parents

During each meeting, teachers undertook a conversational strategy based on appeals to parents to work with their children. The appeals related to the "on-call" topics that occur during each meeting. "There is a request to...," "let the parents," "I ask you to..." – and here a list of parental duties was listed: for the parents to practise the multiplication tables, to make sure they read (including assigned school readings), to teach the child a poem by heart, to make sure they spell, to make sure the child goes home in the same clothes they came in, to motivate them, etc. The teachers did not go into detail, they did not give suggestions on how parents should work out these tasks[*] with their children. Instead, they obliged the parents to continue the school work at home.

Another type of appeal to parents was to make requests to follow the rules that are formulated in the school. Particularly during meetings of all parents from across the school, the principal formulated requests such as: "Please support us in the fact that bans are bans, laws are laws, procedures are procedures" (Meeting 16; 45), "Please do not accept behaviour in which students break school law" (Meeting 16:2). In addition, appeals were made to parents to involve themselves with their presence in the process of daily school life. This included helping changing the children at the swimming pool; "[...] at least two mums would help put shoes on" (Meeting 22; 1536). Parents were also asked to look after their children during outings or trips. They were also asked to vote during school or class competitions via Facebook or to sign their children up online for attractive museum or university activities.

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[*] Especially in terms of teaching support, parents are left to their own devices.

A strategy for involving parents in "economic" issues – "decide for yourselves"
This was a strategy that the teacher used during meetings when he wanted to involve parents in establishing a common position or making a common choice. Areas which the teacher allocated to the parents' own decision were: buying presents for the children, book prizes at the end of the year, choosing (and bringing) dishes for the class Christmas Eve[*]. It was left to the parents' discretion by the teacher to organise team-building meetings or suggestions for spending Children's Day, etc. Parents were eager to participate in the discussion and decision-making related to the organisation of the event. The decision-making process usually took a long time; it is clear that parents are keen to organise meetings, children's events or do the shopping.

As can be seen, the conversational strategies undertaken during the meetings clearly indicate a model of a monologue between teacher and parents. The exceptions are topics related to the organisation of trips, school events or shopping. Parents have the opportunity to converse with the teacher when they inquire at the right time about their own child or intervene in the teacher's monologue.

Instead of conclusions, that is, school parent identities constructed during meetings

The analysis of the conversational strategies observed during the studied meetings, related to their themes, allows us to depict the created institutional identities of the parent.

Parent as spectator of a school performance
The teacher's monologue strategy constructs the parent as a spectator of the school performance of the teacher. The obligation to take note of what the teacher says during the meeting constructs the parent subservient, listening, interested up to a certain point and then bored by the course of the meeting. Often after this part, the parents, who have had to be passive for so long, are happy to discuss or ask many questions. One gets the impression that they are recuperating from the long reception time, and afterwards they want to be as active as possible.

Parent of a whole class
Teacher's strategy of informing about the results of the whole class constructs the identity of the parent of the whole class; with an unsatisfied curiosity about their own child's results and without knowledge of how the child is doing in school. If the parent feels

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[*] During one meeting, a teacher chastised the parents for not fulfilling their promise to prepare a Christmas Eve for the children the previous year.

that the child is not doing well enough, according to the teacher, at school, he or she is reluctant to stay for the individual part of discussing the results. Ashamed, he or she has to wait in line for a long time to hear the news about their own child's problems in front of other parents. Preferring to avoid the anticipated annoyance, he or she does not stay[*], and perhaps after such experiences stops coming to subsequent meetings. He or she waits anxiously to find out in which grade range his or her child has fallen. In addition to confusion and fear, this pattern of action by the teacher can also result in a sense of missing the point of coming to the meeting[**].

Anxious parent

The teacher's strategy of focusing on grades also makes the parent uncertain. Parents feel tension about what grade their child has received. Often this pattern of action triggers in them reminiscences of going back to school (as an adult, but still a pupil). They say, like pupils, that they dread the disclosure of grades. The emotions manifested by the parents ("We are afraid," "There will be 1's") are also evidence of their being reduced to the role of pupil through a strategy of focusing on grades or the teacher's expectation of helping the child with pupil activities.

A parent in conflict of (in)loyalty to their own child

The strategy of ironically or at times mockingly naming pupils constructs a parent embarrassed by the teacher' statements, seemingly amused, but at the same time torn by a dilemma of loyalty to their own child. Ultimately, parents in the conversations shows themselves as confused. He or she is sometimes disloyal to his or her own child, puzzling the teacher or making excuses for the child. The "oh, those kids" strategy is, in my view, one of the most destructive. The teacher's seemingly relaxed negative narrative about students arouses ambivalent attitudes in parents. Some go along with such statements, in order to relieve the tension resulting from the teacher's taking up this pattern, enter into such a narrative and demean their own child in their statements ("that gaggle of mine", "that star of mine"). Other parents try to explain their child. They provide contexts for their child's everyday life, justifying behaviour, grades or not being ready for lessons. This strategy of the teacher, as it were, forces parents either to be disloyal to their own child or to put themselves in the role of the child's advocate. At the same time, issues of real support for the child or the possibility of taking action to correct the student's school competences are left out of the conversation.

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[*] Unless the teacher asks him or her to stay, in which case they wait their turn with trepidation.

[**] During each meeting, teachers take up the topic of attendance. They comment, for example, "Oh, there are so few of us again…"

Parent in the role of a learner

The strategy of obliging the parent to continue the teaching tasks of the school at home reduces the parent to the role of a pupil fearful of the results, who is obliged to do homework at home with his/her own child. Parents are reduced to stepping into the role of a student by appeals to do homework, to ensure reading, spelling, multiplication tables exercises are done, etc. The statements show that the parent feels overburdened and also inadequate. The strategy of mobilising the parent to complete the school's tasks at home places the parent in the role of a subordinate pupil to the teacher, who is given further duties to perform. Parents in this interaction pattern are usually silent, possibly asking with uncertainty and shyness if their child also has to repeat the multiplication tables or spelling.

Parent – active helper

The strategy of involving parents in "economic" issues activates parental activity. They race to come up with ideas about where the children could go, what presents to buy them, how to help organise a trip or what to bring for the class Christmas Eve. Parents are both eager to express their opinions in terms of co-determination and pledge their support and help.

Parent –unnecessary expert

The strategy of focusing on grades, ridiculing the child, the parent's homework or buying gifts leaves out the parent as an expert on their own child. The parent in meetings often talks about his or her developed model of working with the child. This is overlooked by the teacher. This shows that the strategies activated by the teacher do not give room for the parent to become expertly involved in the cooperation for the benefit of the child.

Conclusion

The conversational strategies of the meeting and the constructed strategies of the parent's school identity discussed here are illustrative of the "school-centric" (cf. Kamiński, 1980; Winiarski, 2000) model of cooperation with parents operating in Poland. Parents are obliged to extend the school to the home environment, to do homework with their children, to learn by school methods. During the meeting, the unit of analysis for the teacher becomes the achievements of the whole class, hence the parent expecting information about his or her own child becomes distanced from the value of the meeting with the teacher. Parental statements during the meeting are evidence of the parent's growing concern about the child's performance against the class. The teacher's casual remarks

about the class "giants" or "gaggles" cause embarrassment, perhaps also anger not disclosed at the meeting. Parents are full of conflicting emotions when they express or justify their child's behaviour. They also buy into the teacher's narrative style by referring to their child as a "star" or "chatterbox." The teacher's focus on grades makes parents concerned about their child's "level" against the class. They often express themselves negatively about their own parenting, pointing out their own faults, boldly saying that they do too little homework with their children or control them too little. Their conversationally constructed school identities are also indicative of an interventionist model; "once the teacher has shot his or her gunpowder, and the student's difficulties persist because he or she is unable to deal with them, then suddenly the question of parental responsibility arises" (Krumm, 1989, p. 64).

Despite their expressed efforts and willingness, parents feel inadequate to the expectations set by the school. Conversational strategies make them feel embarrassed, ashamed, feeling that they are again a student at school. Potential and willingness to be active are limited to economic, organisational, culinary issues. Parents, even though they show themselves as willing and interested in their child's school career, are confronted with barriers based on the school concept. The individual potential of the child and his or her abilities is overlooked in the conversational strategies. Also overlooked is the potential of the parent who wants to be supportive of the individual development of the pupil, but there is no room for this in the valid concept of cooperation. Thus, there is no participatory model that assumes a mutually symmetrical arrangement in which both parents and school can set tasks for each other, be doers and inspirers of each other's activities. Instead, we observe a model of accommodation (Kawula, 2007), which is a one-way relationship in which parents are limited to responding to the school's initiatives or instructions.

Methodological note instead of conclusion

As I mentioned earlier, a study using conversational AC analysis of the entire research material of parent meetings is still before me. This article is only an attempt to show a small part of the world of the social relations of the meeting. The conclusions presented here relate to one of the four areas identified. They are only hinted at in this article. I hope that the material presented here shows the potential that arises from studying recordings of meetings in an ethnomethodological perspective (Garfinkel, 2007). It also shows that a hitherto unknown facet of school culture can be revealed by studying relationships with the parents.

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