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Journal for educational research online 9 (2017) 3, S. 47-81



Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Sauer, Daniela: Parent-teacher counseling: On 'blind spots' and didactic perspectives. A qualitative-reconstructive study on teachers' counseling responsibilities - In: Journal for educational research online 9 (2017) 3, S. 47-81 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-153013 - DOI: 10.25656/01:15301

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-153013>

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:15301>

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Daniela Sauer

Parent-teacher counseling: On ‘blind spots’ and didactic perspectives. A qualitative-reconstructive study on teachers’ counseling responsibilities

Abstract

Since the early 1970s, counseling parents has been considered to be among the areas of responsibility for teachers in Germany (Baumert & Kunter, 2006; Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1972; Kultusministerkonferenz [KMK], 2004). Following the discourse on professional theory, parent-teacher counseling is regarded to be a type of professional consultation based on different competencies, attitudes, and specialist knowledge (Grewe, 2005; Hertel, 2009; Schnebel, 2012; Strasser & Gruber, 2003; among others). While a considerable range of aspects of teachers’ counseling competence has already been the object of research (e.g., Hertel, 2009; Kluge, Bruder, Keller, & Schmitz, 2012), studies devoted to the nature of teachers’ implicit knowledge and its significance for counseling in the context of the school system are rare (Fives & Buehl, 2012). This study intends to reduce that research gap. Based on a qualitative-reconstructive research design, 13 teachers from different types of schools were questioned in semi-structured interviews. These interviews were then evaluated using the documentary method (Nohl, 2012; Bohnsack, 2008). In total, three different concepts of parent-teacher counseling were reconstructed from the data. Teachers of type A-1 understand counseling to be responsive support, teachers of type B-1 understand counseling to be feedback prompted by the teacher, and teachers of type B-2 understand counseling to be stressful conflict. These reconstructed concepts of counseling heighten awareness of ‘blind spots’ in the professionalism of teachers by shedding light on the need to qualify teachers: the empirical findings can serve as a basis for discussing the didactics of parent-teacher counseling in the context of specialist training for teachers.

Keywords

Counseling; Documentary method; Teachers as counselors; Teacher training; Professionalism in teachers; Qualitative-reconstructive social research

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Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz [KMK], 2004). Furthermore, the significance of teachers' counseling tasks has been stressed in the discourse on professional theory (e.g., Baumert & Kunter, 2006; Haag, Rahm, Apel, & Sacher, 2013; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Beck, Sembill, Nickolaus, & Mulder, 2009). Thus, both German educational politicians as well as researchers consider teachers – along with guidance counselors and school psychologist – to play an essential role in any school's counseling system (Schwarzer & Posse, 2005; Strasser, 2013), particularly in parent counseling and in passing on working and learning strategies (Heller & Vieweg, 1983). According to Hertel and Schmitz (2010), teachers' responsibilities include counseling focused on learning strategies, guidance on students' academic careers, pedagogical counselings well as counseling in cases of personal crises. The importance of parent-teacher counseling is also reflected in the Munich Model of Communicative Competence in Parent-Teacher Conversation (Gartmeier, Bauer, Fischer, Karsten, & Prenzel, 2011). This theory-based model defines counseling as a typical everyday type of parent-teacher conversation, including managing conflict situations and dealing with unpleasant news (Gartmeier et al., 2011)

Various studies have presented strong evidence that close collaboration between parents and teachers is beneficial to everyone involved (e.g., Cox, 2005; Epstein & von Voorhis, 2001). As Walker and Dotger (2012) noted, “[...] the quality of teachers' relationships with parents has consequences for student achievement, motivation, and emotional, social, and behavioral adjustment” (p. 62). Nevertheless, talks between teachers and parents are frequently deemed unsatisfactory, strenuous, and energy consuming by both parties (Aich & Behr, 2015). In a 2009 survey, teachers ranked the task of ‘counseling/guiding parents and students’ third among their most stressful responsibilities – despite the fact that the number of annual working days spent on this task is relatively low (Landert & Brägger, 2009). Sacher concludes his 2005 study on parent-teacher cooperation at Bavarian schools by stating that a considerable percentage of teachers were apparently unable to offer parents, particularly those with low-achieving children, helpful advice in terms of learning strategies.

Analyses of teachers' counseling responsibilities reveals the task to be complex and dependent on knowledge in a wide variety of fields as well as on various competencies and attitudes. Engel, Nestmann, and Sickendiek (2007) classify parent-teacher counseling as a type of professional consultation that is clearly different to everyday counsel. This claim will be discussed in the following section.

Recent years have seen an increasing number of studies devoted to the modeling and training as well as the multimethodical assessment of teachers' advisory capacities (e.g., Bruder, 2011; Hertel, 2009). Sickendiek, Engel, and Nestmann (2008), however, have noted a lack of qualitative studies which allow for the development of an object-based theory of counseling by schoolteachers (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010). This study specifies that issue by placing its main focus on the practical knowledge (Bohnsack, 2007) available to teachers counseling parents. Practical or incorporated knowledge is the kind of knowledge “which gives orientation to action. [...] This implicit knowledge forms a sort of structure, by which ac-

tion is orientated mostly independently from the subjective meaning” (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 100). Bohnsack describes this incorporated knowledge using the term framework of orientation (Bohnsack, Nentwig-Gesemann, & Nohl, 2007). The main scientific interest reflected in this study is the reconstruction of teachers’ action-directing framework of orientation intrinsically linked to the counseling process.

1.1 Theoretical basis

Recent years have seen an increasing number of studies focusing on teachers’ counseling responsibilities (e.g., Bruder, 2011; Hertel, 2009; Kluge et al., 2012; Strasser & Gruber, 2003). Based on pedagogical and psychological literature as well as existing models of counseling competence in the domain-specific of supporting learning strategies (e.g., Strasser & Gruber, 2003; Schwarzer & Buchwald, 2006), Hertel (2009) developed a five-dimensional model of teachers’ counseling competences. Through further research, this model has evolved into a four-dimensional model (Bruder, 2011). “Different models have been tested by applying latent variable confirmatory analyses, and a four-dimensional solution seemed to be plausible. [...] These four dimensions [counseling skills, diagnostic/pedagogical knowledge, collaboration/perspective taking and coping] can thus be regarded as the main components for counselling talks with parents” (Bruder, Hertel, & Schmitz, 2011, p. 61).

The first dimension, counseling skills, refers to specific counseling and conversation techniques the teacher deliberately uses depending on the different phases of the process of counseling parents. The counseling skills dimension is visualized by the three scales of active listening, paraphrasing, and structuring. In active listening and paraphrasing, the listener displays interest and attention both verbally and nonverbally (Röhner & Schütz, 2013) with the goal of showing empathy for the thoughts and feelings of the person seeking counsel, understanding his or her needs, and rephrasing them in the listener’s own words. This way, the conversation gains structure, the person seeking counsel gains further clarity, misunderstandings between parent and teacher are avoided, and the conversation proceeds in a positive atmosphere (Hertzsch & Schneider, 2013). Structuring, the third scale, refers to the teacher’s ability to remain focused on his or her counseling responsibility (Hertel & Schmitz, 2010). “To structure the talk is especially relevant at school where time is limited and it is important not to drift too far from the main and relevant theme of the talk” (Bruder, 2011, p. 61).

The second dimension, diagnostic/pedagogical knowledge, comprises the four scales of defining the problem, searching for reasons, strategy knowledge, and goal orientation (Bruder et al., 2011). In their study, Kluge et al. (2012) were able to establish a significant connection between counseling knowledge and diagnostic knowledge in counseling concerning studying strategies. In order to conduct a successful consultation about studying attitudes, it is necessary to deliver a relevant diagnosis of studying attitudes (Kluge et al., 2012). For a diagnosis, it is essential

to define the problem using both broad background knowledge as well as strategy knowledge on the topic of learning (Schwarzer & Buchwald, 2006; Mutzeck, 2008). This helps both the advice-seeking and the advice-giving person to better understand the causes and effects of a problem, to widen their horizons, and to conceive of possible approaches for a solution; thus, defining the problem is linked to the scale of goal-orientation (Schwing & Fryszer, 2006). However, the exchange of information between teachers and parents can best be described as asymmetrical, according to a study by Sacher (2014). In the model project "*Vertrauen in Partnerschaft*" (trust in partnership), in only 15 % of all cases parents were asked by teachers to provide information on a student's extracurricular activities. This is in stark contrast to 46 % of parents receiving information on their child's performance or behavior in class and general information on classes from teachers (Sacher, 2014).

The third dimension, collaboration/perspective taking, comprises the scales of cooperative actions, perspective taking, and resource/solution orientation. Here, counseling is understood to be a cooperative process in which teachers and parents work with and for the child or adolescent. As Bruder et al. (2011) noted:

"It is the function of the teacher to support collaboration, and therefore it is important to understand others' perspectives of the problem to be solved. Beyond that, resources/solution orientation fosters not only how the problem is seen, but also what competencies of the pupil/parent can be used to support the problem-solving process." (p. 62)

Coping, the fourth dimension, refers to uncomfortable counseling situations, for example situations in which parents criticizing the teacher or even becoming aggressive (Hertel & Schmitz, 2010). According to Hertel and Schmitz (2010), these challenging counseling conversations may often also be regarded conflict situations. "For that reason, dealing with criticism and knowing how to handle difficulties is a basic counselling competence" (Bruder et al., 2011, p. 63).

Along with counseling knowledge and teachers' confidence as to their efficiency, additional specialist training has been identified as a significant factor in developing counseling competence (Bruder, 2011). Hertel (2009) and Gartmeier et al. (2015) have been able to verify improvements in teachers' counseling competence as well as their communicative competence of teachers after they had received specialist training. The case scenario in the study conducted by Bruder et al. (2011), however, yielded a result that seems contradictory at first: Considering the factor of work experience, teachers with more experience had lower counseling competence scores than their less experienced colleagues. The researchers offer two explanations: On the one hand, they suggest possible improvements in teacher training in recent years, while on the other hand, they note:

"that experience is not the only aspect of teaching that is needed to develop counselling competence. Expertise research has indicated that not only

experience, but also reflection about this experience, is necessary to improve competence. This is an important aspect of counselling education, especially with the goal of supporting teachers in achieving counselling competence.” (Bruder, 2011, p. 63)

Today, counseling takes place in a great number of different spheres of life, making it possible to identify three degrees of formalization in counseling (Engel, 2008; Prange & Strobel-Eisele, 2006; Sickendiek et al., 2008):

- informal, everyday counseling,
- semi-formalized counseling
- explicit, highly formalized counseling.

Informal and/or everyday counseling and support takes place in the form of amicable conversations between relatives, friends, or family (Sickendiek et al., 2008). In semi-formalized counseling, the persons providing counsel are addressed as professionals while they are practicing their occupation. Thus, counseling provided by teachers is classified as semi-formalized counseling. Highly formalized counseling takes place in specific counseling centers. Together, semi-formalized and highly formalized counsel make up the domain of professional consultation (Engel et al., 2007). Professional consultation is clearly and explicitly distinct from counseling in general understanding (Strasser & Gruber, 2003). Therefore, counseling provided by schoolteachers should be more than one-dimensional ‘advice’, and thus advice, in the sense of a directive approach, should generally be distinguished from counseling (Wildt, 2004).

Despite the fact that teachers’ counseling responsibilities are categorized as professional consultation and that teachers are assigned counseling responsibilities as per the regulations for teacher training (KMK, 2004), teachers frequently have no or very little substantial training in counseling. While, according to Strasser and Gruber (2003), pedagogical and psychological counseling are becoming increasingly professionalized and scientifically well-founded, these aspects have not yet been firmly implemented (if at all) as part of teachers’ university training and the training canons of teacher training institutions (Hertel, 2009). Apart from the lack of qualification, the fact that the number of annual working days spent on counseling is fairly low can be documented as well. In an analysis of the working time of teachers across all school types in German-speaking Switzerland, Landert and Brägger (2009) determined that, on average, 3.8 % of teachers’ annual working time is spent on guiding and counseling. This result suggests that despite the abovementioned imperatives, counseling responsibilities have very little influence on teachers’ daily work routine. However, in the study by Landert and Brägger (2009), teachers ranked the task of ‘counseling/guiding’ third among the responsibilities they consider stressful, despite the relatively low number of annual working days they spend on it.

The responsibility of teachers to counsel at school is critically discussed, particularly from the perspective of teachers’ manifold roles as well as the fundamental hierarchical divide between teachers and the persons they are to counsel (Denner,

2000; Schnebel, 2012). Due to their many different tasks and responsibilities, teachers assume different roles when interacting with students and when interacting with parents, i.e. they hold class, assess, educate, and counsel. Inevitably, fields of tension and conflicts of roles in teachers' counseling responsibilities arise from this variety of expected roles, as school is not exclusively a counseling institution (Schnebel, 2012). A teacher's counseling function does not replace their assessment and selection functions. In this context, Gröning (2006) describes a twin obligation in the counseling process ("*Doppelbindung im Beratungsprozess*"), i.e. the fact that persons seeking counsel might be influenced toward accepting and adopting behavior, mentalities, and convictions inherent to the institution of schools. Thus, there is the possibility that the teacher does not clearly separate non-directive counseling and directive forms of influence in parent-teacher communication (Wildt, 2004). Additionally, reasons for parent-teacher counseling sessions to be held are often produced by the school system and possibly the teacher themselves (Schnebel, 2012). Apparent or hidden hierarchies also play a role. In a certain way, students and their parents are in a dependent relationship to the teacher, as they are also the one to grant access rights in the education system. The voluntary nature of counseling as an important element is thus only partially provided in the context of parent-teacher counseling (Sacher, 2014).

1.2 Defining parent-teacher counseling

Based on previous definitions of counseling (Engel et al., 2007; Mutzeck, 2008; Schwarzer & Posse, 2005; Sickendiek et al., 2008), studies on counseling competence (e.g., Bruder, 2011; Hertel, 2009), and general literature on counseling (e.g., Strasser & Gruber, 2003), parent-teacher counseling is defined as follows: Parent-teacher counseling is a counseling conversation between at least one parent seeking counsel and a counseling teacher. The goal of the counseling process is, in which both parties are active participants, is to aimed at developing possibilities for action in dealing with a current parental problem, in which both parties are active participants. Parent-teacher counseling is based on specific counseling competencies, attitudes, and specialist knowledge on the part of the teacher and is thus classified as professional consultation.

According to this definition, the prerequisite for the teacher to engage in any counseling is at least one parent approaching them with a concern or current problem and seeking counsel. Following Schwarzer and Posse (2005), parent-teacher counseling is understood to be a bilateral counseling process – not a monologue. Parents actively participate both in defining the problem and in working out possible options for further action. According to the model of teachers' counseling competence (Bruder, 2011; Hertel, 2009), counseling teachers need various counseling skills and diagnostic/pedagogical knowledge in order to fulfill their task. Therefore, an eclectic approach combining methods used in different counseling concepts appears necessary (Hertel, 2009; Schnebel, 2012). Schnebel (2012) considers behav-

ioral and cognitive approaches, systemic approaches, and resource/goal-oriented approaches as well as approaches from humanistic psychology particularly suitable for eclectic counseling. In this context, however, Nußbeck (2010) stresses that it is insufficient to internalize and master techniques and methods to guarantee the success of a counseling situation. Balancing counseling skills and attitudes, Rogers (2015) states:

“In our experience, the counselor who tries to use a ‘method’ is doomed to be unsuccessful unless this method is genuinely in line with his own attitudes. On the other hand, the counselor whose attitudes are of the type which facilitate therapy may be only partially successful, because his attitudes are inadequately implemented by appropriate methods and techniques.” (pp. 19f.)

Professional counseling is always more than the mere application of counseling methods as prescribed: It requires basic attitudes such as empathy, acceptance, and congruence on the part of the teacher (Schwarzer & Posse, 2005).

Counseling skills are specific counseling and conversation techniques the teacher deliberately uses depending in the different phases of the counseling process. Essential counseling techniques for teachers include (Hennig & Ehinger, 2010; Hertel & Schmitz, 2010; Schnebel, 2012):

- Active listening: In active listening, the listener displays interest and attention both verbally (e.g., by asking questions) and nonverbally (e.g., by nodding or smiling) (Röhner & Schütz, 2013). According to Bay (2010), active listening is more than a conversation technique; first and foremost, it is a matter of personal attitude toward the conversation partner, and only secondly a matter of having internalized communication techniques. The aim is to empathize with the thoughts and feelings of the person seeking counsel, to become aware of their needs, and to verbalize them in different words. This way, the conversation gains structure, the person seeking counsel gains further clarity, misunderstandings between the persons seeking and providing counsel are avoided, and the conversation proceeds in a positive atmosphere (Hertzsch & Schneider, 2013).
- Systemic questions: Questions are an integral part of systemic counseling (Schwing & Fryszer, 2006). In contrast to active listening, which confronts the person seeking counsel with their own needs, thoughts, and feelings, systemic questions are chiefly used to shed light on interactions between persons and/or their behavior. The focus is not on cause and blame or about individualized problem attribution, but on viewing events in their context instead of detached from it. Examples of systemic questions include constructive W-questions, circular questions, questions on goals, questions on exceptions and attempts at solutions so far, scaling questions, questions on resources and strengths, as well as problem-focused questions (Hennig & Ehinger, 2010; Hertel & Schmitz, 2010; Prior, 2009; Schwing & Fryszer, 2006).

- Assigning observation tasks: Observation tasks prompt the person seeking counsel to become active, thus emphasizing their responsibility for their actions. Observation tasks can also help clarifying a situation and getting an overview of it, i.e. help differentiating information on the courses of problems or identifying possible resources (Hennig & Ehinger, 2010; Schwing & Fryszer, 2006).

In addition to counseling skills, teachers who engage in counseling also require pedagogical knowledge, which according to Hertel and Schmitz (2010, p. 26) can in turn be divided into five categories:

Table 1: Reasons for and topics in counseling session at school (Hertel & Schmitz, 2010)

Reason for the counseling session	Topics in the counseling session	Addressee of the counseling session
Counseling in terms of learning strategies	Learning strategies, supporting the child in its studying, specific partial impairments of performance (e.g. ADHD, dyslexia)	Students, parents, colleagues
Behavioral problems at school	Nonconformist social behavior Social anxiety, school and test anxiety, problems with addiction	Students, parents, colleagues
Guidance on the student's academic track	Performance in class, change of grade, change of school type	Students, parents
Pedagogical counseling	Counseling on general pedagogical problems	Parents
Personal crises	Problems in the circle of friends, parents fighting or getting a divorce, death of a family member or friend	Students, parents, colleagues

As illustrated above, parent-teacher counseling is based on both various counseling skills and pedagogical knowledge. Thus, teachers require specialist training to fulfill their responsibilities, making parent-teacher counseling a professional consultation (Engel et al., 2007).

1.3 Desideratum and research questions

Theoretical and empirical research on parent-teacher counseling has consistently described the nature of the topic as challenging. Apart from specific knowledge of different reasons for counseling conversations, teachers need a large number of counseling and communication competencies. These, in turn, must be based on a thorough and deep understanding of the roles involved. A review of the current state of research on the counseling responsibilities of teachers shows a noticeable increase of quantitative studies in the domain-specific area of counseling in terms of learning strategies. Among others, a theoretically and empirically sound model of counseling competence of teachers, a concept for teacher training, and a multi-

methodical approach to the assessment of counseling competence have been published over the past few years (Bruder, 2011; Bruder et al., 2011; Hertel, 2009).

Remaining research gaps include studies of the varying expectations on the role of teachers concerning their counseling responsibilities. A teacher's counseling function does not replace assessment and selection functions. Accordingly, teachers assume different roles depending on whether they interact with students or parents, i.e. they hold class, educate, judge, and counsel. Additionally, reasons for having parent-teacher counseling conversations are often produced by the school system and possibly by the teacher themselves (Schnebel, 2012).

There is also a lack of studies devoted to how teachers cope with the relatively low level of qualification they receive in the field of parent-teacher counseling – if they receive any at all. In Germany, the topic of ‘counseling as an area of responsibility for teachers’ seems to have grown in relevance for the first two phases of teacher training (Bruder et al., 2011) since the publication of the Standards for Teacher Training by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK, 2004). However, most older practicing teachers have received no or little substantial counseling training (Hertel, 2009).

The current question of why teachers perceive their counseling and guidance responsibilities to be stressful and straining (Straumann & Glotz, 2002) remains open for research.

As stated above, there is a lack of qualitative studies in the field of parent-teacher counseling which would illustrate the topic ‘from within’ and thus from the viewpoint of the acting teacher (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2012). This perspective would contribute to a better understanding of social realities and attracts attention to developmental processes, interpretational patterns, and structural aspects (Flick et al., 2012). From a teacher's perspective, for example, what does it mean to counsel parents? How do teachers cope with the widespread lack of specialist training in this constitutive part of their job?

Qualitative-reconstructive social research is a specific form of qualitative research based on the constructivist research paradigm (Bohnsack, 2008). According to Meuser (2011), the specific potential of qualitative-reconstructive research depends on understanding social action as a result of belonging to a particular group, e.g. gender, social position, generation, or a specific occupational group. As a result, the current study is not interested in reconstructing an individual's subjective meaning – but in tracing the collective orientations of a specific group (Meuser, 2011). Thus, the distinction between two different types of knowledge is fundamental for the qualitative-reconstructive perspective: “the reflexive or theoretical knowledge on the one hand, and the practical or incorporated knowledge on the other hand. It is the latter kind of knowledge which gives orientation to action. This is implicit knowledge” (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 100).

According to Bohnsack (2007) and Neuweg (2004), a characteristic feature of this implicit knowledge is the fact that the persons involved are frequently unable to verbalize it. People know more than they are aware of. Accordingly, this implicit knowledge cannot be explicated or retrieved directly (Bohnsack, 2007). In this con-

text Neuweg (2015) also uses the term 'knowledge based on practical experience'. Based on the results of research by Hertel (2009), it can be assumed that teachers receive little or no qualification for counseling sessions with parents in the course of teacher training. Still, they are required to counsel parents as part of their daily work routine and their tasks as teachers. Accordingly, this study assumes that teachers do indeed develop implicit knowledge in the field of parent-teacher counseling in the framework of their professional socialization and the specific 'conjunctive spaces of experience' associated with it. Bohnsack (2007) summarizes this implicit knowledge using the terms 'atheoretical knowledge' or 'framework of orientation'. The question here, however, is how teachers' frameworks of orientation on parent-teacher counseling can be described and how much they are influenced by the current discourse on parent-teacher counseling in professional theory.

As a result, the main focus of this study is distinct from research approaches which aim at verifying a hypothesis. The goal of this study is not to apply existing knowledge of established rules to the interpretation of the cases it analyses, but following qualitative-reconstructive social research, to reconstruct teachers' incorporated knowledge, i.e. their collective frameworks of orientation for parent counseling. Thus, as Bohnsack (2010) has noted,

“[...] it is not the scientific observer's task to apply to the cases under research any knowledge about rules, which is only known to him- or herself. Moreover, it is his or her task to explain that knowledge and the rules, which are implied in this knowledge, which is kept to themselves by those under research without explanation.” (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 101)

Therefore, this study raises two main questions:

- (1) Which frameworks of orientation direct teachers' actions in parent-teacher counseling?
- (2) What conception of teachers' counseling responsibilities is reflected in these frameworks of orientation?

2. Methodology

The documentary method is a particularly well-suited approach to answering these research questions, as its analytical methods allow for insights into the action-directing frameworks of orientation for teachers' counseling responsibilities (Bohnsack, 2011; Nohl, 2012). The interview-based documentary method aims at giving access to teachers' implicit knowledge through the reconstruction and classification of their frameworks of orientation. This, in turn, allows for deductions, which offer impulses for the development of an object-based theory of parent-teacher counseling. To this end, open, non-standardized interview methods should be used in order to give the consulted teachers the opportunity to elaborate on their relevance system for parent counseling. This provides the research-

ers with the opportunity to understand and reconstruct the interviewees' statements by embedding them into a larger context. Interview methods and evaluation methods are closely linked and have to be adjusted in a way that ensures the collected data to be a suitable basis for the adopted evaluation method (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010). Thus, semi-structured narrative interviews with 13 teachers served for data collection in order to reconstruct the frameworks of orientation on which teachers' approaches to counseling are based. Nohl (2012) offers a methodological framework which uses the documentary method for the evaluation of semi-structured narrative interviews. As this method of data collection uses a guideline designed to precede the interview process, it provides a certain degree of comparability between interviews (Marotzki, 2011; Nohl, 2012). The topics for the interview guideline used in this study include (a) an account of an actual counseling conversation with parents, (b) the topics discussed when counseling parents, (c) the usefulness of counseling conversations with parents, (d) the course of an ideal-typical parent-teacher counseling conversation, (e) qualification for counseling parents. Additionally, the teachers interviewed were prompted to provide detailed impromptu narratives. Following the central metatheoretical assumption of the documentary method, access to the frameworks of orientation is often only possible through narratives and descriptions as well as direct observations, as the frameworks are closely intertwined with actual practice (Bohnsack et al., 2007).

In practical terms, the documentary interpretation of semi-structured narrative interviews involves three main steps: The formulating interpretation, which summarizes the topics discussed, the reflecting interpretation of case-specific frameworks of orientation, and type formation, which in turn is subdivided into sense-genetic type formation and sociogenetic type formation (Nohl, 2010).

Regretfully, the description of the entire process of interpretation is well beyond the scope of this article. Below, central steps in interpretation, i.e. formulating and reflecting interpretation as well as sense-genetic type formation, are presented using selected passages and interviews. A detailed description can be found in Sauer (2015).

2.1 The formulating interpretation of interviews

Formulating interpretation aims at finding at least one topic which occurs in two or more interviews. Only this kind of topic can form the basis for the reconstruction of different frameworks of orientation in the comparative analysis of interview passages during the second step, reflecting interpretation (Nohl, 2007). In this study, the same initial impulse (asking for an actual example of a counseling conversation), which occurred in each interview without changes, and the topics included in the interview guideline (e.g., qualification for counseling conversations with parents) allowed for numerous points of comparison. Here's the main question of the formulating interpretation: 'What do teachers answer when questioned about counseling parents?' (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010).

Table 2: Example of formulating interpretation

<p>Introductory Question <i>I (Interviewer): My research focuses on parent-teacher counseling. To start things off, could you please give me a recollection of a concrete situation in which you counseled parents? If you try to recall the situation and the people, what happened?</i></p>			
<p>Excerpt of the Transcription of the Introductory Passage – Interview Ms. Buche</p> <p><i>B (Ms. Buche): You mostly recall difficult cases. Often a parent-teacher interview is held at my specific request and it is me who tells the parents that there is some kind of a problem. The situation is often rather tense and uncomfortable for parents, you can tell that some are a bit insecure, but it also depends on the parents. Frankly, it is often a difficult situation for me.</i></p>	<p>Excerpt of the Transcription of the Introductory Passage – Interview Ms. Fichte</p> <p><i>F (Ms. Fichte): In this specific situation, the mother approached me with her worries. She was truly worried about her child. For quite some time, the boy had had enormous difficulties concentrating. He was receiving medical treatment but there were no signs of improvement at school. Adding to that, the boy started wetting his bed – you could tell by his physical reaction that something was wrong. She told me about the situation at home, which matched my observations at school in terms of the boy’s attention deficit, and she got so carried away by her own story that she started crying. This can sometimes happen in a parent-teacher interview, but it is rather rare.</i></p>		
<p>Formulating Interpretation of the Introductory Passage – Interview Ms. Buche:</p> <p><u>Main topic:</u> Parent-teacher interviews held at the request of the teacher</p> <p><u>Subtopic:</u> Recalling ‘difficult cases’</p> <p>Ms. Buche mostly recalls more ‘difficult cases’. These ‘parent-teacher interviews’ are held ‘at my specific request’ because there is some kind of a problem. Ms. Buche always perceives the parents to be ‘uncomfortable’ (15) and the situation to be ‘rather tense’ (13). Some parents may also be ‘a bit insecure’ (17). It is also ‘often a difficult situation’ for Ms. Buche.</p>		<p>Formulating Interpretation of the Introductory Passage – Interview Ms Fichte:</p> <p><u>Main topic:</u> Parent-teacher interview with a worried mother</p> <p><u>Subtopic:</u> Description of the mother’s worries and concerns</p> <p>Ms. Fichte describes a conversation with a mother who was ‘truly worried about her child’. The reasons were her son’s difficulties with concentrating at school and his wetting the bed. While describing the situation, the mother begins to cry. Ms. Fichte is sometimes confronted with weeping parents, although rather rarely.</p>	

Following Nohl (2012), audio recordings are the basis for any documentary interpretation of semi-structured interviews. Full transcriptions, however, are not necessary for this process (Nohl, 2012). The criteria for the identification of relevant interview passages for transcription include: (a) topics defined in advance by scientific interest, (b) ‘focusing metaphors’, i.e. interview passages are interpreted first in which interviewees make particularly emphatic and detailed statements, (c) similar interview passages, although representing different cases, are dealt with in similar fashion and are thus suitable for comparative analysis (Nohl, 2010). In addition, the introductory phases of the interviews are relevant for transcription, as they document the interviewees’ first reactions to the introductory impulse (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010).

The selection of these interview segments already reflects the continuous search for minimally and maximally contrasting cases in the evaluation process, as all “in-

interpretations are bound by horizons of comparison” (Nohl, 2010, p. 210). The specifics of a case can only be reconstructed separately, through comparison with other empirical cases, detached from the researcher’s horizons. In order to maintain consistency in language use, this selection of interview passages which were originally in German have been translated into English. The following is a juxtaposition of the introductory passages of the interviews with Ms. Buche and Ms. Fichte following directly the introductory question, as well as the describing and formulating interpretation of these passages.

2.2 The reflecting interpretation of interviews

The reflecting interpretation builds upon the formulating interpretation and aims at reconstructing case-specific frameworks of orientation (Nohl, 2007). This step is characterized by two phases: Formal interpretation including the differentiation of text genres, and semantic interpretation including comparative sequence analysis (Nohl, 2012). Differentiation of text genres is the main focus of formal interpretation, i.e., differentiating between narration, description, and argumentation (Nohl, 2012; Bohnsack, 1998; Bohnsack, 2007). As the interviewees generally cannot access their orientation frameworks in a theoretical/reflexive manner, explaining them is very hard, and often even impossible (Bohnsack, 2007). They are, however, apparent in narrations and descriptions of everyday practices (Bohnsack, 2007). Using a method of reconstructive social research, the analytical stance is changed during the semantic analysis of the empirical material. While during formulating interpretation, the researcher’s main question focused on what interviewees said about counseling parents, the question in reflecting interpretation focuses on how teachers narrate or describe the topic in question. The reconstruction of a framework of orientation can only be considered valid if it can be shown to be present in at least three interview passages (Bohnsack, 2007).

“If the Documentary Method aims at analysing the implicit regularity of experiences and reconstructing [...] the orientation framework of these experiences, this involves identifying continuities across a series of action sequences or narrative sequences about such actions. [...] If we assume that in a case a topic is experienced in one (and only one) particular way (i.e. within one framework of orientation), we can assume with regard to an individual topical section that a first narrative segment can only be followed by a specific segment that corresponds to the way the topic is experienced, to the respective framework. It thus becomes possible to determine the documentary meaning, the way of dealing with the topic and the orientation framework in a triple step – the first segment, the second segment (continuation) and the third segment (ratification of the framework)” (Nohl, 2010, p. 208).

Below, the process of reflecting interpretation is illustrated using the interview with Mr. Lärche and the reconstruction of the 'orientation toward problem perception by the teacher and conveying the teacher's perspective' framework.

2.3 Example of reflecting interpretation: Interview with Mr. Lärche

Mr. Lärche, 40, has been a teacher at a *Gymnasium* (grammar school) in a Bavarian town for ten years. He also is head of his department, mediator for the student council, and trainee instructor. The interview was scheduled by the principal's office as per written request. It was conducted in the school's consultation room and lasted 47 minutes.

Central topics for Mr. Lärche included (1) an example of a counseling conversation with parents, (2) time-related conditions, (3) reasons for counseling conversations (4) qualification for counseling parents und (5) an ideal counseling conversation with parents.

Topic (1): Example of a Counseling Conversation with Parents (introductory passage, lines 48–58)

Mr. Lärche replied to the interviewer's initial question in a fairly detailed manner, relating to his position in the last school year as headmaster of an 'E-Klasse', a preparatory class which forms the transition between *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*.

Mr. Lärche: This was an entirely new experience for me, and a very, very intense one at that. That's why it's the first thing that pops to mind in this interview, um, because you had to be tough as nails, um, tell people the plain truth, which, um, was shocking to some of them.

As the class teacher, Mr. Lärche had to be "tough as nails" and "tough and uncompromising" and tell "the plain truth" in conversations with the parents of his preparatory class students. It is Mr. Lärche who relates his perception of the problem (homologous to Ms. Buche and Ms. Kiefer). He is the one to be "tough as nails" and to tell parents the plain truth. First segment: 'Orientation toward conveying the teacher's perspective'.

Topic (3): Reasons for Counseling Conversations (section: 'reasons why parent counseling conversations fail', lines 140–161)

Mr. Lärche: [...] this doesn't relate to parent-teacher interviews, I talked to female students a few times and I realized that, well, if something really is up with them, I can't reach them at all, you know. There's no talking to them. I wouldn't mind having some guidelines, in fact that wouldn't be bad at all. Same goes for parents, particularly with anorexia, you tell the parents and they either accept it and seek professional help for their child, or they don't. They don't want to see it. And I have to admit that I don't have any sort of strategy for how to get that across in those situations.

Using the example of anorexia, Mr. Lärche describes how psychological problems had increased and that he would like to have “better strategies” for discussing this topic. This is an area in which he perceives deficits in his training. Despite this lack of formal training, Mr. Lärche talks to the students affected by this problem as well as their parents because as a teacher, he noticed a problem. In homology to Ms. Buche, he wants to convey his own perspective of the problem: “you tell the parents and they either accept it” or “I don’t have any sort of strategy for how to get that across in those situations.” Second segment (continuation): ‘Orientation toward conveying the teacher’s perspective’. Mr. Lärche’s use of the term “parent-teacher interviews” in this section is homologous to Ms. Fichte and Mr. Hainbuche, another interviewee. (First segment: Orientation toward the term “parent-teacher interviews/talks”).

Mr. Lärche’s orientation toward perceiving problems as a teacher and conveying his own perspective is also documented in a passage on the usefulness of parent counseling conversations.

Topic 6: Usefulness and results of parent counseling conversations (lines 326–342)

Mr. Lärche: [...] whether or not, well, it is beneficial for the parents, hard to say. Little strokes fell big oaks, I guess, um, when there are several talks which go in the same direction, um, like ‘watch your daughter, she’s skinny, she definitely lost weight’. I guess many parents only react after they have heard that from like the fifth teacher, and keep hearing it. In an individual talk with an individual teacher, I think parents tend to think at first, oh well, it’s just his opinion, let’s wait and see what the next one says, you know. And I can see that in parent-teacher interviews at parent’s evenings, when they come to me at the end. And I tell them, look, your child isn’t learning anything, he is really lazy at the moment, you know. And they tell me yes, that’s what three of your colleagues already said. Well, I just know for sure that now I did it, now they believe it, and now they go home and change something, you know. Here you could add to our question of what could be improved, it would certainly be a good strategy to coordinate within the teaching staff and let others know who discussed what topic when. That would be a useful strategy, getting a system in place and improving things.

Mr. Lärche wants to convince parents. That, however, is not easy, which is why he hopes that “little strokes fell big oaks”. To this end, it would be useful to coordinate within the teaching staff and “let others know who discussed what topic when”, i.e. “systematize and improve” how teachers convey their perspective. Unlike Ms. Fichte, who relates an in-depth story of a counseling conversation which took place because of a student’s learning difficulties, Mr. Lärche’s story is about conveying his perspective: “Now they believe it, now they go home and change something”. Third segment (ratification): ‘Orientation toward conveying the teacher’s perspective’

Again, Mr. Lärche uses the term “parent-teacher interviews” (second segment [reaction]: orientation toward the category “parent-teacher interviews”).

Comparative sequence analysis, which also uses minimal and maximal contrasts, is continuously carried out alongside the semantic and the reflective interpretation of the empirical material (Nohl, 2012).

In Mr. Lärche's case, the following frameworks of orientation were reconstructed using the method of reflecting interpretation:

- Orientation toward problem perception by the teacher
- Orientation toward conveying the teacher's perspective
- Orientation toward extracurricular reasons for counseling conversations
- Orientation toward qualification through professional experience / 'in passing'
- Orientation toward the term “parent-teacher interviews”
- Orientation towards a constructive way of dealing with ambivalent situations of being a teacher.

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- Orientation toward the term “parent-teacher interviews”
- Orientation towards a constructive way of dealing with the paradoxes ambivalent situations of being a teacher

This study comprises the reflecting interpretation of eight interviews. The case-specific frameworks of orientation reconstructed in this interpretative step form the basis of sense-genetic type formation.

2.4 Sense-genetic type formation

While the formulating and reflecting interpretations aimed at reconstructing case-specific frameworks of orientation, sense-genetic type formation aims at abstracting and specifying a cross-case framework of orientation, also known as collective habitus (Bohnsack, 2007). This study is interested in the collective framework of orientation of teachers counseling parents. The case-specific frameworks of orientation that emerged through reflecting interpretation (cf. 2.2) are the basis for sense-genetic type formation, based on the assumption that if it is possible to identify a framework of orientation not only in a single case, but across several interviewees, this framework can be separated from the individual case and be used to create a type (Nohl & Schondelmayer, 2006). Consequently, it is never the entire-

ty of a case that is considered for the sense-genetic type formation as used in the documentary method, but only its specific dimensions of experience and the frameworks of orientation they are interwoven with (Nentwig-Gesemann, 2007). In this study, the frameworks of orientation in the following dimensions of experience are combined by way of sense-genetic type formation: Responsibility for problem perception, function of parent-teacher interviews, and qualification for counseling parents. For these dimensions of experience, it was possible to reconstruct homologous and contrasting cross-case frameworks of orientation (see Chapter 3). The abstraction of the collective framework of orientation follows the principle of abduction (Bohnsack 2007; Reichertz, 2012). Abductive conclusion creates the regularity of the reconstructed cross-case frameworks of orientation, i.e., of implicit knowledge, evident (Reichertz, 2011). Therefore, in sense-genetic type formation, the common factor between cases is no longer a topic reemerging across cases, but a cross-case framework of orientation (Bohnsack, 2007). The results of sense-genetic type formation are presented in Chapter 3.

2.5 The sample

Qualitative-reconstructive social research does not require its samples to be statistically representative, but rather conceptually (Meuser, 2011). The different variants of a phenomenon are researched systematically and integrated in larger categories (Strübing, 2011). This presents researchers with various approaches to gaining access into the field and sampling. In the research for this study, a combination of snowball sampling and theoretical sampling was used (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010). Previous professional connections to teachers were the starting point in the search for additional interviewees. In total the author conducted 13 interviews with teachers (see Figure 1). The study concludes with sense-genetic type formation; attributes such as age, sex, type of school, or existing qualifications do not play any role yet, as they become relevant in sociogenetic type formation only.

In compliance with theoretical sampling, the first step consisted of reconstructing the case-specific orientation frameworks for all passages from four interviews which were identified as relevant for transcription. These reconstructed frameworks served as theoretical categories for the subsequent selection and interpretation of four additional interviews. Using minimal and maximal contrasts, theoretical sampling aims at validating orientation frameworks and at offering insight into the variance of the field until theoretical saturation is reached (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010). The limited scope of only eight interviews (due to limited resources) may evoke some criticism, as it was not possible to reach a saturated sample as intended by theoretical sampling. It cannot be ruled out that, apart from the following reconstructed frameworks of orientation and the types abstracted from them, others might exist.

Table 3: The sample (Sauer, 2015, p. 68)

	Name	Type of School	Teaching Experience	Age	Miscellaneous
1	Ms. Ahorn	<i>Gymnasium</i> (grammar school)	25 years	50	–
2	Mr. Birke	<i>Gymnasium</i>	34 years	60	Head of department
3	Ms. Buche	elementary school	7 years	37	Cooperation coordinator Kindergarten-elementary school
4	Ms. Eiche	elementary school	33 years	57	Guidance counselor
5	Mr. Erle	<i>Gymnasium</i>	34 years	62	Assistant principal
6	Ms. Fichte	elementary school	11 years	35	Counselor for student teachers
7	Mr. Hainbuche	<i>Gymnasium</i>	12 years	41	Head of department
8	Ms. Kastanie	<i>Realschule</i> (secondary modern school)	11 years	38	Counselor for trainee teachers; seminar teacher for psychology
9	Ms. Kiefer	<i>Gymnasium</i>	20 years	49	Head of department
10	Mr. Lärche	<i>Gymnasium</i>	10 years	40	Head of department; mediator for student council; trainee instructor
11	Mr. Linde	<i>Gymnasium</i>	33 years	60	Guidance counselor; staff at the Bavarian state school counseling office (“ <i>Schulberatungsstelle</i> ”)
12	Ms. Tanne	<i>Gymnasium</i>	11 years	42	–
13	Ms. Zeder	<i>Hauptschule</i> (middle school)	8 years	37	–

3. Results of sense-genetic type formation

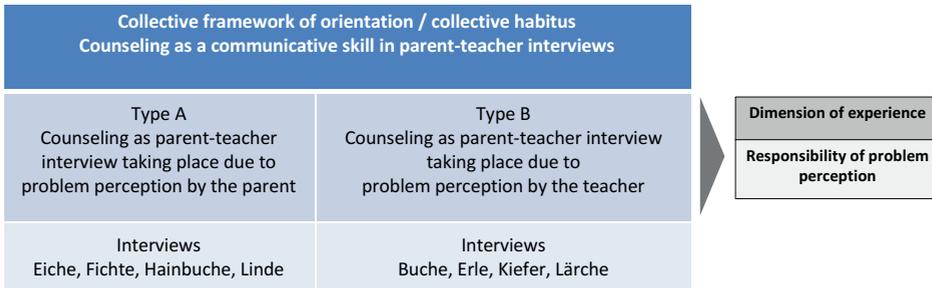
Using sense-genetic type formation, the goal of this study is to abstract the collective framework of orientation of teachers counseling parents and to specify its subtypes (Bohnsack, 2007). With the goal of generalization in mind, sense-genetic type formation is detached from the individual case; in this interpretative step, only cross-case frameworks of orientation are considered. The types formed using the documentary method thus have to be seen as ideal types, as the type does not incorporate the entirety of the case (Nentwig-Gesemann, 2007). The following table lists the reconstructed cross-case frameworks of orientation:

Table 4: Cross-case frameworks of orientation

Cross-case frameworks of orientation	Interviews
Orientation toward the term “parent-teacher interviews / talks”	Buche, Eiche, Erle, Fichte, Hainbuche, Kiefer, Lärche, Linde
Orientation toward problem perception by the parent	Eiche, Fichte, Hainbuche, Linde
Orientation toward problem perception by the teacher	Buche, Erle, Kiefer, Lärche
Orientation toward support and help	Eiche, Erle, Fichte
Orientation toward conveying the teacher’s perspective of a problem	Buche, Erle, Kiefer, Lärche
Orientation toward problematizing and conflict-prone interviews with parents	Buche, Erle, Kiefer
Orientation toward qualification through specialist training	Eiche, Fichte, Linde
Orientation toward qualification through professional experience / ‘in passing’	Buche, Lärche, Kiefer

These cross-case frameworks of orientation form the basis for the abductive abstraction of the collective framework of orientation, also known as collective habitus (Bohnsack, 2007; Reichertz, 2012). Two central aspects emerge as common experiences among the teachers interviewed: Firstly, a noted discrepancy between the qualification for counseling parents received in phases one and two of teacher training on the one hand and the practice expected of teachers on the other hand. Teachers use different coping mechanisms in order to overcome this challenge, e.g. ‘orientation toward qualification through specialist training’ or ‘orientation toward qualification through professional experience’. Secondly, none of the interviewees has made a distinction between the term “counseling conversation” and the general term “parent-teacher interview” (orientation toward the term “parent-teacher interviews/talks”). Regarding the phenomenon of indexicality (Bohnsack, 1998) it should be noted that teachers use the term “parent-teacher interview” synonymously with “counseling conversation with parents” on the level of explicit knowledge, whereas on the level of implicit knowledge, i.e. on the level of frameworks of orientation, the two terms denote entirely different reasons for conversations to take place (see Figure 1). Thus, the empirical material allows for the abstraction of the collective orientation toward “counseling as a communicative skill in parent-teacher interviews” among the teachers interviewed as the common factor between the different reconstructed case-specific frameworks of orientation. Additional subtypes of this collective habitus (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) were specified in the course of further research on the dimensions of experience of ‘responsibility of problem perception’, ‘function of parent-teacher

Figure 1: Specification of the collective framework of orientation for the dimension of experience of 'responsibility of problem perception'



counseling conversations', 'relationship with parents', and 'qualification for counseling parents'.

For the 'responsibility of problem perception' dimension of experience, the specification of the collective framework of orientation depicts to light two markedly different subtypes:

- Type A: Counseling as parent-teacher interview taking place due to problem perception by the parent
- Type B: Counseling as parent-teacher interview taking place due to problem perception by the teacher

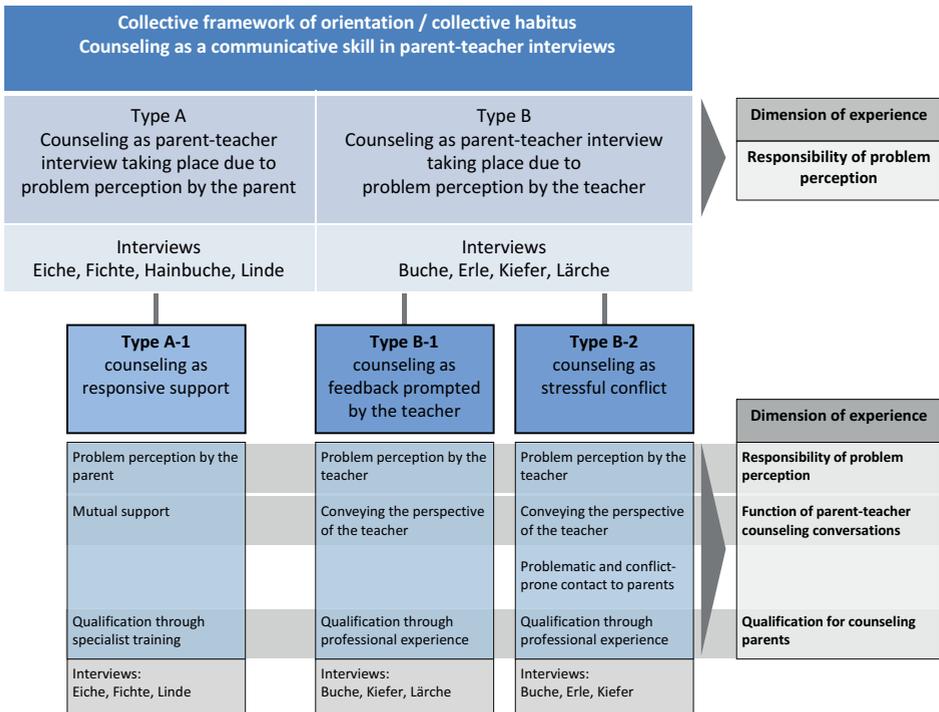
In the course of further specification, types B-1 and B-2 emerged as subtypes of type B, whereas only a single subtype, A-1, could be validated for type A (see Figure 2).

The below glance at the dimensions of experience 'responsibility of problem perception', 'function of parent-teacher counseling conversations', and 'qualification for counseling parents' as incorporated in types A-1 and B-1 will serve as an example of sense-genetic type formation.

3.1 Type A-1 (counseling as responsive support)

For teachers of type A-1, the central basis for a counseling conversation with parents is that parents address them with their concern (orientation toward problem perception by the parent). Narrations, some of which are very detailed, document this framework of orientation as being an essential factor for how type A-1 teachers conceive their counseling responsibilities:

Figure 2: Sense-genetic type formation



Ms. Fichte: In this specific situation, the mother approached me with her worries. She was truly worried about her child. For quite some time, the boy had had difficulties concentrating. (lines 9–11)

Ms. Eiche: Yes, usually it is like in this recent case, a mother will approach me [...] most often it is about problems with the child's performance at school, and the mother will ask: what do you think? I'm worried, what can we do from here? He really has problems with orthography, you know. This was this week, for example [...]. (lines 8–12)

Mr. Linde: [...] that the parents, who always come in with a worry (I: // mmh//), they always have some worry or other [...]. (lines 201–202)

Another central aspect for A-1 teachers' conception of counseling is documented in the dimension of experience 'function of parent-teacher counseling conversations'. In this regard, the action-directing framework of orientation of this type aims at help and support (orientation toward mutual support):

Ms. Eiche: [...] well, the teacher has to be open, approachable, ready to listen to what aspects the parents may talk about, has to know what they can offer the parents in terms of help [...].

Mr. Linde: [...] that the parents, and this is my experience each time, no matter the child's grades, I always experience this, and I try to make sure that the parents, let's say, feel relieved, they are not going to leave laughing [...] but that they are somewhat relieved and that they realize, it's going to be OK [...] and that's important to me, to give parents this relief, that is [...].

Across different interview passages, type A-1 teachers have also repeatedly brought up the topic of qualification for counseling parents. In homology to all other teachers interviewed, teachers of this type also stated that the qualification for counseling parents they had received in their teacher training was lacking. In contrast to teachers of types B-1 and B-2, A-1 teachers think of this lack of qualification as a shortcoming, and they try to counteract it by actively seeking out possibilities for specialist training the school system offers (orientation toward specialist training):

Ms. Eiche: [...] by seeking out the guidance counselor training. I sought it out because again and again, I had children in my class I could not reach [...] so I looked for that. But as a young teacher, I basically did not have any support when it came to talking to parents [...].

Ms. Fichte: [...] and I just signed up for another course. I think it is called "talking to parents" [...] because, as I said before, this is still a field in which I have catch up on a lot.

The interviews with type A-1 teachers repeatedly feature passages in which they construct negative counter-horizons regarding the dimension of qualification. Parent-teacher counseling conversations are supposed to be more than an "irrelevant conversation" which simply "meanders along" (interview with Ms. Fichte, lines 320–327). The positive attribution regarding possibilities for additional training provided by the school system clearly sets teachers of this type apart from those of other types, who regard the school system's courses on talking to parents as having little value and/or do not think they actually need any additional training in the field of parent-teacher counseling (see 3.2).

3.2 Type B-1 (counseling as feedback prompted by the teacher)

Teachers of type B-1 understand counseling to be a conversation with parents most often taking place on the teacher's request. The aim of this conversation is to bring a problem the teacher perceives to the parents' attention. Thus, the central aspect

of type B-1 teachers' concept of counseling is the 'orientation toward problem perception by the teacher':

Ms. Kiefer: [...] well in fifth grade, I have, um, quite a few children with behavioral problems and where I also have to approach the parents myself [...].

Ms. Buche: [...] you mostly recall difficult cases. Often a parent-teacher interview is held at my specific request and it is me who tells the parents that there is a problem. The situation is often rather tense and uncomfortable for parents, you can tell that some are a bit insecure, but it also depends on the parents. Frankly, it is often a difficult situation for me [...].

Due to this framework of orientation, teachers of type B-1 face the problem of getting the parents to realize there is a problem in the first place – in contrast to type A-1 teachers. They frequently see themselves as being 'the bearer of bad news', who have to tell parents 'the plain truth':

Mr. Lärche: [...] of course, in a conversation like that, you are going to be the bearer of bad news. I think it's obvious that you are not going to be very popular that way. Like if you have to tell parents: Your child's time at the Gymnasium is over now, they're not going to make it. Um, I'd suggest a change of school, or maybe for the child to start their first job, um, parents are always going to be shocked at first.

Regarding the dimension of experience of 'function of parent-teacher counseling conversations', an orientation toward conveying the perspective of the teacher can be reconstructed, the second essential aspect of the concept of counseling type B-1 teachers have. For these teachers, the aim of a parent-teacher interview is to convey their perspective of a problem to the parents:

Mr. Lärche: [...] whether or not, well, it is beneficial for the parents, hard to say. Little strokes fell big oaks, I guess, um, when there are several talks which go in the same direction, um, like 'watch your daughter, she's skinny, she definitely lost weight'. I guess many parents only react after they have heard that from like the fifth teacher, and keep hearing it. In an individual talk with an individual teacher, I think parents tend to think at first, oh well, it's just his opinion, let's wait and see what the next one says, you know. And I can see that in parent-teacher interviews at parent's evenings, when they come to me at the end. And I tell them, look, your child isn't learning anything, he is really lazy at the moment, you know. And they tell me yes, that's what three of your colleagues already said. Well, I just know for sure that now I did it, now they believe it, and now they go home and change something, you know. Here you could add to our question of what could be improved, it would certainly be a

good strategy to coordinate within the teaching staff and let others know who discussed what topic when. That'd be a useful strategy, getting a system in place and improving things.

Ms. Kiefer: [...] well, with the anorexia [...] maybe I'll set the ball rolling by refusing to take her along so the parents finally get that something needs to happen. But that's all I can do [...].

At times, the helplessness of the teachers is documented in their narrations. All they can do is inform parents of their problem perception. They feel they have no way of influencing whether or not the parents will accept it or take any action at all.

For the dimension of experience of 'qualification for counseling parents', teachers of type B-1 also consider the relevance of the topic during teacher training as being low. In contrast to type A-1 teachers, however, they do not actively look for possibilities for training provided by the school system. Type B-1 teachers gain their qualification for counseling parents through their professional practice, i.e. through 'learning by doing' (orientation toward qualification through professional experience):

Mr. Lärche: I would say they aren't qualified initially, and when I look at the training, they can't be qualified, when I look at how much time I spent studying for my subjects, how much of my time as a trainee teacher I spent on learning how to teach, um, only a tiny fraction of your training goes towards something like this, although these counseling responsibilities are increasingly important, so there is a huge gap between expectations and reality. But at the same time, I'd say that if you are able to talk to any class from fifth to thirteenth grade for 45 minutes at a time, you should possess the rhetorical skills necessary to conduct a parent interview. We're not stupid and we don't have any trouble talking. So I guess it is manageable somehow.

Type B-1 teachers believe they derive their skill in counseling parents from their teaching skills or gut feeling. They do not think they lack qualification in the field of parent-teacher counseling and thus do not actively seek out opportunities for specialist training. They rather receive additional training 'in passing', e.g., as part of courses offered to the faculty of their school.

Ms. Kiefer: [...] A lot of what I did was based on gut feeling [...] this being open toward your conversation partner, empathizing, whatever. God, you can do a lot based on gut feeling but it's such a big issue now, but, um, when parents make a stand against you, I was quite happy to have someone show me how to skillfully avoid all that. I think we have to do a lot of catching up in this regard. We have more and more parents who try to meddle with the school's concerns or my teaching, and I think it's useful to have some sort of personal strategy for handling these situations.

4. Discussion of the results: Of ‘blind spots’ and the lack of terminological precision

This qualitative-reconstructive study abstracted three different concepts of teachers’ counseling responsibilities over against parents. The empirical reconstructions of these counseling concepts, particularly those of types B-1 (“counseling as feedback prompted by the teacher”) and type B-2 (“counseling as stressful conflict”), highlight discrepancies between what professional theory demands of teachers in terms of counseling responsibilities (cf. chapter 1) on the one hand and the experiences of teachers with the everyday practice of counseling parents on the other hand. However, in contrast to the field of evaluation studies, it is not the goal of qualitative-reconstructive social research to assess whether teachers’ professional practice of counseling parents meets set targets, creating a nominal-actual comparison, but rather to further develop an object-based theory in the field of parent-teacher counseling, based on the reconstructed implicit knowledge of the teachers interviewed (Keller & Kluge, 2010; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010).

As can be seen in Table 2 specifying the basic type, the different types (A-1, B-1, B-2) comprise different frameworks of orientation. Two markedly different frameworks of orientation concerning the dimension of experience of ‘qualification for parent-teacher counseling’ were reconstructed from the three types:

- (1) Communicative skill is based on qualification acquired through specialist training (Type A-1: ‘counseling as responsive support’)
- (2) Communicative skill is based on qualification acquired through professional practice (Type B-1 ‘counseling as feedback prompted by the teacher’; type B-2 ‘counseling as stressful conflict’)

These very different action-directing frameworks of orientation regarding the qualification for parent-teacher counseling may be of particular importance for teacher training. As the professionalization of teachers has so far not been geared toward strategic and well-planned personnel development (Krapp & Hascher, 2009), the implicit conceptions teachers have of their profession influence crucially their professional development. Therefore, particularly in the third phase of teacher training, the development of professionalism in a teacher is based on initiative and independent studying. The direction and quality of this development mainly depend on motivational factors (Krapp & Hascher, 2009). From this point of view, the frameworks of orientation regarding the qualification for parent-teacher counseling reconstructed from types B-1 (‘counseling as feedback prompted by the teacher’) and B-2 (‘counseling as stressful conflict’) can be thought of as critical findings.

Following Huber (2009), teachers of these two types exhibit ‘blind spots’ in the field of counseling competencies. A blind spot refers to behavior which a person is not conscious of, but which is perceptible to others (Laux & Merzbacher, 2008). In types B-1 (‘counseling as feedback prompted by the teacher’) and B-2 (‘counseling as stressful conflict’), so called ‘blind spots’ occur with regard to professionalism in the field of parent counseling. Teachers of these types do not see the need for fur-

ther training in parent counseling, even though their counseling practices do not reflect the conception of teacher's counseling responsibilities in professional theory (cf. Chapter 1). These types of teachers acquire their qualification for parent-teacher counseling through professional practice. Strasser and Gruber (2003) noted that experience gained through professional practice is not per se conducive to competence development. Concerning the type formation specified above, it is evident that the practices of types B-1, and B-2 are chiefly determined by summative experiences and less by theoretical and empirical knowledge on parent counseling. Thus, a science-based reflection on personal communicative skills is impeded, if not made wholly impossible (Messner, 2002).

Furthermore, the abstracted basic type of 'counseling as a communicative skill in parent-teacher interviews' highlights the importance of the term 'parent-teacher interview' for the interviewees' concept of counseling. This study shows that on the explicit level, teachers frequently use 'parent-teacher interviews' and 'parent-teacher counseling conversations' synonymously, while on the implicit level, the two terms denote entirely different types of conversations with parents, ranging from conversations in which responsive support is offered to conversations which are stressful and conflict-laden. Following Carnap (1959, p. 12), explication serves to replace a given, more or less imprecise term with an exact one. Carnap also states that it is not about whether or not an explication is correct, but rather about whether or not a proposed solution is adequate (ibid.).

With regard to the development of an object-based theory, the discussion of this study's empirical results leads both to the explication of the term "parent-teacher counseling" as well as to specialist training for teachers.

5. Perspectives of the development of an object-based theory of parent-teacher counseling

In counseling experiences of teachers, the term "parent-teacher interview" serves as the collective term for various conceptions of counseling. For the below proposal for a terminological categorization of parent-teacher counseling (see Figure 3), "parent-teacher conversation" was used as the umbrella term, as it both comprises the usage of the teachers interviewed for this study and highlights the context of parent conversations. Based on the empirical results of this study and taking the situation types of Gartmeier et al. (2011) into account, the umbrella term "parent-teacher conversation" classifies three types of conversations:

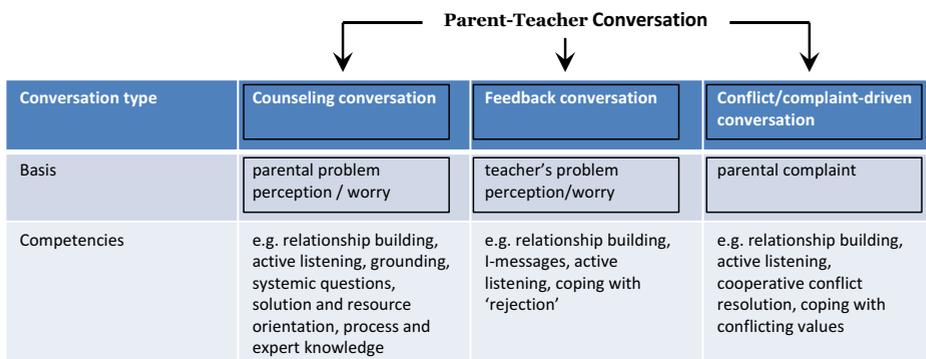
(1) Counseling conversation with parents: a parental concern is the basis for this type of conversation, i.e. the parents approach the teacher, looking for advice. In a cooperative problem solving process, the teacher supports the parents in their search for possible solutions for the problem and/or ways to handle the situation (type A-1).

(2) Feedback conversation with parents: The perception of a problem by the teacher is the basis for this type of conversation, i.e. the teacher invites the parent(s) for a conversation and offers feedback on the child’s academic performance or behavior (type B-1).

Conflict/complaint-driven conversation with parents: A parental discontentment is the basis for this type of conversation, i.e. the parents confront the teacher with complaints (type B-2).

Following Carnap (1959), explicating counseling conversations with parents as one of three markedly different types of conversation collectively termed “parent teacher conversations” seems adequate and relevant, as teachers require different competencies, attitudes, and knowledge according to the type of conversation (counseling, feedback, conflict/complaint; cf., Gartmeier, Bauer, Noll, & Prenzel, 2012; among others).

Figure 3: Proposal of an empirically derived terminology on parent-teacher counseling



The second focus of this study’s development of an object-based theory is the reconstructed dimension of experience of “communicative skills”. Following Prange (1991), the empirical results of this study do indeed allow for the question of how university education can foster the skills necessary in a teacher’s professional life, instead of considering them decreed by nature or postponing their acquisition to ‘training on the job’ in professional practise. Taking inspiration from the pedagogical theory of learning described in Göhlich & Zirfas (2007) as well as from the concept of a developmental map by Leutwyler and Herzog (2011), the following is a rough draft of a ‘didactic map of parent-teacher counseling’. This didactic model should be seen as a scientific tool (König & Zedler, 2007) or didactic support (Bätz, 2003) for researchers, teachers, and students in the field of parent-teacher counseling. The four dimensions of the theory of learning by Göhlich & Zirfas (2007) provide the basic structure of the ‘didactic map’: Learning to know-what, learning to know-how, learning to learn, and learning to live, with the latter dimension

referring to every-day life in the context of working in schools. Thus, the 'didactic map of parent-teacher counseling' consists of the following four dimensions:

- Learning to know-what (knowledge on parent-teacher counseling): This dimension is about the acquisition of declarative knowledge on parent-teacher counseling. It offers an overview on relevant knowledge, such as knowledge of different definitions of counseling, knowledge of counseling skills such as active listening or systemic questions, or knowledge of the terminology on parent-teacher counseling.
- Learning to know-how (skills in parent-teacher counseling): This dimension highlights the difference between "knowledge" and "skills" in the field of parent-teacher counseling. Oser and Oelkers (2001) stated that knowledge alone rarely leads to action, which is why proponents of the situated learning approach refer to such knowledge as inert knowledge. The dimension 'skills in parent-teacher counseling' refers to various skills and attitudes related to counseling. Mastering and using them adequately is essential for professional counseling.
- Learning to learn (learning arrangements on parent-teacher counseling): This dimension is devoted to the significance of learning arrangements on parent-teacher counseling. The intervention training by Hertel (2009) is among the proven learning arrangements for acquiring counseling competence. The four training sessions include various role-playing, reflection, and feedback units (Hertel & Schmitz, 2010). Göhlich and Zirfas (2007) also stress the importance of learning to learn in small groups, i.e. as in the case of role-playing. This is the very type of learning that is required when studying parent-teacher counseling. Thus, the didactic focus should also move toward the development of learning arrangements.
- Learning to apply (conditions of parent-teacher counseling): This dimension focuses on the structural conditions of parent-teacher counseling. The empirical material of this study suggests that organizational conditions in the context of specialist training for teachers as well as in the context of schools (e.g. rooms and office hours available) play a role in the development of action-directing frameworks of orientation of teachers counseling parents.

6. Overview and didactic perspectives

This study was focused on the frameworks of orientations of teachers counseling parents and their closely linked concepts of counseling. In total, three different concepts of parent-teacher counseling were reconstructed from the data. Teachers of type A-1 understand counseling as responsive support, teachers of type B-1 view counseling as feedback prompted by the teacher, and to teachers of type B-2, counseling is a stressful conflict. These concepts of counseling led to a heightened awareness of the terminology of parent-teacher counseling, of 'blind spots' in the professionalism of teachers and how to deal with them, and of the dimension of

skill in parent-teacher counseling. The discussion of these empirical results lead to the fields of explication and the didactics of parent-teacher counseling in the context of specialist training for teachers.

Fortunately, there are currently a number of initiatives devoted to the development and promotion of counseling competencies in teachers. The large-scale application of the Gmünd Model for Conversations with Parents (*Gmünder Modell zur Gesprächsführung mit Eltern*) as part of the official specialist training for elementary school teachers in the German federal state of Baden-Württemberg is one example of positive development in this field (Aich & Behr, 2015). Another example from the area of student teacher's university education is 'BERA: Counselling in Schools', part of the 'WeGE: Pioneering Teacher Education' project at the University of Bamberg, which is funded by the federal government through its program 'Qualitätsoffensive Lehrerbildung' (quality campaign for teacher training). The introduction of the cross-section module 'Counselling in Schools' into teacher study programs aims at improving student teachers' counseling and conversational competencies as well as increasing their motivation and sparking interest in the field of counseling (<https://www.uni-bamberg.de/wege/bera>). One pilot study, for example, focuses on a novel peer-education program concentrating on imparting counseling competencies and analyzes its effectiveness as a teaching/learning format at universities. (Spätgens, in press). The cross-section module 'Counselling in Schools' is to be firmly established in the curriculum, giving student teachers the opportunity to gain in-depth understanding of their future counseling responsibilities as early as the first phase of teacher training. Apart from the conception, realization, and evaluation of this and other teaching formats, the project is also interested in student teachers' concepts and convictions of their counseling responsibilities, as well as their changing attitudes toward counselings, from the beginning of their training until their graduation (Horn, in press). Thus, the current discourse on the subjective theories teachers have on teaching and learning and on their impact on professional practice (Diedrich, Thußbas, & Klieme, 2002) is expanded to include the aspect of counseling. In addition to the identification of subjective theories of counseling, the variability of such theories and their interdependency with various conditional factors in counseling are of particular interest. Findings could be used to adjust teaching and learning formats to meet both the student teachers' requirements as well as the challenges and circumstances of their future counseling responsibilities.

Furthermore, there is a need for an additional discussion concerning organizational matters such as the existing framework for counseling in the school system. According to Engel & Höhne (2010), organizational conditions play a central role for the development of counseling competencies, particularly in less formal counseling settings such as those found at schools.

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