

Beyond the Fancy Cakes. Teachers' Relationship to Home-School Cooperation in a Study From Norway

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The topic of this paper is the relationship between teachers and parents. Seen from teachers' point of view, relating with parents can sometimes be difficult, demanding and stressful. Relating with parents may therefore affect teachers' understanding and experiences of their own profession and may consequently affect teacher supply. The paper starts by exploring what has characterized the parent-teacher or parent-school relationship over time. As schools have opened up towards the surroundings and increasingly consumer oriented and demanding parents are setting the standards for the parent-teacher relation, this increases the pressure on the teaching professions. This leads us to ask how teachers experience the encounters with parents in school, and in this article, the relationship between teachers and parents is pursued, as viewed from the perspective of the teachers. How do teachers relate to home-school cooperation and how do they experience the interaction with parents? The analyses are based on data collected through qualitative interviews of contact teachers in lower secondary schools in Norway. Forty contact teachers (27 women and 13 men) from seven lower secondary schools in Norway were interviewed. A main result is that even though teachers acknowledge the importance of parental involvement and home-school cooperation, this part of their job is often deprioritized due to lack of time and resources.

Keywords: teachers, home-school cooperation, lack of time

Introduction

Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of home-school cooperation and parental involvement in different school related areas; among other things when it comes to students' school motivation, (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005), attitudes towards school (Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008), absence (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004), dropout (Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, L., & Dornbusch, 1990), school achievement in general (Catsambis, 2001) and subject specific achievements, in mathematics (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005a), science (Van Voorhis, 2003) and literacy (Fletcher, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2010; Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afai, Taleni, & O'Regan, 2009; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005b). In other words, we know that engaging parents and homes in children's learning in school is a good idea.

At the same time, however, research also show that sometimes the relationship between home and school is a distanced one and that engaging in cooperation between home and school can be experienced as stressful. Sometimes social group characteristics, cultural or ethnic differences are relevant factors for understanding such challenges, as shown in my own works when it comes to social background (Bæck, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Bæck, 2013), and in for example Fletcher et al. (2010), Fletcher et al. (2009) and Zarate (2007) when it comes to parents from diverse ethnic groups.

In this article, the relationship between teachers and parents is pursued, as viewed from the perspective of the teachers. How do teachers relate to home-school cooperation and how do they experience the interaction with parents? There are a number of reasons why it is important to focus on these issues. Home-school cooperation has been emphasised more in recent years and we have become increasingly aware of the effect parental involvement has on children's learning outcomes. At the same time, the teaching profession has changed and the professional lives of teachers are now more than

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ever filled up with a variety of tasks and obligations. Also, high levels of teacher attrition necessitate an increased focus on the work situations of teachers. Against this backdrop the main question posed in this article is how teachers deal with the issue of home-school cooperation. Firstly, the increased focus on parental involvement and home-school cooperation will be elaborated on. Secondly, some theoretical outlines fruitful for discussing these phenomena are introduced. Thirdly, findings from a research project will be presented, where the focus is on how teachers relate to home-school cooperation.

Increased Focus on Home-School Cooperation

Internationally, parents' role in school has been emphasised more in recent years, and the nature of home-school cooperation has changed over time. As a general picture one can say that parents formal rights have been extended, even though the type of formal rights and the degree of parental authority in school differ between different national settings. In Norway, parents' formal rights are stated in the Education Act and also in the national curriculum, the LK06 National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training. Up until the school reform of 2006, only primary and lower secondary school was obligated to arrange for formal home-school cooperation. As part of the reform, home-school cooperation in upper secondary education was for the first time included. Schools are obliged to arrange for at least one parent-teacher meeting each school year. In addition, primary and lower secondary schools shall arrange for 2 student-parent-teacher conferences each year. For students under the age of 18 in upper secondary school, parents have the right to at least one prepared and structured conversation with the teacher. The formulations about the content of the student-parent-teacher conferences is the same for students in primary and secondary school; it shall be about the student's daily work and performance in the different subjects, about the student's development seen in the light of the Education Act and the National Curriculum. In the conference the parties shall also clarify how student, school and parents will cooperate in order to facilitate for the learning and development of the student. The student has a right to be part of the conversation from the age of 12.

As already mentioned, increased awareness about the importance of home-school cooperation, has pushed forward this issue in educational policy. There are, however, also other intakes to understanding this development. Educational authorities' emphasis on the importance of and efforts to facilitate for a more prominent position for parents within the educational system, can for example be viewed as part of an increased focus on the consumer perspective within the public services in general, as also pointed out by other researchers (Ravn, 1996; Sletten, Sandberg, & Nordahl, 2003). Parents are regarded as, and view themselves as, consumers who have every right to expect and demand the delivery of the goods with the quality that they have been promised. Kofod (2002: 202) sees this as part of the democratisation and neoliberalisation of society. The institutions have been opened up towards the general public, and the users' right to influence the inner lives of the institutions has been acknowledged. As shown by both myself (Bæck, 2010b) and others (Kofod 2002), some parents have pushed this to the limit and even challenged the authority of teachers and school leaders, putting a strain on the parent-school relationship.

With the inclusion of formulations in central policy documents stating parents' formal rights vis a vis the educational system, home-school cooperation appears to be an important part of schools' mandate in Norway, both in primary and in secondary school. To some extent we can say that this is correct. The formal part of home-school cooperation is well institutionalized and is an established part of the school activities, which is apparent in the fact that the majority of the parents do attend these forums Bæck (2010a). Besides these forums, however, Norwegian parents have had little formal say in school, and parent meetings and student-parent-teacher conferences make up the corner stones of formalised home-school cooperation in Norway.

Formal home-school cooperation serves mainly information purposes, and other activities are more central in the everyday lives of parents, and are also more so in the everyday working lives of teachers. As stated by Bæck (2013), when research shows that parental involvement and successful home-school cooperation contribute to improve school achievements, diminish absence and increase students' welfare in school, the focus is usually on the kind of involvement that takes place in the everyday lives of families through conversations, help with home work, encouragement or other forms of support related to children's schooling.

Home and school also interact in other kinds of settings; in conversations between teacher and parent taking place in passing when parents pick up their child after school, in phone calls or e-mail exchanges, for example when parents inform teachers about issues related to the student or complain about something, or ask about misplaced textbook, or call to discuss incidents with teasing or bullying, and so on. All of these types of interactions and encounters, direct or indirect, are relevant for forming home-school relationships, and in the course of these encounters, relations between parents and teachers are built.

The way teachers and parents relate to the question of home-school cooperation as well as mutual expectations held by the two parties, towards each other and towards what this cooperation should entail, will have an effect on the nature of these interactions and encounters. In sync with extended formal rights, expectations may have changed; schools' and teachers' expectations towards parents and, equally important, parents' expectations towards schools and teachers. In this article we focus on the former and explore how teachers relate to home-school cooperation and how they experience the interaction with parents.

When Teachers Struggle With Parent-Teacher Relations

Literature on home-school cooperation and parental involvement has often focused on parents' challenges when it comes to being heard and seen by the educational institutions and has perhaps been less preoccupied with challenges experienced by the teachers in their encounters with parents. However, the problems experienced by the teachers are equally important to focus on since this could ultimately result in lack of job satisfaction, lack of motivation, burnout and in worst case that one decides to leave the profession altogether. Some studies have shown that negative relations towards parents have a negative effect on the way teachers perceive of their own work, for example in a study from Germany where Stoeber and Rennert (2008) document that pressure and demands from parents positively predicated teacher burnout, and in a study from Norway where E. M. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) document that self-efficacy and burnout are influenced by teachers' relations to parents.

In Skaalvik and Skaalvik's study teacher self-efficacy was conceptualised as individual teachers' beliefs in their own ability to plan, organise, and carry out activities that are required to attain given educational goals (E. M. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). They investigated whether self-efficacy and burnout are influenced

by factors such as time pressure, autonomy, disciplinary problems, leader support and relations to parents, and found that relations to parents was a stronger predictor of teachers' self-efficacy than the other school context variables investigated. Parents' evaluation of teachers' work is an important frame of reference for teachers' self-evaluation and self-esteem, and according to E. M. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) experiencing distrust from parents, that parents are critical or difficulties in cooperation with parents, therefore tend to reduce teachers' belief in their own ability to plan, organise and carry out activities that are necessary in order to achieve educational goals. This may in turn create anxiety, a feeling that they do not do a good enough job, and promote a need to protect themselves. Skaalvik and Skaalvik describe how this over time can create a chronic experience of lacking energy, a reduction in their ability to get involved in their students and to give of themselves in relation to them. This may lead to teachers trying to deal with stress by withdrawing from their students and after a while develop more negative and cynical attitudes towards their students (depersonalisation). International research reveals that the teaching profession is one of the professions that experience highest degree of work related stress (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Stroeber & Rennert, 2008, referred in S. Skaalvik & E. M. Skaalvik, 2009).

Ultimately this may lead to a withdrawal from the profession in itself, and as pointed out by a number of researchers high levels of teacher attrition is a major problem (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Roksvaag & Texmon, 2012), and especially so among beginning teachers (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Meister & Melnick, 2003). In Norway, statistics show that one third of the students graduating from teacher education programs between the years 2006 and 2011 had already left the profession by the year 2012 (Bæck, 2013). In Norway, this, together with low recruitment to teacher education and low completion rates of students in teacher education programs (in Norway there is a 30 % dropout rate) is creating a situation where Norway within the year 2020 will need more than 11 000 new general teachers (Roksvaag & Texmon, 2012). This is a lot in a country where the total number of teachers is 43 000. Lindqvist, Nordänger, and Carlsson (2014) describe the same situation from the Swedish context. Even though, as pointed out by them, teacher attrition is a more complex phenomenon than what is typically proposed and that in many cases drop-outs are temporary, a situation of poor recruitment to teacher education programs

and high teacher turnover still poses a major concern for educational authorities.

High turnover creates instable learning environments for students and is not beneficial for students' learning processes. Studies show that in school programs with high teacher turnover children have lower levels of language, cognitive, and social development and in addition changes in the teaching staff may lead to changes in students' behaviour, emotionally and physically (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011). High turnover also have consequences for parents' relations to school. When teachers leave and are replaced by new teachers parents must build new relations to the teachers. Cassidy et al. (2011) show that changes in the teaching staff, either permanent or temporary, affect the parent-teacher relation and lead to diminishing quality in the communication between parents and teachers. Furthermore, parents who experience such changes tend to worry more about their children's welfare.

In this article we look at how teachers experience parental involvement and the teacher-parent relation, and ask whether these factors cause extra pressure on the teachers in their daily working lives which could ultimately lead to them leaving the profession. The aim is also to discuss whether an increased focus on parental involvement in school can be understood in terms of increased focus on assessment, accountability and consumer power. xx is put forward as one important concept in this regard.

The Parent-Teacher Relation

A positive parent-teacher relation is in itself important for a number of reasons. It may lead to convey a more positive outlook on school and teachers to their children, which in turn may have an effect on students' attitudes towards school and teachers (Coleman, Collinge, & Tabina, 1996), ease the communication and flow of information between home and school and initiating contact – for both parties – will be experienced as easier (Bæck, 2007). Also, the information that is actually transferred in a positive parent-teacher relation will be of different character than in a situation with a distanced or strained relationship between teacher and parents.

Also, more information about the student may be exchanged and teachers will gain a better understanding of his or her students' needs, strengths and weaknesses – and the teacher can employ this knowledge in order to maintain constructive relations to the student (Dearing et al., 2008). In this regard, a positive relation between teacher and parents may affect

the relationship between student and teacher as well. Studies have also shown that teachers' perceptions of their relationship with individual students are strongly connected to their perceptions of the parent-teacher relation, especially if they perceive of the students' behaviour as problematic (Dearing et al., 2008; Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005; Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012; Wyrick & Rudasill, 2009).

The Study

The analyses in this article are based on data collected through qualitative interviews of contact teachers in lower secondary schools in Norway. Forty contact teachers (27 women and 13 men) from seven lower secondary schools in Norway were interviewed. The teachers were interviewed once and the interviews lasted between one and two hours. The interviews were taped and transcribed and were then analysed. The seven schools were selected in order to get as wide a selection of schools as possible. School characteristics that were taken into account were school size, school location relative to industrial structure, geographical location, degree of urbanism/ruralism, social class environments (schools dominated by middle-class versus working-class pupils), and degree of non-native versus ethnic Norwegian pupils in the pupil populations. Three of the schools were located in big cities in the southern part of Norway. One of them was located in a suburban area in a predominant working-class environment and had approximately 250 pupils (four female teachers were interviewed). Another was also located in a suburban area, but in a middle-class environment and had approximately 550 pupils (two female and two male teachers were interviewed). The third of these schools was an inner-city school where more than 90% of the 300 pupils had minority backgrounds (three female and three male teachers were interviewed). Two other schools were located in smaller towns in the northern part of Norway with a population of approximately 55,000 inhabitants. One of these schools was located in a middle-class area and had 500 pupils (four female teachers were interviewed), while the other was located in a working-class area and had 300 pupils (six female teachers and one male teacher were interviewed). The last two schools were located in rural settings in the northern part of Norway. Both schools had pupils from primary and lower secondary school. One of these schools was located in an area dominated by agriculture and had 100 pupils on the lower secondary level (two male teachers were interviewed). The other

school was located along the coast in an area dominated by fisheries and had 30 pupils on the lower secondary level (one female teacher and five male teachers were interviewed).

Structures and support for parental involvement in all the schools included annual parent-teacher meetings (twice a year), student-parent-teacher conferences (twice a year), parent representative, Parents' Council Working Committee (FAU) and board of management representation. Other than this, communication between home and school was usually by means of a note informing parents of school activities, and so forth.

The findings from this study are reported in terms of a thematic approach – themes that emerged during the data analyses are used to structure the presentation of the findings.

Findings and Discussion

Recognizing the Importance of Home-School Cooperation

As mentioned above, home-school cooperation is high up on the agenda nationally and internationally, and the teachers in our study also expressed recognition when it comes to the value of home-school cooperation. Yet, there were variations in terms of what teachers thought that engaging parents could contribute to, how much of their time this part of the job should take up and whether it was a natural and self-evident part of their job or not. Most of the teachers acknowledged the resource parents could represent in terms of contributing to students' school motivation and achievements, especially for students who were disadvantaged in one way or another. Teachers also recognized the difference that good communication with parents could do in their jobs as teachers, and especially so in demanding situations. One of the teachers emphasized that cooperating well with parents is often what can allow for change to actually happen in difficult and blocked situations. Another teacher said: "I could see myself having more contact with the parents, because it has something to do with administering a common or shared truth."

In our study, we found that an important part of the teachers' motivation to cooperate well with parents was that they realized that keeping parents close and having them on their side, could benefit themselves and make their own job easier. Some of the teachers sought to control the students through their parents, among other things through demonstrating for the students that their parents agreed with the way they as teachers did their job and the decisions they made.

"By getting the parent on my side, it is not that easy for the student to manipulate the adults, right? And it is not that easy for them to say 'my mum says I can do this or that', and so on, because 'no, in fact you can not, cause I just talked with your mum about that yesterday, so I know."

Challenges in the Parent-Teacher Relationship

In practice, not all teachers found engaging and cooperating with parents to be unproblematic. It is a fact that when teachers are in contact with parents, it most often has to do with some form of problem or difficulty. Some teachers said that they wished it wasn't so, that they would have wanted to be able to also give the parents positive feedback to students' achievements, behaviour and so on – but that there just wasn't time or even a culture to do so. "The contact with parents is most often about something negative", one teacher said, and continued to point out that the parents he knew the best would usually fall into two categories; parents of students who had some kind of problem, academically or socially, or what he termed the 'overly eager' parents. The teachers we interviewed would usually welcome parents to take an interest and contribute in their child's education, but at the same time there would be a thin line between the engaged parent and the overly active parent, whom would most typically be found among the well-educated and well-off parents. The most problematic parent from the teacher perspective was the one they would describe as the parent who would always take their own child's side in conflicts or who defended their own child against critique from the teachers.

For some of the teachers interviewed, home-school cooperation and contact with parents was a part of the job that they experienced as challenging, and especially so for the younger teachers who had not been in the profession for very long. Some of the younger teachers described home-school cooperation as a tough part of their job and as something they dreaded to get into. According to Lindqvist et al. (2014), the proportion of graduated teachers who drop out seems to correlate with the number of years in the profession. These researchers do not touch upon the issue of home-school cooperation in their study, but based on findings from our study it seems likely that younger teachers' struggle with home-school cooperation could be one of the reasons behind their prematurely leaving their profession.

Having to Prioritize

In the educational field, as well as in numerous other fields where policy is supposed to lay the foundation for practice, the gap between ideals and reality sometimes seems wide. For one thing, as shown in previous works (Bæck, 2009, 2010b), educational authorities' efforts to increase home-school cooperation and strengthen parents' position in school, are challenged by the uneven power relation between parents and teachers that hinders parents' actual opportunities to engage in increased involvement and true cooperation with schools. Despite efforts to engage parents, parents' actual influence can therefore still be questioned. In the analyses in this article another factor that may hinder the kind of home-school cooperation envisioned by educational authorities came to the surface, namely lack of time. In their everyday work situations, teachers find themselves squeezed between different demands that sometimes do not match up. The call for increasing parents' role in school implies that time is used for this, which is a problem when teachers' timetables are already filled to the rim with other work tasks.

As already mentioned, the teachers in our study were overall positive when it comes to the value of home-school cooperation, and for most teachers engaging in contact with home and parents was in itself something they viewed as unproblematic. At the same time, however, the interview analyses show that home-school cooperation seems to be deprioritized by the teachers. One common topic among the teachers we interviewed were the increase in the amount and type of tasks that the teachers' working days are filled with. Teachers who had been in the profession for a number of years expected to perform their teaching profession, in terms of which responsibilities and obligations they had as teachers. They had moved from being professional teachers, they claimed, dedicated to the tasks of planning and carrying out their teaching obligations, to having to deal with other kinds of issues. Such issues could include dealing with social problems, bullying, mental issues, problems at home, problems with friends, keeping order in the classroom and so on. For some teachers dealing with these other issues had taken over large parts of their workdays. Teachers we interviewed therefore emphasized the need for an increased presence by other professions in school; professions trained and qualified in dealing with for example emotional problems, and who could unburden the teachers for some of these tasks. These are tasks that the teachers felt that they are not

even competent to deal with themselves. By bringing in other relevant professions, the teachers anticipated that they themselves would be able to focus on what was supposed to be their main task, namely teaching. Thijs and Eilbracht (2012, p. 805) report similar findings from a Dutch study, and they suggest that bringing school psychologists and school-based mental health professionals in could provide teachers with the additional motivation and child-specific information needed to counter student-teacher relational negativity. The situation described by the teachers in our study, pressures the teachers to prioritize. Even though most teachers are positive when it comes to home-school cooperation and appreciate the value of parents' contributions, when faced with more pressing and perhaps more acute situations that demand more immediate action, teachers often have to push home-school cooperation down their to-do lists. In this way, the issue of home-school cooperation and contact with parents would keep receiving the shorthand in teachers' busy working schedules. Home-school cooperation have to compete with a number of other time consuming tasks that are often more immediately pressing and more 'in the teachers' faces', so to speak. Some of the teachers were apologetic about this situation: "This is a shame, really, but we just lack time".

Changing Power Relations

Teachers' need to prioritize has become more urgent also due to increased demands related to assessment and to reporting and documenting their practice, which are, the teachers emphasized, tasks that steal time away from what they perceived to be their primary tasks as teachers. Authorities' call for increased parental involvement in school is one of several efforts to enhance school quality, and it is difficult not to view this, at least in part, in light of the political and ideological turn in educational policy following after the PISA studies. The last 15 years in Norway, since the PISA-shock hit, making it painstakingly clear for Norwegian authorities that the results produced by Norwegian students were not as good as one had expected, there has been an increased focus on assessment and on national and international testing. This is not exclusive to the Norwegian setting, and even in nations excelling in the PISA-exercise this increased focus is clearly present. An obvious driving force behind this development is the neoliberal take on education that has washed over most of the Western world. The increased focus on the educational system as a site for production of competent and flexible work forces for globally competitive economies, has actualized the need to measure

the success of the system. At the same time, as emphasised by among others Kofod (2002) and Moos (2002), this turn in educational policy brought with it demands for more transparent educational systems, for example in the sense that the results (thus, the effectivity of the system) should be made public. By being able to demonstrate success, schools would achieve accept for their way of conducting 'business' and also gain a stronger position in the fierce competition with other public institutions over limited resources, as also pointed out by Moos (2002). Also, with the user/consumer perspective more prevalent in educational institutions, their activities are more heavily scrutinised. These changes have affected the teaching profession and the everyday working days of teachers. The already tight time schedules teachers have had to relate to, have become even tighter. As findings from our study show, this in turn affects how the teachers address the demand for home-school cooperation and involving parents.

As already mentioned, the relationship between parents and teachers can be understood as a power relation, where teachers have traditionally constituted a very powerful group in school compared to parents. Ball (1994, p. 21) has pointed out the same, and has stated that in school, teachers are the ones who decide 'what can be said and thought' and 'who can speak, when and where and with what authority'. If we employ Bourdieu's concept of social field, the school arena can be interpreted as a social field; an arena or a battlefield for power fights between different actors, in this case between parents and teachers. A field is defined by specific stakes and interests, and the struggle that takes place within the field is about the monopoly of the specific authority that is characteristic of the field in question (Bourdieu 1993, 72). The changes referred to above, can potentially alter the power balance that has traditionally existed in school, and the current focus on increased parental involvement brings with it a potential for a levelling out of the power balance between teachers and parents. This may again force teachers to protect themselves and withstand the pressure from parents through different strategies, for example through keeping parents at arms length and insisting on their own professionalism, as shown in Bæck (2010b).

In the analyses in this article, we have also seen that lack of time in itself can lead to a dismissal of home-school cooperation by the teachers. Schools face increased demands from educational authorities and others, when it comes to assessment, national and international testing and reporting. These extended demands

interfere directly in teachers' working lives, in the sense that teachers are obliged to direct their resources to issues that are likely to increase their success as teachers. The results from our study indicate that in this context, working with parents and home-school cooperation are deprioritised. In terms of power relations and power balance in school, this situation also challenges the notion of teachers as powerful actors in the educational setting. Teachers are increasingly subject to external demands, and this also constitutes a threat towards teachers' professional autonomy.

Conclusion

There are a number of barriers for positive home-school cooperation and for engaging parents. In this article, I have shown that new demands on the teacher role and on schools pose a challenge for working with home-school cooperation and parental involvement. Due to time constraints, teachers are forced to prioritise what their limited time should be spent on. As a consequence, home-school cooperation is often given low priority. Not because teachers do not acknowledge the importance of working with homes or involving parents in their work, but because teachers experience a number of pressing demands that compete for their resources and attention. Time constraint may of course also occur for parents and limit their opportunities to be involved in their children's schooling.

It is still very much a fact that the issues of home-school cooperation and relating to parents are a privatised part of a teacher's job in the sense that it seems to be the responsibility of the individual teacher. Studies show that there is room for a more thorough focus on these issues in teacher education programs, as for example shown by Thijs & Eilbract (2012: 805) who argue that there should be more emphasis on preparing teacher candidates for the realities they will encounter as teachers, and that they also need to learn how to become more impervious to negative and frustrating interactions with parents instead of focusing on trying to change them. Teachers sometimes view parents as threatening, and getting to know each other and laying down some common foundation and ground rules for their relationship, can help prevent tensions between them. Roles need to be clarified; what is the role of the teacher, what is the role of the parent – and what expectations do they have towards one another? We know that parents of different social and cultural backgrounds may have different beliefs about parenting and when it comes to how they view their role in their

children's schooling. Discussions about these issues can help both parents and teachers in their efforts. The findings in our study demonstrate the importance of institutionalising this part of schools' work at the level of school leaders. The responsibility should rest firmly on the school leaders who should construct and implement strategies and action plans for how the relation between school, teacher and parent should be. To what degree and in what way should parents be involved in school? To what extent should parents keep their autonomy in relation to parents? It is crucial for teachers to be able to keep their independence and autonomy when executing their own profession (S. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009), but in order to make this happen, time needs to be spent on reflecting on and planning for home-school cooperation, as well as having the time to actually execute these plans. In order to reduce conflicts between teachers and parents and build trusting relationships between them,

responsibilities and expectations need to be clear and communication lines need to be as open as possible. This takes time. An important prerequisite for positive home-school cooperation and for engaging parents in a positive way is therefore that the institutional structures surrounding this relation is in place. Resources in terms of time is, as shown in this article, a primary foundation that must be in place, and teachers need to have time explicitly earmarked for working towards home and parents. Teachers also need time to develop their interpersonal skills and abilities to cooperate and communicate with parents. They need time convey to parents that their starting point is what is best for the child, and they need time to allow trusting relationships to grow.

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