Interests Informing Dutch Parents’ and Teachers’ Positioning in their Collaborative Relations

Thesis

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Interests informing Dutch parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their collaborative relations

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ABSTRACT

To benefit the schooling and development of a child, the relationship between parents and teachers is considered to be crucial in improving social and academic outcomes. Dutch education policy aims to encourage collaborative parent–teacher relations. However, in practice, this seems to be complex. Evaluations of partnership practices in Dutch education have concluded that more action is needed to develop a collaborative culture. This empirical study aimed to contribute to the existing literature by investigating 1) how conflicting positionings inform parents’ and teachers’ collaborative relations and 2) how the transactional positioning of parents and teachers has an impact on possible conflicts and tensions in interaction. The theoretical framework of ‘transactional positioning’ developed for this research draws upon positioning theory, role theory, and the concepts of agency and transaction. A pragmatic approach was adopted and a mixed methods study designed to provide further insight into the positioning of parents and teachers in their relationship. The sample consisted of 367 parents and 80 teachers sourced from five different urban Dutch schools. A questionnaire and group interviews provided interesting insights into the role conceptions and positioning of parents and teachers. The data revealed how strained relations seem to hinder parent–teacher relations and how parents and teachers seem to be located based on the ambivalent ways in which they position themselves. Individual reflections and assessments guide their positioning rather than mutual coordination of the development of their relationship. The framework of transactional positioning provides a useful tool for further research into positioning practices in educational and other areas. The findings of this research have the potential to inform policy and develop practices in schools. This research contributes to new knowledge on parent–teacher relations by revealing the conflicting interests of parents and teachers and providing insight into the transactional nature of positioning in practice.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... i  
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... ii  
Table of contents ........................................................................................................ iii  

| List of tables ............................................................................................................ v  
| List of figures .......................................................................................................... v  |

## Chapter One

| Aims and outline ....................................................................................................... 1  
| Identifying the problem .......................................................................................... 1  
| Research aims and questions ................................................................................ 2  
| Professional and personal experiences .................................................................. 3  
| Pilot study .............................................................................................................. 5  
| Positioning theory and role theory ...................................................................... 6  
| Developing the conceptual framework .................................................................. 7  
| Contribution to new knowledge ........................................................................... 7  
| Outline of the empirical study ............................................................................. 7  
| Outline of the thesis .............................................................................................. 8  
| Summary ............................................................................................................... 8  |

## Chapter Two

| The Dutch context ................................................................................................... 10  
| Dutch education policy ........................................................................................ 10  
| Policy in schools .................................................................................................. 12  
| Current interest of parent–teacher relations ....................................................... 14  
| Summary .............................................................................................................. 15  |

## Chapter Three

| Introduction .......................................................................................................... 16  
| Concepts ............................................................................................................... 17  
| Roles ..................................................................................................................... 18  
| Positioning theory ............................................................................................. 24  
| Agency and reflection ......................................................................................... 28  
| Transaction and transactional positioning ........................................................ 30  
| Transactional positioning: a cyclical process ...................................................... 32  
| Summary ............................................................................................................ 35  |

## Chapter Four

| The researcher’s position ...................................................................................... 36  
| Mixed methods design ........................................................................................ 38  
| Sampling strategy ............................................................................................... 40  
| Methods of data collection ................................................................................. 44  
| Validity and reliability ....................................................................................... 47  
| Relevance of the findings ................................................................................... 51  
| Ethical issues ...................................................................................................... 51  
| Summary ............................................................................................................ 53  |

## Chapter Five

| Analysis of the characteristics of the sample ....................................................... 54  
| Qualitative data analysis procedures .................................................................. 54  
| Thematic analysis ............................................................................................... 55  |

## Chapter Six

| Data Analysis ....................................................................................................... 54  |

## Chapter Seven

| Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 56  
| Implications ....................................................................................................... 107  
| Recommendations .............................................................................................. 116  
| Summary ............................................................................................................ 119  |

## Appendix

| List of abbreviations ............................................................................................. 122  
| Acknowledgements ............................................................................................... 124  
| References ......................................................................................................... 126  |

## List of figures

| Figure 1: Conceptual framework ......................................................................... 99  
| Figure 2: Transactional positioning ................................................................... 100  
| Figure 3: Agency and reflection .......................................................................... 101  
| Figure 4: Transaction and transactional positioning .......................................... 102  
| Figure 5: Transactional positioning: a cyclical process .................................... 103  

## List of tables

| Table 1: Characteristics of the sample .............................................................. 104  
| Table 2: Summary of the findings ..................................................................... 105  
| Table 3: Methodology ......................................................................................... 106  

## Acknowledgements

| Acknowledgements ............................................................................................... 108  |

## Bibliography

| References ......................................................................................................... 109  |
Appendices

Chapter seven

Appendix 11. Reflexive notes
Appendix 12. Development of the theme ‘ambivalent positioning’
Appendix 13. Data fragments parents
Appendix 14. List of quotations in Dutch

Chapter eight

Appendix 1. Letter for schools
Appendix 2. Inviting letters for participants
Appendix 3. Letter for MEd students
Appendix 4. Questionnaire for Parents
Appendix 5. Questionnaire for Teachers
Appendix 6. Group interview guide and elicitation tools
Appendix 7. Approval Human Research Ethics Committee
Appendix 8. Request for permission letters
Appendix 9.1 Fragments questionnaire data
Appendix 9.2 Fragments group interviews
Appendix 10. Fragments of Dutch data
Appendix 11. Reflexive notes
Appendix 12.1. Development of the theme ‘strained relations’
Appendix 12.2. Development of the theme ‘ambivalent positioning’
Appendix 13.1 Data fragments parents
Appendix 13.2 Data fragments teachers
Appendix 14. List of quotations in Dutch
List of tables

Table 4. 1: Sampling procedures.................................................................42
Table 4. 2: Phases of data collection...............................................................45

Table 5. 1: Units of data...................................................................................58
Table 5. 2: Example of labelled sentences ......................................................59
Table 5. 3: Examples of data fragments and codes.........................................60
Table 5. 4: Initial codes related to ‘Normative assumptions’............................61
Table 5. 5: Emerging themes...........................................................................62
Table 5. 6: Development of the theme ‘strained relations’...............................63

Table 6. 1: Proportion of parents that responded ............................................66
Table 6. 2: Proportion of teachers that responded ...........................................68
Table 6. 3: Group interview sample of parents ................................................69
Table 6. 4: Group interview sample of teachers ..............................................69
Table 6. 5: Parents’ age and gender.................................................................70
Table 6. 6: Proportion of parents represented per grade ..................................70
Table 6. 7: Parents’ country of origin...............................................................71
Table 6. 8: Parents’ level of education.............................................................71
Table 6. 9: Teachers’ age and work experience..............................................73

Table 7. 1: Teachers’ roles according to parents (N=367).................................89
Table 7. 2: Parents’ roles according to teachers (N=80).....................................90

Table 8. 1: Legitimated social acts of teachers (N=80) .....................................111
Table 8. 2: Legitimated social acts of parents (N=367)....................................113

List of figures

Figure 3. 1: Concepts to be discussed.............................................................18
Figure 3. 2: Positioning triad Source: Harré, 2015, p. 501..................................27
Figure 3. 3: Transactional positioning.............................................................33

Figure 9. 1: Model of strained relations .........................................................135
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Intangible factors appear to play a role in parent–teacher\(^1\) relationships. As a teacher, teacher trainer, school counsellor, and parent who works and lives in the Netherlands, I have experienced how developing ‘good’ parent–teacher relations is neither straightforward nor simple. My different experiences and observations as a teacher and educationalist, and as a parent, have raised questions with regard to the nature of the position of parents and teachers within the relationships they have developed, and why it still seems so difficult to collaborate effectively in order to support the child involved. The positions of both the parent and the teacher in the child’s life appear to be two different worlds. The question raised concerns how parents and teachers perceive their relations. These observations and questions marked the beginning of this research journey.

**Aims and outline**

The journey ultimately led to the study reported here, which investigates parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of the collaborative relations they develop for the benefit of a child’s schooling within the context of Dutch primary education. The study aimed to use positioning theory and role theory as useful frameworks to develop an in-depth understanding of conflict and tensions in parent–teacher collaborative relations in theory and practice. The concept of positioning can be regarded as a metaphor for the different ways in which people locate themselves and others in interaction within a particular context (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999).

In this opening chapter, the rationale for the research and the intended aims are presented. First, the problem that led to the research questions will be identified and the aims and questions that subsequently arose from this will be presented. Additionally, a brief overview of the thesis structure and the focus of each chapter will be presented.

**Identifying the problem**

The body of knowledge with regard to parent–teacher collaboration is extensive and offers significant evidence supporting the importance of parent–teacher relationships in nurturing a child’s development. Bakker et al. (2013), for example, demonstrated this in their review

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1Note on terminology: where the term parents is used, it is intended to cover more broadly those who hold familial responsibility for children, whether that be birth, adoptive or step parents, or grandparents, partners, or other carers.
Research aims and questions

The aim of this research is to investigate how parents and teachers connected to Dutch primary schools position themselves and each other within their collaborative relations. The perspectives of role theory and positioning theory will be used to develop a greater understanding of the conflicts and tensions that appear to be immanent in parent–teacher relations. A further aim is to clarify the conflicting positionings of parents and teachers as different stakeholders in the relationship they develop when furthering the child’s schooling. Therefore, parents’ and teachers’ role conceptions and positioning practices were investigated to develop a deeper understanding of how parents and teachers are located within their collaborative relations. This focus led to the following research questions:

(1) To what extent are tensions in parent–teacher relations a product of their conflicting positionings?
(2) To what extent does the transactional positioning of parents and teachers in their collaborative relations lead to possible conflict and tensions in their interactions with each other?

**Professional and personal experiences**

My own context is important, because the research questions, in addition to building on findings from the literature, are also influenced by my professional and personal experiences. Moreover, it is important to clarify the different positions I occupy as an educationalist as I have developed an insider’s perspective on the parent–teacher relationships that affects my research (Trent and Cho, 2014). In line with Day (2012), who argued that providing clarity with regard to the position of the researcher creates transparency and enables the reader to understand who conducted the research, it is important to explain my professional and personal experiences. Currently, I work as a teacher educator on the Master of Education (MEd) programme at a university of applied sciences in Utrecht in the Netherlands. I am responsible for several modules, the aim of which is to educate teachers on how to appreciate diversity within the classroom environment, address the challenging behaviour of children, and communicate with parents and other stakeholders. In addition to my university position, I work as a school counsellor, offering advice to parents and teachers to support students who are experiencing learning or behavioural difficulties. Prior to this, I worked for ten years as a special education teacher. As a parent, I have regular contact with the teachers of our daughter, who now attends secondary school. This variety of different experiences provided me with the impetus to research parent–teacher relationships.

As a parent and based on the professional roles and perspectives I have experienced, I have observed how difficult it can be to develop equitable relationships between parents and teachers. This has provided me with insightful perspectives on the nature of the problem and a greater awareness of different professional and personal views. This has informed my stance as a researcher. Relationships with parents and parent–teacher collaboration have formed a common thread throughout my professional career. In my work as a special education teacher, teacher trainer, and social worker, parents are important stakeholders. When I began my career as a special education teacher, working together with and listening to parents were customary practices, because parents have intimate knowledge of their own child and are important participants in the child’s life. Nevertheless, it was evident that this method of working was not approved by all my colleagues or principals.
For instance, some colleagues perceived parents to be difficult or that working with them consumed too much of their time. Others thought parents were important in practical matters such as assisting in school activities. Given these differences, my awareness and personal interest in the subject of developing relationships with parents as a teacher evolved over time.

This impression was reinforced when observing, for example, that teachers frequently expressed complaints or judgements about parents, and that misunderstandings frequently occurred. Exploring the literature on parent–teacher collaboration confirmed that the perceived quality of parent–teacher relationships and the collaborative practices that had been developed raised dilemmas and engendered tensions and discomfort (Deslandes et al., 2015). Additionally, I noticed that in both the teacher training curriculum and in the MEd programme, the subject of building parent–teacher relationships received limited attention. This is despite Epstein’s (2011) convincing argument that the involvement of parents in their children’s schooling is important and improves social and academic outcomes. In fact, in teacher training, developing equitable and supportive parent–teacher relationships is a subject mostly presented in a single course as one of many subjects relating to communication practices.

Furthermore, as a parent, my awareness was increased through different situations in which it appeared to be difficult to develop a genuine collaborative relationship with teachers. As a mother, I noticed that my position in this relationship differed significantly from my professional position. With some teachers, I developed an effective parent–teacher relationship in which we were able to communicate equitably to support my daughter’s development. However, with others, I felt that I was not able to communicate adequately on my child’s behalf. Sometimes, communication with teachers regarding my child’s development in school was impossible. Some teachers, for example, appeared to be intimidated by my professional experience and expressed their uncertainty or expected my professional opinion on several aspects of other children’s development. When there were disagreements about my daughter’s behavioural functioning, such as when she felt she was being bullied at school, I experienced being positioned as a worried and overprotective mother. I also felt vulnerable in my position as a parent and sometimes felt powerless.
These personal experiences, in addition to my professional experiences, reinforced my belief that the subject of parent–teacher relationships still required attention. My view is supported by several researchers including, for example, Dahl (2017), Vincent (2017) and Stefanski et al (2016), who have all argued that parent–teacher relationships in practice require reflection and that it appears to be difficult to develop a true dialogue between parents and teachers. The observed relational tensions in my own experiences outlined above, and the different ideas and practices experienced or heard, can be identified as problems that justify this research. Developing dialogical and satisfying relations between parents and teachers appears to be a difficult process. Therefore, this thesis aims to clarify the tensions and conflicts in parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their relationship in order to support the development of dialogical relations that provide optimum support for the child’s schooling and allows parents to be engaged in this process.

**Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted to develop my understanding of parent–teacher relationships. The pilot study aimed to clarify parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of their collaborative relations. The study subsequently became important in further developing the aims of the final thesis research.

The pilot study aimed to investigate parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of the development and management of educational partnerships. A questionnaire was developed and piloted at a school in a rural area in the province of Utrecht in the Netherlands. Parents and teachers connected to the school answered questions with regard to the conceptions of their role, their expectations of the relationship between parents and teachers, their satisfaction with collaborative practices, and their perspectives on aspects of working that should be changed or continued. One of the factors that the data revealed was how the theoretical concept of building educational partnerships appeared to be very different from parent–teacher relationships that were constructed in practice. This led to a change in the focus of the research from educational partnerships to parent–teacher relations.

Additionally, the pilot study provided greater insight into the significantly different roles of parents and teachers, and the diverging and sometimes even conflicting perspectives of both parties with regard to each other’s position. The differences observed informed the development of the conceptual framework for the final study, as it revealed the importance of positioning and the different roles parents and teachers assume and are assigned in the
relationship. Thus, the findings of the pilot study led to a focus on parent–teacher collaborative relations and the positions and roles assumed by parents and teachers within the relationships they develop.

Positioning theory and role theory
In the course of the journey for this research project, I explored positioning theory as proposed by Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) and found it to be a useful theoretical foundation as it appeared to provide insight into the observed differences between parents and teachers. It also offered an understanding of the complex dynamics that appear to be inherent in parent–teacher relations. Positioning can be understood as a dynamic concept that refers to how people stand relative to one another in everyday interactions (Van Langenhove, 2010). Different positions can be assumed and assigned in moment-by-moment interaction, such as an educator or instructor for a teacher and a caretaker or educator for a parent. Additionally, positioning theory offered an analytical framework (Harré et al., 2009) that was fruitful as a way of gaining insight into parents’ and teachers’ perceived positions and what will be referred to later as storylines constructed in the relationship, as well as yielding an understanding of what parents and teachers report they say and do to collaborate effectively. Despite its relevance, positioning theory, according to Matthiesen (2016) and Freeman (2010), has scarcely been used in research on parent–teacher relationships. The purpose of using this theory was to provide original insights into and new professional knowledge about parent–teacher collaborative relations.

Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) introduced their theory as a contrast to role theory, referring to role theory as a static or fixed concept and to positioning theory as a dynamic and fluid alternative. Role theory regards roles as recognisable social positions with accompanying expectations of one’s own and others’ behaviours (Biddle, 1986). I began to reflect on the difference between role theory and positioning theory, because, in my observations as a researcher, roles provided a foundation upon which parents and teachers locate themselves and each other in the relationship they develop. The foundational nature of roles is endorsed by Dennen (2007), who believed that roles are inevitable in the organisation of a school. Additionally, Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002) convincingly demonstrated the importance of parents’ and teachers’ role construction in developing relationships with each other. This gave me food for thought and prompted discussion with colleagues. Consequently, I decided that it was conceivable that role theory and positioning theory might not be mutually exclusive.
concepts, but instead had the potential to reinforce one another. I wondered if constructing one’s role and developing ideas about the other’s role was likely to influence position-taking and ways of positioning the other in parent–teacher relationships. This thought process led me to use both theories in my research.

**Developing the conceptual framework**

Through elaborating on positioning theory and role theory, a framework was developed, referred to as: ‘transactional positioning’. The conceptual framework is presented in Chapter Three. In short, it argues that parents and teachers both act as agents in the relationships they develop and determinedly try to influence the course of events by taking up certain positions and displaying social acts that seem appropriate on the basis of their role (Van Langenhove, 2010). They assess situations and reflect on their practices (Bandura, 2006). This leads to modifications in their positions and social acts during interactions, namely transactions (Woodward, 2000). The framework of transactional positioning guided the empirical research in this study and supported further understanding of the conflicting interests and tensions in parent-teacher relations.

**Contribution to new knowledge**

This empirical research, using the framework of transactional positioning as the main interpretative focus for parent–teacher relations, yielded new insights with regard to the relations between parents and teachers when interacting in the interest of a child’s schooling. A model of transactional positioning was developed to provide an insight into important factors that have an impact on parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their relations. The research provided insights into the conflicting interests of parents and teachers and the transactional nature of positioning that inform theory and practice. The insights gained led to further development of the initial model and resulted in a second model that more accurately reflects the transactional relations revealed during the study. In particular, the strained relations between parents and teachers, as the evidence from this study suggests, and the ambivalent positioning of parents and teachers in their relations that was observed, appear to be crucial factors in explaining why parents and teachers do not seem to be attuned with each other.

**Outline of the empirical study**

The empirical research that informs this thesis adopted an interpretive perspective (Johnson et al, 2007) and a pragmatic approach (Greene, 2007) to investigate parents’ and
teachers’ positions within parent–teacher relationships. A mixed methods design (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) was used to address the research questions. The sample for this research consisted of parents and teachers connected to five urban schools in the Netherlands. Questionnaires consisting of open-ended questions and group interviews using eliciting tools were employed to gain an insight into parents’ and teachers’ perceptions with regard to the relationships they develop. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used as a comparative data analysis method to derive themes from the data in order to develop a description of parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their collaborative relationships. Findings are presented on each theme that emerged from the data. Finally, each research question is addressed in the light of the findings, the limitations of the study are described, the implications that emerge, and suggestions for further research are presented.

Outline of the thesis

In Chapter Two, the Dutch educational context is explained and the current situation regarding parent–teacher relations in the Netherlands is illustrated. The framework of transactional positioning is introduced and explained in Chapter Three. My epistemological stance is described and explained in Chapter Four, following which the research design is presented to provide an understanding of the approach taken for this empirical research. In Chapter Five, the data analysis process is explained and an explanation and illustration provided of the thematic analysis that was employed to analyse the data. In Chapter Six, a descriptive analysis of the respondents is provided. In Chapter Seven, the themes generated from the data analysis are introduced followed by the findings in relation to the first theme that emerged from the data, namely ‘strained relations’. In Chapter Eight, the findings that relate to the second emerging theme, ‘ambivalent positioning’, are presented and illustrated. Finally, in Chapter Nine, the research questions are addressed in terms of the findings from the data. The conclusions and implications for practice and recommendations for further research are then described, and the chapter ends with reflections by the researcher on the empirical research.

Summary

The journey that resulted in this thesis provided an insight into the tensions and difficulties in relationships between parents and teachers as a result of conflicting interests in their positioning. The findings of the pilot study informed the current research. The study and its outcomes inform theory and practice, as role theory and positioning theory both offered useful explanations that provided an insight into parent–teacher relations. The model of
transactional positioning yielded new insights into the relations that parents and teachers develop in furthering a child’s development.

In the next chapter, the Dutch educational context for this research will be explained.
CHAPTER TWO
NATIONAL CONTEXT

This research was conducted within primary educational settings in the Netherlands. The Dutch educational setting comprises a particular context that requires explanation and clarification so that the reader can understand the larger context within which the research is embedded. It is important to contextualise research, as this enables the reader to understand the position of the researcher and explains how the research questions are embedded in specific professional, national, and policy contexts (Day, 2012; Plowright, 2011). In this chapter, the Dutch educational context will first be presented, followed by an explanation of policy and practice with regard to parent–teacher collaborative relationships in the Netherlands.

The Dutch context

In the Netherlands, all children are expected to attend primary education between the ages of five and twelve (Government of the Netherlands, 2014). The education system comprises mainstream primary schools as well as special primary education for children with learning or behavioural difficulties. Most children enter primary education by the age of four. There are different types of schools a parent can choose for their child, such as public education schools or schools that are based on a particular faith (e.g., Catholic, reformed or Muslim schools) or a specific educational philosophy (e.g., Montessori education, Summerhill schools). In the 2014/2015 academic year, almost 1.5 million children were enrolled in primary education distributed across 6,549 different schools (CBS, 2016). Within this context, governmental policies influence school policies that frame parent–teacher relations.

Dutch education policy

Dutch education policy is applied within the framework entitled ‘passend onderwijs [suitable education]’ (Government of the Netherlands, 2014), the translation of which means that schools are obliged to organise appropriate education for all children of all abilities (Bijsterveldt-Vliegenthart et al., 2012). The policy requires schools within the same region to work together to provide the best education for every child within that region. One of the goals of ‘passend onderwijs’ is to increase parental involvement. The government’s aim is to place the child’s strengths and educational needs at the core when supporting their educational development (Government of the Netherlands, 2014).
Consequently, the Dutch government recognises the importance of parental involvement in children’s educational development. Furthermore, Dutch policy is aimed at improving overall student performance, and parents are expected to play an active role in supporting their children to achieve their potential. Additionally, the education ministry expects parents and schools to collaborate in this process and to work as partners, as discussed extensively during a general debate in the Dutch Parliament (House of Representatives, 2012).

Furthermore, it is a statutory requirement for every school to have a representative advisory board (Bokdam et al., 2014). Both parents and school personnel are elected as members of the board. The representative advisory board has the prerogative to approve and advise in the decision-making processes of the board of governors and school management; it therefore needs to be informed on all relevant issues. Most schools also deploy a parents’ council, although this is not compulsory. Parents who serve on a parents’ council support many school activities. They may, for instance, collect a ‘voluntary parental contribution’ to enable extra-curricular facilities and activities to be implemented. Most parents’ councils arrange extra activities and facilities, such as school camps or sports days. They may also advise the representative advisory board on certain issues.

Clearly, parents have the opportunity to play an important role in school life. Nevertheless, parental involvement in the school environment by advising on school policy or supporting school activities is not considered to be crucial in supporting their child’s development at school (Bakker et al., 2013). Therefore, policy is also aimed at developing educational partnerships between parents and teachers, as will be outlined in the following sections.

The Minister of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science recently funded a working group to deploy different kinds of activities to focus attention on the subject of parental involvement in schools (Parents and Education, n.d.). Previously, in July 2013, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science allocated a budget for developing knowledge and sharing experiences on good relationships between parents, schools, and students (Dekker, 2013). Subsequently, several reports defined the concept of educational partnership, evaluated partnerships between parents and schools, and discussed practical implications for schools, such as the obligations schools are expected to meet to involve parents (Bokdam et al., 2014). Educational partnerships presume a fundamental attitude that acknowledges how activities at school are aligned with parenting activities at home. It also assumes that parents and teachers hold joint values (Oostdam and Hooge,
The aim of a partnership between parents and teachers is to achieve solidarity and to form a confederation (Bokdam et al, 2014). Parents are expected to support their child’s development at home through active involvement with the school, communication with their child on school issues, the creation of a rich learning environment for their child, and by supporting the planning and completion of homework (Parents and Education, n.d.).

With respect to engagement practices in Dutch primary education, it has been demonstrated by Bokdam et al. (2014) that further steps are required to develop a collaborative culture. Ledoux (2017) found that deficits can be observed in the communication practices developed in schools, and that parents vary in terms of their satisfaction with parent–teacher contacts. Despite the stimulus to improve parent–teacher relationships, it is important to make improvements in defining shared goals and to make mutual expectations clear and explicit (Ledoux, 2017). Within this context, the present research aims to contribute by providing improved insight into parents’ and teachers’ positioning, and thus the development of deeper understanding into the tensions and conflicting interests that appear to be immanent in practice.

**Policy in schools**

Recently, within the supervisory framework designed for primary education within the framework of ‘passend onderwijs’, the Dutch Schools Inspectorate (2017) described how parents should be substantially involved in the development of school strategy and evaluations, and how schools should relay their plans and practices to parents and students. Furthermore, the inspectorate stated that schools need to inform parents about their child’s development. Therefore, it appears that the focus for the government has shifted from developing partnerships to informing parents, which reflects the view that parent–teacher relationships are unilateral in the direction of teacher to parent (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Furthermore, the policy seems to encourage parental involvement in schools, instead of parental engagement in their child’s schooling. According to Goodall and Montgomery (2014), parental engagement encompasses more than the involvement of parents and requires equitable relations between parents and teachers. Additionally, the Schools Inspectorate published a report in which it concluded that inequality between children of highly educated parents and children of parents with lower levels of education had increased (Dutch Schools Inspectorate, 2016). One of the reasons that the Schools Inspectorate came to this conclusion is that it had observed that teachers appear to interact more often with highly educated parents and seem to have higher expectations of children.
of such parents. Understanding the reason for this disparity is crucial in ensuring that teachers engage with all parents. The above stresses the importance of readdressing the subject of parent–teacher relations, which is the focus of this thesis.

When it comes to implementing the prescribed policy in Dutch primary education, there is some evidence to indicate that schools still use standard practices when communicating with parents (Ledoux, 2017). For example, it is common practice for teachers and parents to meet to discuss the development of the child two or three times during a school year at a parent–teacher meeting, where each discussion lasts ten minutes. Most schools invite parents to one or more meetings during a school year, where general information is provided on school subjects and issues relevant to parenting may be covered. Meetings are arranged in each class to inform parents about the schedule of activities. The majority of schools provide newsletters on a weekly or monthly basis, while some teachers send a newsletter to parents on class matters. From the above examples, it can be seen that schools largely provide information on the children’s progress in class (Bokdam et al, 2014) and, additionally, when dealing with parents, teachers still seem exhibit bias on an expert position (Bakker et al, 2013). This suggests that traditional school structures are maintained, restricting the possibility for the development of a dialogue between parents and teachers (Stefanski et al, 2016).

Nevertheless, schools are developing practices such as introductory talks with parents at the start of a new school year, teacher–child conversations instead of parent–teacher conferences, and ‘parent-cafes’ to discuss relevant issues on education and upbringing. Additionally, they may use online platforms to inform parents and, for example, share photographs of activities in class. The focus of schools is increasingly that of a marketing-type operation rather than any educational concern for the children, as they seem to aim for parental satisfaction when developing new practices (Klapwijk and Van Eck, 2018). This is hardly surprising given the fact that the Schools Inspectorate requires schools to achieve a satisfactory rating from parents in a study undertaken every two years (Dutch Schools Inspectorate, 2017). This requirement has an impact on the relations between parents and teachers, as it suggests that parents are regarded as clients (Deslandes et al, 2015). This orientation towards keeping parents satisfied differs
significantly from engaging parents in their child’s learning, which has been described by Goodall (2018) and others as an important focus of schools in their relations with parents. The orientation of schools towards a ‘satisfactory’ situation may lead to conflicting interests between parents and schools, as parents feel a significant responsibility to provide for their child with the best education possible, as illustrated by Ivan et al. (2015).

Indeed, policy and practice seem to conflict with empirical insights, because policy as well as current practices in schools appear to be aimed purely at informing parents rather than engaging parents in their child’s schooling. Thus, within the current Dutch educational context, investigating parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their relationship is legitimate in order to further understanding of developed practices. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute new knowledge on parent–teacher relations in practice.

Current interest of parent–teacher relations
The currency of the topic of parent–teacher relations in the Netherlands is underpinned by several reports and news coverage of problematic relations between parents and teachers (Van Teeffelen, 2017; DUO Education Research, 2015). Recently, for example, newspapers and other media have published evidence showing that three-quarters of the teachers in grades seven or eight feel pressured by parents with regard to the advice teachers give for secondary education (Primary Education Council, 2018). Newspapers have reported that parents exhibit aggressive behaviour towards teachers. DUO education research (2015) reported that 18% of the teachers interviewed experienced verbal or physical aggressive behaviour from parents. It has also been reported that parents have sued schools when they did not agree with the choices the school made (Van Teeffelen, 2017; Van Gaalen, 2016). Teachers and school leaders have reported that parents appear to undermine the authority of the school or the school personnel (CNV education, 2014). Hence, research on parent–teacher relations appears to be warranted based on the public perception that parent–teacher relations seem to be problematic. Furthermore, the public feeling that is reflected in reports and news coverage, particularly in cases of allegedly aggressive parents or parents who act unreasonably, seems to be in favour of teachers. Repeated reporting of problems in parent–teacher or parent-school relations may influence both parents’ and teachers’ opinions and positions in the relationship they develop. The practical effects of this societal sentiment in Dutch public opinion underlines the importance of developing an understanding of the problematic factors in parent–teacher relations, which is the aim of the current research.
Summary
Within the Dutch context, this research is considered relevant as policy is aimed at embedding the role of parents in schools: the Dutch government explicitly obliges schools to consult parents in evaluating school policy and practices, as well as inform parents about their child’s progress in school. However, in practice, this only appears to result in a focus on the parents’ position in relation to schools, even though research has emphasised the importance of the parents’ position at home and the need for schools to support parents in scrutinising their child’s development. Furthermore, developing a relationship between parents and teachers that provides optimal support for a child requires a supportive environment, and this seems to receive limited attention within the current policy designed by the Dutch government. This can be regarded as a conflict between policy and practice, and the processes that are expected to inform and support the development of collaborative practices in parent–teacher relationships. Additionally, public opinion on parents’ positioning in their relationships with teachers and schools appears to highlight the problematic status of parents and largely portrays teachers as victims. This is likely to influence parents’ and teachers’ opinions and positioning in the relationships they develop. It is within this context that the research reported here is conducted. The research aims to contribute to new knowledge and inform policy and practice by inquiring into the relationships between parents and teachers and discovering more about their perceptions of these relationships.
CHAPTER THREE
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: TRANSACTIONAL POSITIONING

Introduction
This third chapter of the thesis presents the conceptual framework that emerged from the literature to describe the transactional process of parent–teacher relations. The framework is called ‘transactional positioning’. It draws on the concepts of role, positioning, agency, and transaction to develop an understanding of collaborative relationships. Parents and teachers are considered to operate as agents in this collaborative relationship and mutually influence one another. They assume different positions in relation to each other and, from these, enact their roles on the basis of how they are conceived.

This chapter first discusses why, from a scholarly perspective, an exploration of parent–teacher relationships is still required. The chapter explains how the concepts of role, positioning, agency, and transaction are harnessed to shed new light on parent–teacher relationships. Furthermore, the chapter argues that the manner in which parents and teachers define their role determines their positioning in their relations and supports further understanding of conflicting interests in parent–teacher relations. Finally, the model of ‘transactional positioning’ is presented and explained as a framework for this research.

In spite of the widespread recognition that parent-teacher relations that benefit a child’s schooling and development are crucial in improving social and academic outcomes (e.g., Bakker et al, 2013; Epstein, 2011), developing mutual and collaborative relations between parents and teachers seems to be a complex process (e.g., Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). From the parental side, as demonstrated by Ivan et al. (2015), parents’ engagement with the schooling of their child has changed dramatically in the last decade. Furthermore, public opinion on children’s development has shifted from traditional values such as children contributing to family life, to valuing the primacy of children’s personal development. Parallel to the findings of Ivan et al. (2015), Ule et al. (2015) found that parents are closely involved with their child’s development and consider themselves co-educators of their child. Nonetheless, as Fernandez and López (2017) indicated, parent–teacher collaborative practices in schools appear to be taken for granted and power-dynamics seem to remain unbalanced. This is endorsed by Ishimaru (2017), who argued that traditional collaborative practices in schools can be characterised as unilateral and are based on unequal relations where the teacher is in control. This contrast between the
fundamental shift in society’s understanding of the role of parents and the traditional approach to parent–teacher collaborative relations by schools, as demonstrated by Stefanski et al. (2016), has the potential to produce tensions in relations between parents and teachers and suggests that parents and teachers have conflicting interests in these relations. In their review, Bakker et al. (2013) demonstrated that schools and teachers still determine how and when contact and communication with parents occurs and this constrain the ability of parents to have a voice in their relations with teachers. Conversely, Ule et al. (2015) found that parents seek cooperation with teachers to exert influence and control over their child’s educational trajectory. The different points of departure for parents and teachers highlighted above produce conflicts and apply pressure on teachers, as Dahl (2017) found in her observations of parent–teacher interactions at school. She observed how teachers sometimes feel threatened by parents’ engagement in their child’s learning at school. Additionally, Ule et al. (2015) found that dissatisfaction in their relations exists among both parents and teachers.

The findings discussed above suggest that developing further insight into the way parents and teachers are positioned in their relations is still required, particularly given that different scholars (e.g., Stefanski et al., 2017; Vincent, 2017) have identified the dramatically altered societal positions of parents and the traditional approach of parent–teacher relations that can still be observed in schools. In this research, the aim is to clarify the tensions and conflicting interests observed between parents and teachers in their collaborative relations.

**Concepts**

There are multiple facets involved in the development of a deeper understanding of parents’ and teachers’ relations. First, an explanation will be provided as to why a different operationalisation of the concept of role is proposed in this research instead of the conventional focus on parents’ and teachers’ role construction and motivational beliefs. Roles are discussed in this context, and an explanation given as to how parents and teachers define their roles and enact them in different ways. Additionally, the concept of positioning will be introduced along with explication of the way parents and teachers influence each other in the process of interaction. Furthermore, it is argued that parents and teachers are agents, acting deliberately and self-consciously in their relations with each other. Finally, the concept of transaction will be discussed and explained as an important way of understanding parent’s and teachers’ positioning in their collaborative relations.
This chapter culminates by constructing a framework called ‘transactional positioning’, which brings together all the discussed facets. Figure 3.1 provides a schematic overview of the successive order in which the concepts will be discussed.

Figure 3.1: Concepts to be discussed.

Roles
To develop a further understanding of parent–teacher relations in practice, understanding the different roles parents and teachers play within their relationships is important. Role theory suggests that roles are constructed social identities located within a specific context and characterise the social behaviours of the people involved in such a way that recognisable scripts and expectations for appropriate behaviours are offered (Biddle, 1986). The social script that comes with each role refers to a theatrical metaphor that represents prescribed characteristics and behaviours for the role that are adhered to by the performer and understood by other social actors. Dennen (2007) indicated that, in education, roles are inevitable as everyone involved occupies identifiable positions on the basis of established roles with recognisable functions. According to Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013), it can be presumed that, as with other social environments, parents and teachers develop ideas and expectations about their roles in their relationships with each other. Parents’ and teachers’ understanding of their role has been shown to influence the way they approach each other and the way they engage in the relationships they develop (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Bandura (2006) comprehensively explained how people are active participants, constructing meaning within social reality through planning, acting, and examining their behaviours. This is equally true in a school setting, where parents and teachers play different roles and operate in this relationship from different contexts. Gastaldi et al. (2012) explained, for example, how parents enter a relationship with their child’s teacher from a personal position as the primary caretakers of their child, while teachers enter the
relationship as professionals and are part of the child’s life on a temporary basis, with particular responsibility for the child’s academic development. This underlines the point that parents and teachers have different interests when entering their collaborative relationship. Although shared interest in the child’s schooling and development in parent–teacher relations has been acknowledged and endorsed by scholars like Bakker et al. (2013), it appears that the different and potentially conflicting interests of parents and teachers have not been examined in detail. Therefore, it is important that parents and teachers are asked how they define their roles in order to increase our understanding of the different interests they hold in their collaborative relations.

Oostdam and Hooge (2013) argued that parents and teachers form a relationship that is assigned merely as the result of the child attending the class of a specific teacher. However, Keyes (2002) demonstrated that the development of this relationship depends on the manner in which both parents and teachers view their role and, as a result of their role conceptions, interactions between parents and teachers can vary. Hence, it is important to develop an understanding of subtle practices in parent–teacher relations in practice, as identified by Jeynes (2011). It also follows from their differing roles that parents and teachers view the same child from different perspectives. According to Gastaldi et al. (2012), teachers view the child as a pupil, whereas parents see their offspring; furthermore, Epstein (2011) identified that, as a result of the different roles they play in the child’s life, each has a different position regarding the child and regarding each other. Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) stressed that with these distinct perspectives, different expectations of the rights and duties that accompany a certain role are immanent in practice. However, to understand the tensions and dilemmas that are inevitably part of parent-teacher relations (Deslandes et al., 2015), it will be helpful to elaborate upon the concept of a role.

Conventional understanding of roles: role construction

In research on parent–teacher relationships, the concept of a role is principally operationalised as a cognitive psychological construction, which helps to develop an understanding of parents’ and teachers’ motivations and the experienced sense of efficacy (e.g., Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). According to Biddle (1986), research associated with cognitive role theory focuses on role construction, expectations, and a person’s actual behaviour in practice. Kim et al. (2013) and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1992), among other researchers, have argued that parents and teachers need to develop
suitable role construction with regard to their relationship. Role construction refers to personal belief systems that are developed over time through different experiences (Biddle, 1986).

Hence, parent and teacher role construction is based on prior experiences over time, such as their own schooling, (prior) learning experiences, role models, and external influences such as cultural background and other circumstances (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992). Green et al. (2007) described how role construction and a sense of efficacy are distinct elements of parents’ motivational beliefs. The sense of efficacy refers to the individual’s beliefs about being able to achieve specific outcomes when making behavioural decisions, as described in cognitive role theory (Biddle, 1986). According to Green et al. (2007), both elements are considered to influence parents’ beliefs and expectations. Additionally, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002) found that role construction and a sense of efficacy also determined the approach of teachers towards parents.

Although research based on cognitive role theory has generated informative and helpful insights regarding parents’ and teachers’ motivational beliefs, it appears that the operationalisation of role construction in the work of Kim et al. (2013) and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1992), among others, refers to cognitive psychological processes that are difficult to examine. Van Langenhove (2010) argued that it is difficult to operationalise the mental activity behind peoples’ thoughts and practical actions. Furthermore, Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) argued that, in interaction, people say and do things that are deemed to be socially acceptable on the basis of their conceived role within the given situation. Evidently, ideas about one’s role are related to parents’ and teachers’ cognitive psychological belief systems, although it is the actual definition of their role (in other words, how they understand the realisation of their role in practice), that is believed to influence the initial relations of parents and teachers, as this determines when and how they approach each other. The research that forms the basis for this thesis on parent–teacher relations aims to provide further understanding of parents’ and teachers’ representations regarding their collaborative practices and their practical understanding of the different roles they play in the relationships they develop with each other. This requires a new perspective on the concept of role in parent–teacher relations, as one of the aims of this thesis research is to understand how the ideas of parents and teachers regarding their own and each other’s roles locate them within their collaborative relations. Furthermore,
this new perspective contributes to existing knowledge on professional practice and scholarly understanding.

*Roles in practice*

Because this research aims to understand parents’ and teachers’ conflicting positioning in practice, it is appropriate to assess parents’ and teachers’ understanding of their own and each other’s role from a practice-based perspective. Rather than using cognitive role theory, which focuses on individuals’ cognitive psychological processes (Biddle, 1986), this research considers the different roles parents and teachers play in the relationships they develop and their characterisation of their own and each other’s roles, as well as their associated expectations in the light of social role theory, as specified by, for example, Zhao et al. (2014).

Zhao et al. (2014) demonstrated that social role theory explains how, in social reality, people occupy typical roles in different circumstances. Thus, within the social reality of a school, the particular roles of teachers and parents involve certain rights, duties, expectations, and behaviours that are socially accepted, as well as ideas about what is considered unacceptable behaviour (Koenig and Eagly, 2014). According to Harré et al. (2009), recognisable roles are considered to generate norms, beliefs, and preferences that lead to presuppositions with regard to certain practices accompanying the role. Thus, as argued by Sims-Schouten (2015) in her research on collaborative relations between parents and teachers, roles provide normative frames that support parents’ and teachers’ choices and actions in their collaborative practices. For instance, it may be considered the duty of a parent to take a child to school on time and it is a teachers’ duty to observe and assess the child’s progress in class. These are socially accepted ways for parents and teachers to enact their roles. Lynch (2007) argued that, in order to enact one’s role appropriately, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the role and its associated rights, duties, and responsibilities. To provide an insight into these perceived rights, duties and responsibilities and the associated positions they assume in practice, parents and teachers were asked in this research to explain how they define their roles.

*Defining one’s role*

According to Hellmueller and Mellado (2015), individuals need to develop ideas about the function of their role in order to act in a socially acceptable way. This view of the importance of defining one’s role in practice, as explained by Browne-Ferrigno (2003),
differs from the concept of role construction that is conventionally used in research on parents’ and teachers’ understandings of their role (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), as role construction refers to a system of beliefs with regard to one’s responsibilities and the motivations and feelings of efficacy that stem from these beliefs. As Browne-Ferringo (2003) explained, defining one’s role involves a conception of the role that follows from a set of expectations, norms, values and standards that are considered socially acceptable within a specific social context. For example, a teacher who believes that their role is solely to teach children and inform parents when considered necessary, differs significantly from a teacher who believes that their role is to support children’s development in collaboration with parents. These teachers will work with different values and standards, which might be confusing for parents. Rodriguez et al. (2014) underlined how parents have to depend on the teacher, and how teachers differ in their approach to parents.

Likewise, parents differ in the way they define their role, as was found by McKenna and Millen (2013) in their research on parent’s views on their own involvement. Some parents define their role as providing support at home, while others define their role as being equally responsible to the teacher and want to be engaged in decisions regarding their child. In contrast, Van den Berg and Van Reekum (2011) indicated that teachers’ perceptions of parents’ roles are mainly focused on parents acting as a support to teachers. Thus, it is important that parents and teachers are asked to define their role, as this could yield important information about the subtle differences between parents and between teachers as well an insight into the differing interests of both. Therefore, in line with Frydman (2015), who explained that roles are foundational in people’s behaviours and described how ideas about roles are embedded in the social environment, the way parents and teachers define their role is investigated as the foundation for parents’ and teachers’ behaviours in practice.

Enacting one’s role

The behaviours of parents and teachers are based on conceptions of their roles within the social context of parent–teacher relations. A parent at one school, for instance, can define their role as bringing the child to school and briefly informing the teacher as to the child’s wellbeing every day, because they are closely involved and feel equally responsible for the child’s development. This parent is likely to approach the teacher proactively on a daily basis. Another parent at the same school, however, might understand their role as bringing
the child to the schoolyard without approaching the teacher directly, as this is common practice at the school the child is attending. This parent would probably drop the child at the schoolyard, wave, and decide to return to their home without even entering the schoolyard. The first parent, therefore, is more visibly present from the teacher’s perspective and might be considered to be appropriately involved, while the other parent might be perceived as absent and thus less involved. Wanat (2010) demonstrated that teachers judge parents on the basis of their presence in school and described how these judgements lead to tensions in their relations with parents. Conversely, Dahl (2017) found that parents who assume a central position in their relations with teachers might be perceived as dominant by teachers. Thus, it is important for teachers to understand how parents define their role, because this supports the teachers’ understanding of the manner in which parents enact their roles in different ways. The ideas that parents and teachers develop about their roles create the framework within which parents and teachers determine how they and schools will cooperate and how they assess the enactment of these roles in practice. The research reported here explores the role conceptions of both parents and teachers in order to develop a deeper understanding of the different ways in which parents and teachers assume positions in their relations, as these differences have the potential to become a source of tension and possible conflict in their collaborative relations.

Nonetheless, the way teachers and parents define their roles as a basis for their behaviours still does not seem to fully explain the subtle dynamics in their relations in practice, as observed by Castro et al. (2015). This may be because, in social interactions, roles are not assumed in straightforward ways (Korobov, 2010). Jenkins (2004) emphasised this point in stronger terms and argued that, in most situations, people improvise. Although social role theory acknowledges that transactions occur when people interact with each other, the theory focuses on the individual actor and the different roles actors play in different social contexts (Xin Zhao et al., 2014). This suggests that role theory does not completely address how roles are negotiated in interaction. Because positions are more fluid and different positions may exist within certain roles, as Dennen (2007) explained, it is important to identify the positions parents and teachers can assume in their collaborative practices. The concept of positioning seems to support a deeper understanding of the dynamics in parent–teacher relations. This is because according to Van Langenhove (2010), the concept of positioning moves beyond a linear and static perspective on interactions. Thus, in the context of this research, positioning theory has the potential to add an important dimension
to role theory by recognising the fluid and dynamic nature of social interactions within the scope of the roles that parents and teachers are assigned culturally, historically and institutionally (Fernandez and López, 2017). Positioning theory is, therefore, considered in more detail in the section that follows.

**Positioning theory**

Positioning theory was defined by Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) as a metaphor for how people stand relative to one another within conversations. They highlighted how human interaction allows us to continually create different narratives in interaction and stressed how roles are enacted in diverse ways. Additionally, they indicated how, in a specific situation, one locates oneself relative to others and simultaneously locates others relative to oneself, as teachers do with parents and vice versa. Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) and Van Langenhove (2010) contrasted role theory and positioning theory, arguing that role theory is too static to provide a deep understanding of role enactment, and that roles are limited by constraints and requirements that are fundamental in someone’s life, such as being a parent or performing a job. Positioning theory, however, provides a framework for organising and understanding the dynamic nature of parent–teacher collaborative practices, as explained below.

In practice, as discussed in the relevant section above, enacting a role is not straightforward (Lynch, 2007). Van Langenhove (2010) argued that this is where positioning theory adds important insights and facilitates deeper understanding of the different positions that can be assumed and assigned in moment-by-moment interaction. For instance, within the recognisable role of being a teacher, the teacher can assume several positions such as ‘professional’, ‘person in charge’, ‘authority’, ‘expert’, ‘host’ or ‘guide’ as demonstrated by, among others, Matthiesen (2016) and Dennen (2007). Teachers might assume any of these positions when interacting with parents. Similarly, a parent might assume positions such as ‘caretaker’, ‘advocate’, ‘assistant during school trips’ or ‘assistant with homework’ as well as ‘co-expert’ or ‘partner’, as suggested by Christianakis (2011) and Epstein (2011). When assigning positions, some parents might position a teacher as an ‘expert’ and accept their view, although they may not necessarily agree with them, as Matthiesen (2016) demonstrated in her research on the silence of Somali parents in parent–teacher conferences. Conversely, as demonstrated by Freeman (2010) in her research on working class parents’ positioning in their relations with teachers, others may position the same teacher as ‘non-responsive’ and refuse to accept
anything the teacher says or does. Teachers might also position parents in diverse ways, such as ‘easy going’, ‘opponent’ or ‘involved’, as shown in the review by Bakker et al. (2013). It is easy to imagine how different ways of positioning oneself and the other can lead to different choices when approaching one another and how, for instance, opposing positions in interactions might result in tensions in parent–teacher interactions or potentially even conflict. Therefore, it is argued that positioning theory allows further understanding of the dynamics in parent–teacher relations and, as such, serves the purpose of this research in clarifying the dynamics, as well as possible tensions and conflicts, between parents and teachers.

**Positioning in interactions: storylines and social acts**

Positions assumed in interactions determine relations when parents and teachers meet. However, relations between parents and teachers are dynamic and subsequently develop during their interactions. Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) explained how people relate to each other and, besides positioning themselves and each other, produce joint storylines when interacting. A storyline can be understood as the thread or narrative that unfolds during a conversation between a parent and a teacher (Van Langenhove, 2010). For instance, at a parent–teacher conference, a parent enters the room with the storyline in mind that everything is well with their child, while the teacher is preparing for a difficult conversation, having recently discovered that the child is seriously deficient in maths. When the teacher initiates the conversation and shares their concerns, the storyline changes for the parent, who might either react fiercely or uncomplainingly to this unexpected message. Both reactions lead to different storylines for this parent–teacher conference. Recognising the moment-by-moment dynamics of interactions and the various ways in which the storyline might develop within each conversation is important in developing an insight into the tensions and conflict that can arise in parent–teacher relations.

Furthermore, Van Langenhove (2010) explained that, within conversations, the roles of participants and the positions they assume result in certain ways of behaving and talking, namely certain ‘social acts’. A social act refers to intentional and unintentional acts, such as speaking, adopting an attitude, or making gestures. Each social act has a particular meaning for the actor and other participants in the conversation in this particular context (Harré, 2012). For example, a teacher who reclines in a chair with folded arms, scrutinising a parent who has posed a question regarding their child, is positioned differently and assumes a different position compared with a teacher who sits attentively and looks
expectantly and in a friendly manner at the parent after posing the same question. Each scenario yields a completely different storyline, which is reflected in and supported by the social acts of the participants. Additionally, Van Langenhove (2017) argued that what a person is allowed to say and do differs across situations and depends on their role and the associated position they assume or are assigned in that particular situation. According to Matthiesen (2016), this means that a person has certain rights and duties that create and limit the possibilities of what they are entitled to do and say in a given situation. For instance, in the current educational environment, a parent is not entitled to mark tests for their own child and a teacher is not entitled to determine how a child spends their leisure time at home. Nevertheless, a parent is entitled to approach the teacher and ask questions about their child’s progress, and a teacher is entitled to assign homework if this is considered necessary. Distinguishing social acts from storylines and positioning in interactions adds another fruitful angle that supports further understanding of parent–teacher relations, because social acts provide an insight into attitudes, gestures, and words that may indicate whether parents and teachers are comfortable in their conversation, or whether there are tensions and conflicts. In practice, social acts are useful because they can be observed and considered for discussion when tensions or conflicts arise.

Thus, positions, storylines, and social acts mutually influence one another and determine how an interaction unfolds; if any of these change, the others will also change (Harré, 2012). For instance, the storyline of the interactional episode between a parent and teacher might change because the teacher does not seem to listen carefully to the parent’s view. If the teacher interrupts the parent to change the subject, this might cause annoyance on the part of the parent, and this is likely to change the social acts and positions in this particular conversation. Additionally, it is feasible that the storyline may change as a result of changing social acts and positions within an interaction. One of the participants might, for example, feel challenged and will consequently defend their interests or withdraw from the conversation. Harré (2012) argued that positions, social acts, and storylines are inextricably intertwined. The process of positioning was presented diagrammatically as a triad with three mutually determining angles by Harré (2015), illustrating how positions, storylines, and social acts (e.g., speech, gestures and acting) influence each other. This triad is presented in Figure 3.2:
In this research, the aim is to develop an understanding of the experiences and observations of parents and teachers with regard to the positions that are assumed, the storylines that are recognised, and the social acts that are performed.

According to Matthiesen (2016), positioning theory offers a perspective that can support an understanding of the interactional dynamics in parent–teacher relationships. Reflecting on relationship practices outside the actual conversation itself is necessary, as Jenkins (2004) indicated that interactional episodes in themselves provide only a brief indication of the positions parents and teachers assume in their relationship. Therefore, to provide an insight into the normative frames within which parents and teachers perform their involvement practices for this research, information on their positioning in practice was gathered by asking parents and teachers to reflect on their experiences in collaborating with each other, and on the way they position themselves in their relationships with each other.

The literature and discussion presented above highlight the importance of role and positioning as concepts that underpin an understanding of parent–teacher relations. Parents and teachers develop ideas about their own and each other’s role, which determine their positioning in practice. A storyline then unfolds within each conversation or interaction between parents and teachers. Parents and teachers enact their role in interaction through the display of social acts and by assuming associated positions. The storyline might change as a result of changing social acts and altered positions, and vice versa.

Underlying these basic ideas is the assumption that parents and teachers are active participants who contribute to the relationship they develop. This assumption will be explored in the following section on agency.
**Agency and reflection**

Although parents’ and teachers’ roles and positions are distinct, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) claim that parents and teachers can both be seen as agents in their relationship, consciously choosing their own actions with the ability to reflect on these. The concept of agency presumes that people act intentionally to work towards certain goals, based on which they form mental representations in order to develop action plans (Bandura, 2006; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Additionally, people are expected to act on these plans and regulate their behaviour in order to achieve the desired outcome. Extrapolating this to the parent–teacher relationship would mean that parents and teachers are actively involved in the relationship and, in line with Bronfenbrenner’s (2004) explanation of human behaviour, use resources to accomplish goals.

Ryan and Deci (2017) explained how people are capable of observing, interpreting behaviours, and reflecting on social situations. In the research for this thesis, it is assumed that parents and teachers are able to assess situations and interpret events through reflection. For example, a parent who is concerned about their child’s progress is likely to contact the teacher either to indicate that they are worried or to ask for the teacher’s opinion on the child’s development. The parent can choose to write an email, approach the teacher in the schoolyard, or even make a phone call to accomplish the goal. Alternatively, a teacher might suppose that the parents of a child are worried if their child has failed a test. The teacher could decide to call the parents, approach the mother in the schoolyard, or invite the parents for a meeting.

A person’s actions often involve other agents. In parent–teacher relations, shared goals have to be negotiated between parents and teachers. To achieve these, Swann and Jetten (2017) claimed that it might be necessary for parents and teachers to minimise their own interests in interaction as a way of achieving meaning and commitment to shared goals and intentions. In other words, parents and teachers have to be prepared to recognise that their pursuits aimed at supporting the child are not individual endeavours and they are involved in a relationship because, as Keyes (2002) argued, they share the responsibility for the child’s schooling and development. Thus, parents and teachers need to act deliberately and determinately in the relationship they develop, namely by displaying agency. However, developing an equitable relationship, according to Goodall and Montgomery (2014),
requires school staff and parents to acknowledge each other’s agentic position, as agency is related to action and responsibility.

It is also assumed for the purposes of this research that human beings are self-reflective, meaning that people continuously, although not always deliberately or with conscious awareness, reflect on their actions and examine their own functioning (Bandura, 2006). According to Bandura (2006), this reflexive capacity makes life personally manageable, as reflection leads to behavioural adjustments when needed. Nevertheless, as Goffman (1963) indicated, the involvement of other agents means that people not only reflect on their own behaviour, they also assess the behaviour of others and respond to what they observe. For example, a parent who decides to ask the teacher in the schoolyard about their child’s progress in class recognises that the teacher can answer the questions only briefly. Based on this assessment of the situation, the parent decides that it is probably more appropriate to email the teacher and make an appointment. Furthermore, research on school leaders’ practices and engagement in professional discussions, as conducted by Goodall (2018), has suggested that these enable school leaders to encourage and support the engagement of parents. Additionally, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002) found that teachers’ reflections on their relations with parents supported their positioning in their relations with parents.

This research recognises the importance of this reflexive capacity and the capacity to assess situations and others in that it enables parents and teachers to reflect on the relationship they develop. Harré and Van Langenboe (1999) argued that reflection outside the interaction itself can be regarded as contemplative positioning, providing rhetorical accounts of interactions. This suits the aim of this thesis, which is to clarify parents’ and teachers’ conflicting positioning in their relations through teachers’ and parents’ accounts of their own experiences. Explicit reflection by parents and teachers on their relationship practices is necessary to provide an insight into the assessments they make of the collaborative situation and their own and each other’s behaviour when interacting. Parents and teachers are considered to be authoritative sources who can provide significant insights into their perceived interactions and positioning practices. Furthermore, it is presumed that they mutually influence one another while collaborating in order to support the child’s development. This means that the relationship takes the form of a transaction, the nature of which will be discussed further in the next section.
**Transaction and transactional positioning**

The final concept that is central to the conceptual framework for this research is the concept of transaction. According to Samerooff (2009), a transaction refers to the influence on an individual’s views and thoughts of the interactions between people and the context in which the interaction occurs. Epstein (2011) demonstrated that family–school relationships can be regarded as continuously changing, complex, and dynamic connections between families and schools that are influenced by different circumstances and interpersonal interactions that develop over time. Hence, the concept of transaction appears to add an important insight into role, positioning, and agency, as it facilitates further understanding of the dynamics between parents and teachers in their relations. When parents and teachers interact, it is not only a matter of sending and receiving information, assuming positions, displaying social acts, and developing a storyline, but also of influencing each other. Bronfenbrenner (2004) argued that persons always function with their environment in interactions and that interpersonal relations are an important aspect of the context that influences the person. Thus, parents and teachers function in interaction and mutually influence one another. The messages that are exchanged as they interact have an impact on both the parent and the teacher involved. Burkitt (2016) argued that human beings can be regarded as relational agents who are deemed to interact with others, who are interdependent, and from whom agency is constituted within the relationship they develop as a result of their interactions across time in different circumstances. Thus, the relationship that unfolds between a parent and a teacher as relational agents is constituted by the actions and interventions of both actors, which produce different effects and different outcomes.

Therefore, it is argued that transactions determine positions, social acts, and storylines, namely the positioning of parents in their relations. This explains the choice of ‘transactional’ as the title of the conceptual framework for the thesis, as it is assumed that positioning is a transactional process. Parents and teachers continuously influence one another, providing an explanation for the inherently dynamic character of parent–teacher relations that was demonstrated by Barton et al. (2004), who argued that parental engagement is a social and interactive process.

According to Samerooff (2009), a transaction can be regarded as an ongoing process within relationships in which mutual and emergent effects occur as a result of reciprocal interactions. Research on parent–teacher collaboration by researchers such as McKenna
and Millen (2013) and Wanat (2010) has provided evidence to show that parents appear to act in response to what they perceive to be communicated from teachers, and that parents depend on the outreach or support of teachers to develop adequate collaborative practices. Furthermore, research indicates that teachers sometimes experience tensions or discomfort when collaborating with parents, influencing their behaviour towards them, and that teachers’ attitudes are determinate in developing adequate and supportive relationships with parents (e.g., Stormont et al, 2013). It has also been suggested that parents who are more familiar with the school context due to their lengthy involvement with the school may change their position and role conception as a result of their experiences interacting with teachers (Ishimaru, 2014). From an alternative perspective, Bokdam et al. (2014) argued that a teacher’s work experience and age can lead to modified relations with parents, suggesting that teachers modify their views and behaviours as a result of their growing experience of interaction with parents. The concept of transaction has the potential to provide useful insights for schools and teachers because it offers the inviting prospect of using the ongoing process within relationships to transform parent–teacher relations in schools and develop a dialogue with parents. Rule and Kyle (2009), for example, demonstrated that changing practices as well as continuous and open communication with parents yielded positive outcomes for their school.

The subtle and dynamic interplay between parents and teachers is considered to be a more important factor in shaping parent–teacher relationships than the amount of contact or the structures developed in schools. For example, in their meta-analysis Castro et al. (2015) demonstrated that, despite the evidently positive effects of parental engagement in children’s schooling, they were not able to explain the differing and sometimes paradoxical results in the success of pupils. They concluded that parental involvement is a complex construct and that the expectations of parents regarding their involvement and their relations with teachers are not clear. Furthermore, Jeynes (2011) concluded, as a result of several meta-analyses, that subtle practices from teachers and schools to parents, such as being inviting and adopting a friendly attitude, and the expectations of parents regarding teachers and schools, appear to be more determinate in parent–teacher relations than providing information or developing guidelines for parent–teacher relations. This thesis aims to provide an insight into these subtle practices by applying the concept of a role that guides expectations and the concept of positioning that provides further understanding of the dynamics of interactions between parents and teachers. The concepts of agency and transaction provide insights into the way expectations guide the behaviours of parents and
teachers and their mutual influence upon each other. Additionally, the concept of transaction and agency can help teachers and schools understand that they are able to exert influence in their relations with parents, because the concept presupposes that participants are actively engaged with their environment and attempts to organise their world (Sameroff, 2009).

By investigating parents’ and teachers’ reflections on their interactions with each other, this thesis aims to provide further understanding of the transactional positioning that occurs between parents and teachers. It is argued that parents’ and teachers’ assessments of each other and their interpretations of each other’s behaviours lead to modified positioning in interactions. The ‘transactional positioning’ that determines parent–teacher relations is a conceptual framework that contributes to the development of new knowledge. The concept of role is important in understanding how parents and teachers position themselves initially, and the concept of agency supports an understanding of the importance of parents’ and teachers’ views, assessments, and reflections as a basis for actions and reactions. Transactional positioning determines how their relationship develops in practice.

**Transactional positioning: a cyclical process**

The preceding explanations lead to the development of a conceptual framework for parent–teacher collaborative relationships called ‘transactional positioning’. Transactional positioning refers to the process that occurs between parents and teachers when interacting within the context of the school. This is proposed as a cyclical process. Through reflection on their own behaviour and assessment of the other’s, parents and teachers conceptualise what position they are able and allowed to assume in practice. However, they are not necessarily aware of the process involved. As a result of this lack of awareness, tensions and conflicts are likely to arise because roles are not defined explicitly and positions and storylines may not be explicated to support the development of dialogical parent–teacher relations.

Initially, it is assumed that parents and teachers, as agents, are able to develop ideas about their roles, assess situations, and reflect on their actions. When developing a relationship, parents and teachers develop conceptions of their own and each other’s roles. From this, they assume a position in interaction as a means of enacting their role. When interacting and thus positioning themselves and each other, they exert a mutual influence by assuming positions, performing social acts, and developing a storyline. This reciprocity in
positioning is regarded as a transaction, because their interactions with each other lead to modified behaviours known as social acts, which are a result of their assessments and interpretations of each other’s behaviour and the actions that follow from this. This means that parents and teachers participate in the relationship as active contributors and both have an effect on each other and on the way the relationship develops. Their positioning is guided by continuous, although not always conscious, reflection and assessment. The process of transactional positioning is presented in Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3: Transactional positioning of parents and teachers.**

Transactional positioning is presented as an interdependent process because, as discussed above, each transaction within an interaction may lead to modified behaviour and new
positions in the next interaction, as well as modified ideas about their own and each other’s role. The model of transactional positioning reflects how parents and teachers position themselves as agents on the basis of their role conceptions and how transactional positioning leads to possible modifications in their behaviours or role definitions.

Parents and teachers are agents who are able to develop a role definition for their own and each other’s roles. From their role follows their role enactment in practice, which leads to particular social acts that parents and teachers display.

The social acts parents and teachers display reflect their positioning in interaction. Resultantly, different storylines are conceivable in parent–teacher interactions. They mutually influence each other during their interactions; in other words, the process of transactional positioning occurs.

As a result of transactional positioning, parents’ and teachers’ agentic reflections and assessments might change their views and, consequently, they might modify their behaviours. Modified behaviours change the social acts they display. These modifications have an impact on the positioning and the storyline in interaction and thus on the way parents and teachers enact their roles.

Furthermore, modified role enactment might lead to modified ideas about the way their own or each other’s role should be enacted and, consequently, their role definitions for themselves and each other as agents might change, leading to another episode of transactional positioning.

For example, a parent as an agent defines their role as being as equally responsible as the teacher and expects the teacher to take their view into account. To enact their role, based on this role conception, the parent assumes the position of an adviser and decides to advise (social act) the teacher on the pedagogical approach for their child (storyline) in the schoolyard. However, through their transactional positioning in the interaction with the teacher, the teacher acts defensively and tells the parent not to interfere with the daily practices at the school. As a result of this reaction, the storyline changes as well as the position of the parent, as the parent is positioned by the teacher as interfering. Resultantly, the parent modifies their behaviour and, after assessing the situation, decides to withdraw (social act) and sends an email to the teacher to explain the situation. This experience
might result in a modified view of their role as a parent, as well as reinforcement to enact their role as defined originally. For the teacher in this example, a similar description of the process of transactional positioning can be given.

**Summary**

Parent–teacher collaborative practices are dynamic, complex sites where parents and teachers meet to further a child’s schooling. They continue to be valuable objects of study because, as can be observed, multiple subtle and seemingly intangible factors and differing interests influence them and still require explanation. Further exploration of these factors and processes will enhance our understanding of parent–teacher relationships.

The aim of this research is to contribute to the development of new knowledge with regard to parent–teacher collaborative relations through the framework of transactional positioning, as described previously. The framework emerged from the literature and supports further understanding of the process of transactional positioning that occurs between parents and teachers when they meet each other. Furthermore, using the framework to investigate the reality of parent–teacher relations will provide further insight into perceived mutual relations and possible conflict, tension, or discomfort in their relations. Asking parents and teachers to explicate their role conceptions and explain how they enact their roles provides an insight into the initial positions of parents and teachers. Additionally, discussing parents’ and teachers’ experiences regarding their interactions and their perceived positioning within these interactional episodes provides greater insight into more subtle collaborative practices. The agency perspective is used as the basis for consulting parents and teachers about their reflections on and assessments of their relationship practices. The framework of transactional positioning facilitates more specific insights into the way relations between parents and teachers are developed.

The next chapter provides an insight into the researchers’ position and explains the methodology that was employed for this study.
CHAPTER FOUR
METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This chapter presents a justification of the epistemological perspective associated with this study, including an outline of the choices made in the research design. These choices are affected by both the world view adopted in this research and by the research questions. First, the researcher’s position will be explained, following which the research approach will be described. Second, the research design, sampling strategy, and choices of data-generation technique will be delineated. The advantages and limitations of the choices made to generate narrative data and the potential relevance of the findings will then be discussed alongside issues of reliability and validity. Finally, an explanation will be given as to how ethical issues have been resolved.

The researcher’s position

Like positioning in direct interactions, undertaking and reporting a study involves the positioning of the researcher towards both participants and the audience that will read the report (Dean et al., 2017). In terms of possible positions, the research literature on social science refers to the philosophical underpinnings of a research methodology (Creswell, 2010). According to Plowright (2011), philosophies about the world enable us to comprehend our perspective on the world and account for and justify the decisions we make and activities we undertake. A researcher always brings assumptions to their research about the phenomenon under study, as argued by Boeije (2014) and Creswell (2013). In this research, the social reality of parents and teachers is explored and, in line with Biesta (2010, p.11), it is assumed that this involves a ‘world of meanings and interpretations’ as parents and teachers are asked to describe and explain how they understand their experiences in the relationships they develop.

Newby (2014) explained how basic philosophical assumptions about the nature and origins of knowledge and what will be accepted as evidence underpin the epistemological assumptions underlying research. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), defining what will be accepted as evidence is important for social researchers as they develop an understanding of the social phenomenon under investigation through the perspectives of participants as well as through their own perspective. According to Biesta (2010), warranted assertions follow from careful observations, informed choices, and control within the particular context of a research study. This research can be regarded as a process
of inquiry into the dynamic world of parent–teacher relationships, which results in warranted assertions about the relations developed between parents and teachers connected to Dutch primary educational settings. Scott and Usher (1996) argued that providing clarity with regard to the epistemological stance taken is an additional way of justifying how an inquiry leads to warrantable assertions about the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, my epistemological stance will be explained in the following section.

**Epistemological stance**

Epistemologically, this study adopted an interpretivist framework and, in so doing, employed both a pragmatic approach, as discussed by Greene and Hall (2010) and Johnson et al. (2007), and a narrative approach, as exemplified by Plowright (2011). Although ‘there are many forms of pragmatism’, as Creswell (2013, p. 28) identified, it is important to recognise that a theory or idea is most successful when it is instrumental, meaning that the theory is useful in practice, as explained by Plowright (2011). Therefore, the current study can legitimately be considered pragmatic because it aims to understand parent–teacher collaborative relations, to contribute to both theoretical and practical knowledge, and to inform practices in schools. According to Baert (2005), an interpretivist framework accepts the subjectivity of the researcher and the different views of participants with regard to reality. In this study, recognising differing experiences and viewpoints is inevitable in developing a meaningful and contextual understanding of the positions of parents and teachers. In line with Plowright (2011), this stance fits a narrative approach. Therefore, words and conversations, open-ended questions, and group interviews are used as ways of generating rich, narrative data from which meaning can be constructed in regard to the parent–teacher relationship.

An important assumption reflected in the use of positioning theory, as explained by van Langenhove (2017) and also reflected in the research design, is that social phenomena are considered to be socially constructed and constituted through language and interaction (Searle, 1997). According to Plowright (2016), experiences shape how we construct the meaning of our world and, as such, they influence our beliefs about the world, which consists of ideas and values that are generated through experience. These beliefs and positions establish rules and legitimation for action and, consequently, determine our actions (Searle, 1997). In this research, recognising this presupposition is crucial as the way parents and teachers construct meaning from their position within the relationship they develop for the benefit of the child’s schooling is the primary focus.
Furthermore, because researchers such as Van Nes et al. (2010) have demonstrated a link between action, thought and language, parents and teachers were asked to reflect on their practices in order to provide insight into their thoughts and reflections on their collaborating relationships. Additionally, Pring (2000) argued that individuals have the capacity to share their understandings of experiences and actions with others. Therefore, parents and teachers in group discussions were asked to share reflections and understandings with a view to providing a more detailed understanding of the expectations, thoughts, and experiences of both groups with regard to their positioning in their relations.

The approach adopted acknowledges both individual differences and the multiple perceptions of parents and teachers on the relationships they develop and the positions they assume (Greene and Hall, 2010). Although the intention was to present the thesis in English, in accordance with suggestions from Van Nes et al., (2010), the decision was taken to conduct the research in the language with which the participants were most comfortable, namely Dutch. This would enable participants to contribute more easily and fluently. As identified by Searle (1997), the complexity of a given phenomenon (in this study parent–teacher relations) can make it difficult for the researcher to find the appropriate language to use to explain and understand it, and the amount of data generated can be hard to manage. Therefore, as Chi (1997) indicated, it can be difficult to generalise understandings that emerge from data analysis because of the wealth of data and the different views expressed by participants. Nonetheless, the research strives to collect information on the different experiences of those involved, both parents and teachers, and to learn from this experience. This will do justice to the complex nature of positions and roles in parent–teacher relationships.

**Mixed methods design**

According to Gorard (2010), a research design can be regarded as the organisation of a project that will have the greatest potential to acquire knowledge that will answer the questions that were asked. A mixed methods design was adopted for this research. In line with Greene (2007) and Ritchie and Lewis (2003), it was assumed that the eclectic nature of mixed methods research would enable a better understanding of parent–teacher collaborative relations. A mixed methods design provides the researcher with tools for developing a complex and detailed description of the research story, whereby each method brings its own particular insights (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Furthermore, the decision to
conduct a mixed methods study is legitimate given that, according to Greene (2007), a mixed methods study strives to achieve a broad and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Hence, such a design is appropriate for this research, which aims to develop an in-depth understanding of parent–teacher relationships using methods and approaches that provide an insight into different dimensions and aspects of collaborative relations. A mixed methods study also means adopting a creative approach by mixing methods of data collection, approaches to data analysis, and even the integration and presentation of data from parents and teachers. Nevertheless, empirical research still needs to be warranted, systematic and rigorous, as indicated by Niglas (2010).

As advocated by Morse (2010), the research question was central in conducting this empirical research and guided the decisions regarding the choice of research methods. The questionnaires, for instance, generated individual reflections of parents and teachers regarding their own and each other’s positioning, while the group interviews allowed a more in-depth understanding of the perceived dynamics of parent–teacher relations in practice, as it enabled parents and teachers to explain their experiences in more detail. It should also be noted that, in line with Gorard (2010), mixing also involves the use of different approaches towards analysing the data, such as quantifying and coding narrative data, and integrating different sources of data, such as that provided by the two different groups of participants in this research.

Because the aim of the research is to learn from the experiences of parents and teachers with regard to the relationships they build, the decision was made to consult both groups of participants by asking them directly about their expectations and experiences. Consequently, it was determined that the questionnaire (Appendices 4, p.163, and 5, p.165) would be administered to both parents and teachers. However, lessons learned from the pilot study indicated that it was necessary to supplement the data collection through conversations with parents and teachers. Hence, it was assumed that interaction would provide further insight into the different views and understandings of parents and teachers. Therefore, group interviews (Appendix 6, p.173) were employed to provide a means of exploring their experiences and views with regard to positioning. Thus, in line with the views of Morse (2010) and Greene (2007), the research uses two methods of data collection to investigate the understandings of two populations, and then attempts to integrate the findings.
To justify the legitimacy of the research design, the choices made regarding which sampling methods to use, the methods of data collection and analysis, and in relation to ethics, will be substantiated (Greene, 2007).

**Sampling strategy**
To provide answers to the research questions posed, Collins (2010) argued that it is essential to identify suitable informants. Plowright (2011) added that the appropriate informants for a study will have an increased likelihood of providing credible data. In this study, parents and teachers were considered to be appropriate informants, as they have the capability to reflect on parent–teacher relationships and are therefore more likely to provide credible data. Because the goal of the research is to strive for a greater understanding of the views of parents and teachers, and to make a valuable contribution to the understanding of parent–teacher relationships by generating refreshed insights from the perspective of both as key informants, a multi-stage, purposeful sampling strategy was adopted. This concurs with the view of Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), who divided purposeful sampling into multiple stages, making it a possible sampling scheme for mixed methods research. The purposeful sampling strategy involved obtaining access to parents and teachers who were connected to Dutch primary schools, and every stage of the strategy involved purposeful selection. Determining how many schools would be purposefully approached to participate in this research was the first step towards generating a suitable dataset. Later stages of the sampling procedure involved non-probabilistic, purposeful sampling.

The population for this research, determined by the research problem, consisted of parents and teachers connected with 6,549 primary education institutions in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, 1,457,800 children attend primary education and 97,100 teachers are connected to those institutions (Vogelzang, 2016). On average, each school serves 222 children, with 19 teachers providing instruction (Education Numbers, 2016). In the Netherlands, the average family has 1.7 children (Considering Averages, 2016). Thus, an average of 130 families would be involved per school, meaning that, in total, the target population of parents is approximately 851,370 families and the target population of teachers is approximately 125,394. Although the aim of the research is not to generalise findings, defining the target population was considered to be the first step towards generating a dataset, where efforts were made to minimise bias when selecting participants.
The different phases of the multi-stage, purposeful sampling strategy explained here are presented in Table 4.1. The first phase consisted of determining the geographic area for the study. The Netherlands is divided into 12 provinces. Four provinces were selected based on practical considerations and the manageability of the number of schools that could be approached. The provinces of Overijssel, Utrecht, Noord Holland, and Zuid Holland were selected because these were a maximum of one hour’s drive from the researcher’s home. Nevertheless, there were still many primary schools available within these provinces. To manage selection and minimise bias when choosing participants, a list of schools was generated from a website listing schools in each province in the Netherlands (School in beeld, n.d.) in line with Newby (2014). Each school on the list was assigned a number. The numbers listed on the website were inserted into Research Randomizer (Research Randomizer, n.d.) and 40 schools were selected in every province, yielding 160 schools in total. The website provided links to the websites of every school. Email addresses were obtained via each school website.

**Sampling procedure**

The process of sampling began in October 2015. In the first week of November 2015, schools that were selected via Research Randomizer (https://www.randomizer.org/) (N=160) received an email explaining the research goals and research design (Appendix 1, p. 165). The email invited them to participate in the research. They also received an offer that was intended to increase the appeal of participating in the research: first, extra questions were added to the questionnaires to facilitate an evaluation of parent–teacher collaborative practices, and second, they were offered a report and a presentation of the results of the questionnaire. These incentives were designed to help the schools, who are obliged to evaluate their relations with parents on a regular basis and to report their progress in this area to the Schools Inspectorate.

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the different phases of the sampling procedures.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>October 2015</td>
<td>Determine geographic area: time- and cost-effective, maximum of a one-hour drive.</td>
<td>Four provinces: Overijssel Utrecht Noord Holland Zuid Holland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>October 2015</td>
<td>Determine schools to approach for the research: Research randomiser: selecting 40 schools per province.</td>
<td>160 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November 2015</td>
<td>b. Get back to schools b. Phone schools that did not respond. Respond to schools that approached the researcher.</td>
<td>b. No extra schools. Too busy, too many requests or not interested in taking part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>c. Email students Master of Education Convenience sample</td>
<td>Two schools in Zuid Holland: Alblasserdam and The Hague. One school in Overijssel: City of Zwolle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>d. School received letter via other school Snowball sample</td>
<td>One school in Overijssel: City of Zwolle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>Enter into an agreement with participating schools Consent forms sent to school directors. Appointments made to send out questionnaires.</td>
<td>Two schools withdrawn: Zwolle and Amsterdam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>March and April 2016</td>
<td>Send out questionnaires to parents and teachers Parents and teachers asked for their consent. Self-selective sample.</td>
<td>Three group interviews with teachers and three group interviews with parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initially, only two schools in the province of Utrecht (cities of Amersfoort and Utrecht) responded positively to the email and decided to participate in the research. Although one school in Amsterdam in the province of Noord Holland initially decided to participate, the director had to withdraw at a later stage because the teachers did not give their consent. The majority of schools (n = 102) did not respond. Follow up calls with non-responsive schools showed that some were either too busy to participate or other studies were being conducted at their school. One school director mentioned that schools receive requests to participate in research almost every week. Consequently, a convenience sampling strategy (Creswell, 2013) was also adopted to find additional schools that were willing to participate. Therefore, my contacts as a teacher trainer were used to recruit additional schools for the research. Finally, one school that had not originally received the invitation to participate in the research (province Overijssel, city Zwolle) contacted me by email asking if the school could become involved. The school director received my email via a colleague, who had received the invitation to participate in the research and subsequently decided to send it to her colleagues.

Education students were asked via email if they were interested in participating in the research for their master’s thesis (appendix 3, p.168). They were offered the opportunity to use my data for analysis and to collaborate in reporting the findings to the schools. Three students responded positively to the invitation and came from The Hague, Zwolle and Alblasserdam, respectively.

This sample is considered sufficient to provide the information needed to develop an understanding of parents’ and teachers’ roles and positions within the relationships they develop. In line with Collins (2010), primary schools were purposefully identified and approached: parents and teachers connected to Dutch primary schools can be regarded as key informants for this research.

Schools were asked to provide information regarding the number of families connected to the school and the number of teachers working at the school. Additionally, appointments were made with the schools regarding the distribution of the questionnaires to all parents and teachers involved. The time that the questionnaire would be available for parents and teachers to access was set at one week. Parents and teachers received an email (Appendix 2, p.166) inviting them to respond when they had the opportunity. On the final day, another email was sent to remind parents and teachers that it was their last chance to participate.
Participation methods were dependent on the involvement of the school director or school counsellor. For example, at the school in The Hague, the teachers were obliged to complete the questionnaire during a workshop. Furthermore, at the same school, a teacher arranged for parents to complete the questionnaire at a central parents’ evening, thus removing barriers by making school computers available and arranging for parents to assist other parents. At the school in Amersfoort, the school director invited parents and teachers to participate in the research through the website and the school newsletter.

This approach led to a self-selected sample of parents and teachers where in accordance with Newby’s (2014) explanation of a self-selected sample, all participants had the opportunity to participate in the research. A question was included in the questionnaires asking whether the parents or teachers were willing or unwilling to participate in a group interview. Therefore, the participants in the group interviews can also be considered a self-selected sample. According to Newby (2014), a consequence of generating a self-selective sample is that atypical data are likely to be generated. Scott and Usher (1996) argued that one cannot be sure that such a sample of respondents represents the larger population. Thus, the results of the study need to be treated with caution because the data gathered might be atypical. This will be considered further in the discussion and conclusions of this report.

**Methods of data collection**

Newby (2014) explained how methods such as observation, documentation, and questionnaires are specific data collection techniques. Similarly, Plowright (2011, p. 49) distinguished three generic data collection methods: conducting observations, asking questions, and undertaking artefact analysis. In this research, asking questions is the most obvious generic method for supporting the collection of information as it provides an insight into the opinions and understandings that parents and teachers construct about their own and each other’s positions. Asking questions, which includes the use of questionnaires and interviews, is a strategy that is useful in research where respondents are important sources for data collection (Plowright, 2011). According to Adams and Cox (2008), open-ended questions can provide valuable insights and are likely to reveal issues and perspectives that are important to participants. Two data collection methods were used in this research: a questionnaire for parents and teachers, and group interviews with separate groups of parents and teachers. Table 4.2 provides an overview of the phases of data collection.
Table 4. 2: Phases of data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Degree of structure</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>Online questionnaire</td>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>Group interviews</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Plowright (2011) discusses how integrating different approaches is important in achieving a participant-centred strategy which follows the research agenda and also allows respondents the opportunity to decide what information they would like to provide. In this research parents/carers and teachers, being the central participants, were able to choose what answers to provide via the questionnaire, and also whether to participate in the group interviews to provide more detailed information about their relations with each other.

Using a questionnaire with open-ended questions aimed to produce a rich overview of the ideas that parents and teachers construct about roles and positions. By using group interviews as a follow-up, it was possible to conduct a more in-depth investigation into the concept of transactional positioning in parent–teacher relations. As Adams and Cox (2008) pointed out, the two data collection methods, i.e. questionnaires and group interviews, yield information that is differently organised and display different levels of elaborateness.

For example, the questionnaire answers provided quite specific information regarding expectations, roles and positions, such as: ‘my role is to be present at parent-evenings’. However, during the group interviews the conversation about the positions of parents led to a more complex and detailed understanding of parents’ and teachers’ experiences and thoughts regarding roles and positions, for example: “But eh, as you said, eh parents have the courage to say a lot of things in conversations. And they take up a lot of space demanding things they want.”

**Questionnaire**

A questionnaire asking for background information on the participants (e.g. age, place, type of school) was designed, and four open-ended questions were formulated to acquire information about the participants’ expectations of working together in a parent–teacher capacity, their role conception and in what way they wanted to be viewed by the other in the relationship they developed. These questions, therefore, were designed to elicit statements about roles and positions (Appendices 4, p.169 and 5, p. 171).
As with all methods of data collection, questionnaires have advantages as well as disadvantages. One of the advantages is that they can provide data from a large number of people relatively quickly. Burgess et al. (2006) argue that because the same questions are posed to every participant without the presence of an interviewer, there is no interviewer effect. However, according to Adams and Cox (2008), a disadvantage is the fact that participants might not feel motivated to participate or do not accurately complete the questionnaire. To increase the likelihood of parents’ and teachers’ involvement, particular questions were added to evaluate their experiences in practice and it was explained that the information they provided would be used by the school to enhance parent–teacher relations.

**Group interviews**

As indicated above, to develop a more in-depth understanding of positioning in parent–teacher collaborative relationships, group interviews were conducted in addition to the survey. Group interviews have been deemed to be productive sources for empirical research, providing not only information from stakeholders on the ‘self’, but including ‘context’ and ‘others’, and allowing the researcher to get to the heart of processes that constitute social reality (Leavy, 2014). Additionally, Litosseliti (2000) points out that group interviews are appropriate for gaining insight into divergent perspectives and, therefore, could be expected to offer very rich insights into the views of parents and teachers through the process of discussing, reconsidering and sharing, and the developing of participant’s views as a result of the discussion. Hence, group interviews were considered to be particularly useful for exploring parent–teacher relationships and the views and experiences of parents or teachers with regard to their roles and positions in the relationship they develop.

Group interviews are useful when conducted with similar interviewees, because participants are likely to have had similar experiences. This allows them to exchange knowledge and to compare and contrast their experiences (Creswell, 2013). It was, therefore, assumed that group interviews would work best for this study when the groups were homogenous, that is separate groups of parents or teachers, because parents and teachers are expected to have different needs and views on the topic of parent–teacher relationships. Despite the homogenous grouping, it is still important to monitor the conversation in order to engage every participant and develop a sense of trust as Creswell
(2013) and Litosseliti (2000) amongst others explained. Furthermore, according to Boeije (2014) it is important that the interviewer leads the conversation and gives guidance to the interactions between participants in order to monitor the group dynamics. Ryan et al. (2014) stress that the purpose of a group interview determines the design of the interview. Although the aim of the group interviews in this research was to elicit positioning talk and to construct knowledge based on shared ideas, experiences and beliefs, the range of opinions among participants was important, and so the interview was also designed to prompt participants to elaborate on their ideas (Newby, 2013).

A group interview guide was developed (Appendix 6, p.173) and, as suggested by Ryan et al. (2014) and Wilks (2004), elicitation tools containing thought-provoking sentences and an abstract presentation of positioning were developed to facilitate natural conversation among participants. According to Ryan et al. (2014), employing elicitation tools as an elicitation tool facilitates exploration of parents’ and teachers’ experiences in their collaborative relationships. Wilks (2004) explains that, although elicitation tools are often designed as written simulations of real events, a variety of other ways of presenting material are also known, for instance through cartoons or videos. For this research, it was important to elicit positioning talk and to discuss the role conception of parents and teachers. Therefore, the elicitation tools were designed as two sentences that could be completed and included a simplified model, presenting a vehicle for interaction. An interview guide and the elicitation tools as presented in Appendix 6 were used as a stimulus to move participants beyond simple statements to explore motives and explanations, and to stimulate thinking and reveal tacit knowledge (Creswell, 2013).

**Validity and reliability**

Syed and Nelson (2015) argue that validity concerns the extent to which findings reflect actual experiences of participants and represent all the participants’ voices, and that it is important that the researcher critically appraises the findings. They summarise this as the credibility, authenticity and criticality of research. Boeije (2014) explains that validity is concerned with the interpretation of data and, as such, is also concerned with applying a theoretical framework. Furthermore, Syed and Nelson (2015) recognise the importance of the researcher’s integrity regarding issues of validity by acknowledging that there is a possibility of error; for example, because of misinterpreting participants’ comments or not adequately capturing the construct of interest while coding the narrative data. Therefore, a reflexive account of the research development is important, as for example Burgess et al.
(2006) argued, since it is vital to acknowledge that bias is a relevant issue and that our perception of reality is influenced in numerous ways. As a result, in line with the view of Dean et al. (2017), it is necessary to make my position explicit, discussing how my experiences and values shape my interpretation of the phenomenon of parent–teacher relations.

First, my experiences as a parent, as a teacher and teacher educator influence my interpretations of the data. Additionally, the conceptual framework that was developed for this research contributed to my interpretation of the data. It is important to acknowledge that using this framework may have introduced some bias in the way in which I interpreted data. While providing the context of my voice as a researcher is a way to provide transparency (Day, 2012), it also should be acknowledged that, as Dean et al. (2017) and Charmaz (2014) rightly indicate, our own preconceptions, for instance in my case from positioning theory and role theory, might be forced on the data we code. For this reason, it is important to enhance reliability by comparing across data and not reframing participants’ statements in order to force them into preconceived categories (Charmaz, 2014). To increase validity, the argument and the evidence provided need to be complete, and the research processes and results must be provided transparently (Greene, 2007).

*Questionnaire design*

Although the aim was to design a good questionnaire, according to Newby (2014), this is not an easy exercise. For example, questions can be phrased in a way that leads respondents to answer them in a particular way. This can introduce unintentional bias to the results. Other important aspects are the vocabulary and context of the possible respondents. Words and phrases need to be straightforward and recognisable to participants. Validity, i.e. the degree to which a method actually measures what it is supposed to measure (Leavy, 2014), is at stake here. Another important issue here is reliability. Neuman (2012) defines reliability as meaning that data are consistent, and that should the study be repeated under the same conditions, the outcomes would be relatively stable. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that with a questionnaire, participants are free not to answer questions or to choose not to fill in the questionnaire, thus possibly affecting reliability. None the less, despite these drawbacks, using a questionnaire does facilitate efficient data-gathering from a large number of participants, and so was an appropriate instrument to provide insights into common issues around positioning in parent–teacher relations.
Adams and Cox (2008) suggest that questionnaires should be piloted in order to enhance reliability and to address the disadvantages of length, wording and phrasing. In line with this, the questionnaire was piloted and discussed with colleagues. Two colleagues as well as three parents from my own personal network were asked to give feedback. They were asked to comment on the length of the questionnaire, and on the wording, phrasing and clarity of the questions posed. The colleagues confirmed that they thought the questions would yield relevant and valid information for answering the research question. Two questions (2 and 3) were rephrased after the pilot. Two parents thought it was difficult to describe the roles without reference to practices they developed in collaborating with teachers. Instead of asking the participants directly to describe what their role was in the original questionnaire, the question started by referring to what parents and teachers actually do when collaborating with each other, referring to their role. The changes made were considered to enhance reliability, because the feedback provided was that participants would understand what was asked and the questions were appropriate for this study. To supplement the information gathered from the surveys and develop further insights into the positioning of parents and teachers, group interviews were also conducted.

**Group interview design**

As suggested by Plowright (2011) in order to enhance reliability and to minimise any disadvantages resulting from prompting, wording and phrasing, group dynamics and management of the interview, group interviews should be piloted. Therefore, the group interviews for this research were piloted and at first, two elicitation tools were used; one asked parents or teachers to complete a sentence about their own positioning, and another asked them to react to the discussion stimulus. The ensuing conversations were focused and easy to manage. In order to add more depth to the conversation before presenting the discussion stimulus, it seemed appropriate to add a sentence with regard to positioning the other person. This is important in light of Newby’s view (2013) that group interviews are not always used to their full potential because data collection remains at a surface level, and interviewers do not always use supplementary questions to further explore participants’ views and experiences. The group interviews conducted in this study yielded rich information, because the parents in the parents’ group and the teachers in the teachers’ group had shared experiences and discussed their views extensively with each other. Probing questions, for example, ‘could you explain further?’, facilitated further exploration of the initial statements provided by parents and teachers. Litosseliti (2000) explains that it
is important to use probing questions to explore participants’ views and thus develop a detailed understanding of their experiences and understanding of the subject under study. The complete group discussions were transcribed verbatim, thereby providing a rigorous and productive account, and generating a comprehensive source for analysis.

To increase validity, all participants in the group interviews received a summary of the interview in which they took part. They were asked to respond to the report to corroborate or question my interpretation of the conversations and the points of special interest presented. Of all six group interviews, either with five or six parents or four to nine teachers, three or more participants in each group confirmed my report. Trent and Cho (2014) refer to this process of interaction between researcher and participants as transactional validity, aimed at achieving a higher level of accuracy.

**Inter-coder agreement and feedback**

As an additional means of enhancing reliability, an inter-coder agreement check (Creswell, 2013) was undertaken. Two colleagues were asked to code fragments of the survey data and the group interview data and to look for agreement on code names and coded passages. The differences observed in the coding were discussed and codes were further developed in co-operation with these colleagues. For example, a theme that one colleague defined as ‘role construction’, and which the other colleague defined as ‘convictions’, referred to almost the same quotations and codes. In co-operation with each other, the theme was finally defined as ‘obligations’, since parents and teachers provided rather prescriptive ideas for each other’s role. Additionally, to avoid forcing the data into preconceived themes, which Boeije (2014) considers a possible threat to reliability, it was important to engage in writing reflexive notes (Appendix 11, p. 188) and discuss the themes with three colleagues, who read randomly selected fragments of the questionnaire and interview data. Another colleague was asked to assess the matrices (Appendices 12.1, p.183 and 12.2, p. 185) that were developed using quotations that reflected the themes and subthemes. The colleagues confirmed that the themes and subthemes were reflected in the data, noting that data fragments and quotes could sometimes be related to more than one theme. For example, themes like ‘attitudes’ and ‘actions’ seemed to be overlapping. Therefore, the themes and subthemes were reconsidered in the light of the research questions, memos, rereading of the data, and rewriting of the data analysis, and presented to the colleagues once again. In line with the process of thematic coding that Braun and Clarke (2006) adopt, this process was repeated until the themes represented distinguishable concepts that
reflected a balanced narrative supported by illustrative extracts of the data. Chapter five provides a detailed account of the data analysis procedures and outcomes and explains how translation dilemmas, e.g. involving a translator and language differences (Temple and Young, 2004) were addressed.

Feedback was also requested from someone not familiar with educational research, and from a professional doctoral researcher. This further enhanced validity by providing an assessment of whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions were supported by the data (Creswell, 2013). These reviewers confirmed that the data did indeed support the conclusions, although it was recommended that the theory should be more clearly developed. As a result of this feedback, the conceptual framework was reviewed and presented to the reviewers again. They confirmed that they understood my argument and suggested some minor adjustments to clarify detailed information. These concerns were addressed and in reaction to their feedback, further clarifications were added.

Relevance of the findings
The aim of this research is not to provide findings which can be generalised, but to develop a warrantable and credible understanding of parents’ and teachers’ views and experiences in their collaborative relations. However, Boeije (2014) explains that it is important to provide insight into the relevance of a study’s findings beyond the context and sample of the study itself, i.e., the external validity of a research. In this research, this is provided through a thorough description of the methodology, data analysis and sample characteristics. To enable readers to decide about transferability of data to other persons and situations, as argued by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), an in-depth description of this study’s context, a full description of the research design and conduct and data analysis procedures are provided in the current chapter and chapter five. In line with Creswell’s suggestions (2013), the composition of the samples of parents and teachers will therefore be described in detail in chapter six, as part of the research findings to enable a comparison of the data presented in this study with other situations and parents and teachers.

Ethical issues
Throughout the whole process of research, as indicated by for example Scott and Usher (2002), ethical issues have to be embedded in the methods employed, the ethical standpoint of the researcher needs to be defined, and explicit ethical decisions are required to be made. According to Gorard (2010) and Newby (2014), as a researcher, it is important to be
honest, to be open, and to show responsibility for decisions made and the quality of the research, for the position of participants in your research, and for the way you share your findings. Therefore, in line with Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) and Plowright (2014), it was important for me to be aware of my own position in the different contexts relevant for my research, and to consider how and to whom findings would be reported and to whom I should provide my interpretations of the data. In order to ensure a transparent process for all participants, data that was of relevance for schools was shared in a report specifically written for each school, and the broad findings were presented to parents and teachers at a special presentation and on the school website.

In practice, for this research, ethical approval was requested and received from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee. An explicit protocol was defined addressing ethical issues regarding my behaviour as a researcher and professional, participants (rights, anonymity and informed consent), data collection, data storage, and reporting the findings (Appendix 7, p.175; HREC, 2006). The data was collected only by the researcher, who is also the only one who has access to the stored data. At the beginning of the data-gathering process, the research aims and the way the information would be stored and handled were explained to participants. Explanations of the research aims and procedures were provided via email, at the start of the questionnaire and at the start of each group interview. Personal information was stored separately from the answers provided to the questionnaires and also from each group interview transcript. Data that was shared with the MEd student undertaking her Master’s thesis, was shared via a protected OneDrive account and without providing any personal information of parents and teachers. The descriptive information about the participants was provided by the researcher of this thesis research.

As a researcher, it is important to be open and honest about the purpose and content of my research. Parents and teachers who participated were asked to read and sign a statement that was designed according to standards that were described by Neuman (2012) and Hoyle et al. (2002) giving informed consent, which is presented in Appendix 8 (p. 176; HREC, 2006). Anonymity was guaranteed by using numbers instead of names for participating schools. Even though the cities in which the schools are located are named, anonymity is still guaranteed since, for example, there are 463 primary schools in Utrecht and 43 different primary schools in Zwolle (School in beeld, n.d.). The area within each city in which the school is situated has not been mentioned to prevent any recognisability. Data is
presented in a way that does not allow specific individuals to be linked to responses (Neuman, 2012; HREC, 2006) by using numbers for participants. It was made explicit to participants that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty, and their answers would not be used if they did not wish them to be. As a researcher, I have to be aware of my own values and beliefs, and reflect on the reasons for conducting this specific research and the procedures (HREC, 2006; Hoyle et al., 2002). This will be discussed further in the conclusion and reflections on the research.

**Summary**

This research originates from the researcher’s professional experiences and profound belief that insight into the role conception and positions of parents and teachers within their collaborative relationship is important in order to develop supportive relations between them for the benefit of the child. The research design reflects a pragmatic and constructionist view of knowledge, where investigating tacit knowledge and experiences in collaborative practices between teachers and parents leads to insights and valuable data about the concept of positioning in parent–teacher relationships. Using authoritative sources, the insights of participants will produce credible information as they represent multiple personal realities and shared understandings. Nevertheless, the sample procedures yielded a self-selected sample of parents and teachers. This will be addressed in the conclusions and reflections on the research.

A mixed methods approach fits the aim of this research to develop further insight into parent–teacher relations and their positioning within these relations. This was achieved by using questionnaires and group interviews for both parents and teachers and mixing the data of parents and teachers in the analysis. In order to enhance validity and reliability, critical friends were involved and the participants of the group interviews were also asked to reflect on a summary of their interview. Furthermore, throughout the research process, ethical issues were taken into account. In the next chapter, the analysis of the descriptive information of the samples of parents and teachers will be presented, and the data analysis process of the narrative data will be discussed.
CHAPTER FIVE
DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter provides further details on the analysis procedures that were employed to manage, present, and interpret the data to increase the understanding of parent–teacher relations and to answer the research questions. First, the analysis of the characteristics of the sample will be explained. Thereafter, the process of choosing data analysis procedures for the narrative data is described and justified. Finally, each step of the data analysis process will be explained and illustrated to provide an insight into the procedures that were used to analyse the data.

Analysis of the characteristics of the sample
The data from parents and teachers were analysed using SPSS to provide a description of the sample and to gain an insight into its composition. This is important, because, as Morton et al. (2012) explained, a description of the characteristics of the sample provides information about the quality of the sample and the validity of the data. The data were generated via Survey Monkey and then downloaded as an Excel document. Thereafter, the descriptive data were exported from Excel into SPSS. For the respondents’ age and teachers’ reported years of working experience, both the mean and median were calculated. Parents’ nationality, respondents’ gender, and education levels were first transposed into categorical numerical codes (i.e., 1 = male, 2 = female). Frequencies and percentages for nationality, gender, and education level were then calculated to provide information about the distribution of gender, different nationalities, and education levels within the samples.

Qualitative data analysis procedures
The questionnaire and the group interviews both generated data that Plowright (2011) has referred to as narrative data. As Saldaña (2014) indicated, analysing narrative data requires the researcher to make informed choices and carefully plan the analysis. The data analysis was guided by a comparative approach aimed at developing abstract ideas due to its detailed procedures, systematic approach, and discursive nature (Charmaz, 2014).

The narratives were analysed using a qualitative data analysis programme (Atlas.ti) to generate information from the open-ended questions and the group interviews. Open
coding, which aimed to reveal emerging themes (Newby, 2014) on the positioning of parents and teachers, was used to analyse the data. In line with the thematic analysis process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), the data analysis procedure consisted of three major phases:

1. Organising and coding the data;
2. Developing themes;
3. Defining themes and subthemes.

The following sections provide a detailed account of the analysis procedure employed for the narrative data and show how the themes and subthemes emerged from the analysis.

**Thematic analysis**

There are numerous methods available to manage narrative data, one of which is thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2014). Because the aim of the data analysis is to provide a complex, rich and detailed account of the understandings of parents and teachers about their roles and positions, thematic analysis, as specified by Braun and Clarke (2006), was the data analysis strategy chosen for this research. According to Fram (2013), thematic analysis involves an iterative process of constant recoding and comparing different segments of data. Thematic analysis fits the interpretivist framework adopted and the pragmatic approach of this research, as it supports the identification of patterns in the data that are of interest in parents’ and teachers’ relations and obtains answers that are useful for practice.

Although thematic analysis is widely used, Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that it is not well defined. Therefore, it is important to clarify how thematic analysis is employed in this research.

In phase one, Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that coding involves the search for patterns in the data to capture the important aspects through reading and re-reading, and then naming what can be identified at a semantic level. This involves looking for explicit and observable meaning in order to summarise the observed patterns into one, two or three words. In this phase, initial codes are developed through line-by-line coding (Boeije, 2014), meaning that each line of text is explored individually and every fragment (i.e., an answer to a question or a statement of a participant) is summarised in a word that reflects the meaning represented by the fragment.
In phase two, in line with the phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), patterns are identified by combining initial codes into potential themes that reflect the meaning of an observed pattern.

The third and final phase consists of reviewing and defining the themes and describing what is important in order to discover overall patterns in the data and integrate themes.

During the coding phases, there is a progression in the level of analysis from extremely detailed to a broader, more conceptual level. To provide a more general understanding of the meaning constructed by parents and teachers with regard to their roles and positions, codes that were developed in the first phase were counted to generate numbers that provided an insight into patterns and possible relations. Syed and Nelson (2015) argued that counting codes allows the researcher to develop a more general understanding of the phenomenon studied, while Chi (1997) argued that counting reduces the subjectivity of qualitative coding. Despite these contrasting views, the act of borrowing from quantitative methods has its place in a mixed methods approach and is useful in supporting the analysis of the data as it provides an insight into codes that appear to be of general interest to parents or teachers. Nonetheless, recognising Chi’s (1997) concerns, the main focus remained the analysis of the content of parents’ and teachers’ explanations. Therefore, when a code appeared to be significant for a proportion of parents or teachers, the content of the explanations provided was analysed to determine what was represented in the data and how this seemed to be of significance to parents or teachers. This approach supports comparisons across the data, as suggested by Charmaz (2014), and prevents the statements of parents and teachers being forced into preconceived themes. The themes that were developed in phases two and three supported the development of a more general argument about parent–teacher relations.

The process of analysis
According to Greene (2007), it is important to describe the process of analysis transparently to enhance validity. As discussed earlier, during the process of analysis, both colleagues and someone who was unfamiliar with educational research were involved to increase reliability and further enhance validity. This concurs with the suggestions of Dean et al. (2017) that researchers should share their data to validate or contradict interpretations as a way of ensuring academic rigour.
An important presupposition for this research, in line with Van Langenhove (2017) and Searle (1997), is that all social phenomena are constituted through language and interaction and that people construct the meaning of their world. Furthermore, as Charmaz (2014) explained, the research process itself can be considered a social construct, as it involves more than simply following the phases of thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2006) have presented and is affected by the researcher’s position and perspective. My perspective incorporates theoretical knowledge about the concepts of positioning theory, role theory, and other theories on parent–teacher relationships, which have the potential to create bias. Thus, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the choices that are made throughout the process and the steps that are taken within the thematic analysis will be explained in the following sections to justify the data analysis procedure employed.

**Phase 1: Organising and coding the data**

Reading the questionnaire responses, listening to the recordings of the group interviews and transcribing the interviews are the first tasks required when researchers are familiarising themselves with the data, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). During this early stage, in line with the suggestions for analysing narrative data that were described by Saldaña (2014), notes were written (i.e., memos) and voice recordings were made by the researcher to capture ideas that emerged or to describe thoughts and reflections that occurred. Secondly, data processing continued by becoming familiar with the data through reading and re-reading (Charmaz, 2014). Thirdly, after becoming immersed in the data, the more formal process of coding was started.

The data were organised into text units in a manner that was appropriate for the analysis of the data (Saldaña, 2014); this meant the questionnaire data and the interview data for parents and teachers were stored as separate files, thus forming four separate text files. The data were first stored in Excel (questionnaire data) and Word (transcripts of the interviews). Next, the data were uploaded to Atlas.ti for computer-assisted analysis. For each group of respondents, two distinct units were created, where one unit consisted of group interview transcripts and the other consisted of answers to the questionnaire. These units of data were each stored as one extended data file in Atlas.ti., described as a hermeneutic unit. In total, four hermeneutic units (two for parents and two for teachers) were created, as presented in Table 5.1.
Table 5.1: Units of data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hermeneutic unit</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents: questionnaire data</td>
<td>Answers per respondent</td>
<td>4 descriptive answers: N=367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents: group interviews</td>
<td>Group interview transcripts</td>
<td>3 transcripts: N=17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers: questionnaire data</td>
<td>Answers per respondent</td>
<td>4 descriptive answers: N=80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers: group interviews</td>
<td>Group interview transcripts</td>
<td>3 transcripts: N=17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within a hermeneutic unit, each group interview or each individual respondent was distinguished and could be treated separately for coding and further analysis.

Charmaz (2014) explained how line-by-line coding is necessary when searching for meaning in the data and how developing initial codes that summarise what is presented in each answer enhances the analytical approach to the data. Therefore, initial codes were developed by labelling sentences (i.e., line-by-line coding) with a word or a short note that summarised what the data appeared to represent in each text fragment. Labelling sentences supported an analytical approach, because it allowed the researcher to stay as close as possible to the meaning of the original quotations of the participants. As initial codes recurred and summarising notes accumulated, a broader understanding of the data was gradually developed. Table 5.2 provides an example of labelled sentences, and Appendix 9.1 (p. 179) shows fragments of the questionnaire data of parents with the accompanying list of initial codes.
Table 5.2: Example of labelled sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers parents provided to the question: What do you expect when collaborating with teachers?</th>
<th>Initial codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be informed with regard to my child’s progression at school and help at school every now and then. (P5)</td>
<td>Become informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child’s progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating well means that parent and teacher listen to each other and agree on things. I expect my child to get good grades and behave well. (P6)</td>
<td>Listen to each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child’s progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child behaving well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the teacher to provide information on time and be friendly toward children. (P10)</td>
<td>Teacher-directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Become informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendly toward child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A factor of great significance for the analysis is that the data were gathered in Dutch. Temple and Young (2000) argued that researchers need to be aware of the importance of translation when working with data in a different language from the one in which the study is reported, because translation might change the meaning of participants’ words and the researcher has a responsibility to represent participants correctly. To develop codes that are actually grounded in the data, the decision was made to code the Dutch data into initial Dutch codes to ensure that as little meaning as possible would be lost in the process of coding due to translation issues. This is in line with the suggestion of Van Nes et al. (2010), who recommended that research should remain for as long and as far as possible in the original language to avoid possible adverse influences and lost meaning due to translation. Appendix 10 (p. 182) presents examples of fragments of the Dutch data and their translations in English after the coding process was finished.

Within each hermeneutic unit, it is easy to make comparisons across files. For example, when opening the list of codes and clicking on a code, all the text fragments that received the same code will be listed and can easily be accessed and compared to observe how the expressions of respondents differ or show similarities. Additionally, the codes within each hermeneutic unit could be easily compared and linked with each other. Bryant (2014) explained how initial codes need to be compared and clustered in order to work towards a more abstract level of codes. For example, initial codes like ‘assessing’, ‘judging’ and ‘determining for position’ were clustered because these codes seemed to represent similar
meanings. Codes that appeared to link together were then listed and sometimes renamed after rereading the data. For example, ‘determining for position’ was renamed ‘position finding’, because this appeared to better reflect the fact that parents tried to position themselves strategically. Rereading the data and recording emergent ideas in writing memos or making voice recordings supported this process. Also, codes were renamed during this phase; for instance, ‘teacher-directed’ was renamed as ‘teacher’s initiative’ to reflect descriptions indicating that the teacher should take the initiative or is the person responsible. Appendix 9.2 (p. 180) presents a fragment of a group interview transcription with accompanying initial codes and merged codes. Table 5.3 provides examples of data fragments and codes.

Table 5.3: Examples of data fragments and codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fragment</th>
<th>Initial codes</th>
<th>Merged codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T2: Well, as a teacher in the lower grades I think for me it also concerns working with parents as co-educator. So, actually I cooperate with parents to see how we can help John, Peter or Nick develop further.</td>
<td>Co-educator, Working with parents, Difference lower-upper grades</td>
<td>Co-educator, Collaborating, Different approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1: Well, I reconsidered that. I too thought this way for a very long time. Until I… actually it was about half a year ago… I realised it was a missed opportunity. Not only the cognitive development, but also social emotional development is to be considered very important.</td>
<td>Reconsidering, Missed opportunity, Cognitive development, Importance of social emotional learning</td>
<td>Reflection, Transformation, Well-being</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is a time-consuming process to work systematically through all the data to focus on each fragment while summarising what is read into codes that adequately represent the outlines of the data and to identify interesting patterns or connections (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Diverse notes were written or voice-recorded during this phase to support the analytical process because, according to Saldaña (2014), notes and voice-recordings capture interesting aspects, support comparison of data, and enhance familiarisation with the data. Appendix 11 (p.188) provides some examples of different notes. During this phase, as many codes from the data as possible were assembled through line-by-line coding, as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006). This resulted in an extended list of codes, which needed to be processed into a smaller number of more abstract themes.
Phase 2: Developing themes

After the initial coding phase, the different lists of codes were extracted and downloaded from Atlas.ti to facilitate the second major phase. During this phase, codes were collated and organised while searching for themes. Bryant (2014) explained that it is important to move the process of conceptualisation forward by developing themes that reflect a higher level of abstraction. Initially, codes from parent and teacher information were separately listed and then sorted into emergent themes. The codes from both the questionnaire responses and the interviews were combined in this list to provide a complete description and to enable a comparison of parents’ and teachers’ reflections on perceived positions, roles, and expectations. To develop themes, codes and their associated indications were compared with other codes (Boeije, 2014). When a theme was assigned to a group of codes that indicated the same meaning, the significance of the theme was assessed by determining its relevance by re-reading the data and highlighting codes that were excessively discussed or mentioned repeatedly by different participants. Charmaz (2014) argued that re-reading and gathering data relevant to each emerging theme supports a thorough coding process. Table 5.4 presents an example of a list of initial codes that are related and the theme that is considered to represent these codes. After re-reading the data, a description of the theme was generated, reflecting how the theme was represented in the questionnaire and interview data.

Table 5.4: Initial codes related to ‘Normative assumptions’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Normative assumptions</th>
<th>Initial codes from parents’ data</th>
<th>Initial codes from teachers’ data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be involved</td>
<td>Be involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show interest</td>
<td>Show interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be open</td>
<td>Be open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be accessible</td>
<td>Be available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show an open/involved attitude</td>
<td>Be present</td>
<td>Support (child, class or teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be approachable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be proactive (to inform parents or in tailoring the child’s needs)</td>
<td>Assist/volunteer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be receptive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities for contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During this phase, 11 different themes emerged. Boeije (2014) indicates that it is important to make informed choices about themes that emerge from the initial codes. Therefore, the initial codes were collated into emerging themes and compared with relevant data fragments which yielded a higher level of abstraction and provided a skeleton of the analysis. Table 5.5 presents the themes that were derived from the initial codes.

Table 5.5: Emerging themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes: parent’s data</th>
<th>Themes: teacher’s data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependency</td>
<td>Dependency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational moral order</td>
<td>Organisational moral order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligations</td>
<td>Obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative assumptions</td>
<td>Normative assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(In)equality</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerations</td>
<td>Attitudes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After defining these themes, the data were revisited to determine the relevance and adequacy of the initial themes. This led to major changes, since re-reading, reorganising codes and writing up a first data analysis, led to developing insights about overlapping themes and a growing awareness about the level of abstraction of the themes with regard to parents’ and teachers’ positioning, roles and relations. The codes and themes were subsequently discussed and further developed in co-operation with two colleagues. This resulted in alterations, for example the emerging themes ‘normative assumptions’ and ‘obligations’ were merged into the subtheme ‘latent tensions’ (appendix 12.1, p. 189) since this better reflected how parents’ and teachers’ expectations of each other appear to be conflicting. Furthermore, the emerging themes ‘inequality’ and ‘professionalism’ were subsumed into ‘legitimacy’ (appendix 12.2, p. 191), since parents and teachers appeared to construct arguments about the legitimacy of their positions and their role enactment. After reviewing and refining the themes, the overall picture of the data appeared to be reflected in two main themes and four subthemes. During this phase, the data were translated and a professional translator, as suggested by Van Nes et al. (2010), was consulted occasionally.
to determine the best way to reflect the meaning of the participants’ statements and to check translated transcripts for accuracy.

**Phase 3: Defining themes and subthemes**

The final coding phase consisted of matching the emerging themes to the research questions. The aim of this coding phase is to review themes that emerged from the data in the light of the research questions and the theoretical framework. The themes that emerged during the second phase were regrouped and interpreted at a conceptual level to reflect how themes relate to each other, with the aim of integrating the themes into a framework.

The themes were defined and further refined. The essence of each theme was described in detail and fragments of the data were linked to the themes to determine what aspect of the data was reflected in each theme. Each theme was described in relation to the parents’ and teachers’ data in order to compare and contrast what the data revealed with regard to parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their collaborative relations. This resulted in two tables (Appendices 12.1, p. 183 and 12.2, p. 185) which provide a clear account of the relation between the two main themes ‘strained relations’ and ‘ambivalence’ and relevant data fragments. Table 5.5 presents an excerpt of the table for the theme ‘strained relations’.

**Table 5.6: Development of the theme ‘strained relations’**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme:</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strained relations:</strong> Strained relations can be observed in the data as a result of parents’ and teachers compelling and conflicting expectations of each other’s appropriate role enactment on one hand and enacted tensions in strained interactions on the other hand.</td>
<td><strong>Latent tensions:</strong> Potential tensions appear to play a role in parent-teacher relations. Expectations of parents and teachers are contradictory or are likely to induce tensions.</td>
<td>Teachers: To be present To be involved Be visible Participate Stay in contact with the teacher Think with school/teacher</td>
<td>Q-T30: Parents should show their involvement by volunteering for excursions or by indicating that they are not able to attend (sometimes we don’t get any response). Q-T32: I appreciate it if parents show involvement with their child’s class and assist if necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Charmaz (2014), themes at a conceptual level support the development of a coherent and comprehensible analysis that may be presented as hypotheses, a theoretical model or a narrative. For this research, a narrative approach is adopted. This is presented in
the next chapters, and suggestions for practical application in parent–teacher relations will also be made. However, developing themes and concepts is a somewhat ambiguous process as Leavy (2014) rightfully indicates. Gentles et al. (2014) demonstrate that on the one hand, the themes are founded in the data and emerge during the coding process, but on the other hand, as researchers are inclined to use concepts from their field, preconceptions are inevitable. However, the iterative process of coding, memo-writing, defining themes, discussing themes and returning to the data supported reflection and maintaining a certain distance. Charmaz (2014) argues that this allows the development of a warrantable data analysis and valid conclusions.

**Summary**

Thematic analysis fits the interpretivist framework chosen and the pragmatic approach of this research, since constant comparative data analysis is aimed at searching for meaning and patterns in the data of parents and teachers concerning their relations. Because of the large dataset, counting codes supported the search for patterns in the data.

The process of analysis in the three major phases described above, progressed from detailed analysis to developing themes at a conceptual level. The constant comparison of codes with data, codes with codes and developed themes with codes and data, allowed the development of themes at a conceptual level that supports a theory about what is to be learnt from this research about parent–teacher relations. My position as a researcher influences how I approach and interpret the data. Therefore, during the process of analysis, it has been important to share my data with colleagues and someone not familiar with educational research to contradict or validate my interpretations.

An important point of interest is the fact that the results are based on Dutch data. Therefore, as a way to avoid the loss of meaning by translating data at an early phase, the first two phases of coding and developing themes were conducted in Dutch. The data was translated by the researcher with the support of a professional translator. The final phase, defining themes and subthemes, was written in English.

The next chapter presents the response rates and the characteristics of the sample.
The aim of this research is to investigate how parents and teachers position themselves and each other within their collaborative relations and to clarify the conflicting positioning between parents and teachers as different stakeholders in the relationship they develop.

Two research questions are central to this thesis research:

(1) To what extent are tensions in parent-teacher relations a product of their conflicting positionings?

(2) To what extent does the transactional positioning of parents and teachers in their collaborative relations lead to possible conflict and tensions in their interactions with each other?

For this research, data from a large varied sample of parents and teachers connected to five Dutch urban schools was generated. The data provided surprising and worrying insights into parents’ and teachers’ positioning and their role conception, since conflicting interests appear to inform their relations. The analysis of the data led to two major themes that reflect the conflicts and tensions observed in the information provided by participants. These themes provide some interesting clues about why building collaborative parent-teacher relations appears to be such a difficult issue to crack, despite many plans and policies.

This chapter provides a general introduction to the findings of this research. In this chapter, insight is provided into the response rate for parents and teachers at each school and participants in the sample are introduced in detail to provide insight into the characteristics of the parents and teachers who reflected on their collaborative relationships with each other. Chapters seven and eight will provide a more detailed account of the findings of the research.

Response rates
To provide insight into the response rate of this thesis research, the number of parents and teachers that responded at each participating school is presented. This is important, since
Baruch and Holtom (2008) argue that knowing something about the response rate in a research project helps the reader assess the credibility and value of the data.

Questionnaire responses

Parents and teachers from five different schools reflected on their experiences in parent–teacher relationships by means of an online questionnaire. The population of parents connected to each school varied from a maximum of 364 parents to a minimum of 111 parents. Using the average school population of 130 families (Considering Averages, 2016) as a size comparator, the sample consists of four larger schools and one smaller school. All schools are situated in an urban area. Every family and every teacher connected to the school received the questionnaire once via email.

The response rate for parents varied from 9% at one school to 30% or higher at the other four schools. Of the five schools that took part in the research, the proportion of responses at the four schools can be regarded as comparable to the average response rate of 33% achieved in online questionnaires (Duncan, 2008). Table 6.1 provides insight into the response proportion for parents per school.

Table 6.1: Proportion of parents that responded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Unusable</th>
<th>Remaining</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=5</td>
<td>N=1284</td>
<td>N=428</td>
<td>N=61</td>
<td>N=367</td>
<td>14% 86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Baruch and Holtom (2008) argued that it is important to provide information about the proportion of usable questionnaires. They argued that this provides one indication of the quality of the sample, although it does not automatically indicate higher or lower levels of accuracy or the usefulness of the data collected in the research. A non-response rate for parents of 60% or more at each school indicates that not all parents were able to complete the questionnaire or were possibly not interested in participating. According to Newby (2014), non-response in research may have an impact on the validity of the study, because
the sample may not be typical of the population; for instance, in this study, only highly educated parents or those parents convinced that parent–teacher relationships are vital may have responded.

It is important to note that, at School 4, the responses of parents were increased by the intervention of the student researcher carrying out her Master of Education thesis. Due to response rates falling short of expectations and the suspicion that language problems were influencing parents’ responses because most parents connected to this school were immigrants, the student advocated intervention to increase the response rate. The student recruited parents from the parent-council and provided laptops so that parents could complete the questionnaire during a parent information night. Parents from the parent-council explained the research to other parents, invited them to answer the questions, and were available to translate when parents indicated they could not read and write in Dutch. The involvement of other parents might have influenced the answers parents provided or answers may have been modified as they were translated by other parents. According to Temple and Young (2004), the risk of information being modified during the process of translation has a possible impact on the reliability of the information gathered. This should be addressed when considering the conclusions of this research.

In total, 27 parents from all the schools indicated raised objections regarding the use of the information they provided for this research. They only approved the use of those answers that were positive for the school. Additionally, 34 parents did not provide answers that were suitable for analysis in light of the research questions, such as ‘good’ or ‘the teacher is nice’, or parents only provided information about their backgrounds and did not answer any of the questions on parent–teacher relationships. This could be an indication of weaknesses in the questionnaire design, such as wording issues or length (Newby, 2014). Alternatively, it could be that parents found open-ended questions difficult to answer, possibly as a result of language problems (Adams and Cox, 2008) due to difficulties with the mastery of Dutch or limited reading and writing skills. After removing these questionnaires from the dataset, 367 questionnaires remained for the purposes of analysis.

In comparison to the sample of parents, the proportion of usable questionnaires for teachers was relatively higher. This may in part be related to the fact that, at two schools, teachers were explicitly given time to complete the questionnaire during a meeting. Table 6.2 provides an overview of the proportion of teachers responding at each school.
Table 6.2: Proportion of teachers that responded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Unusable</th>
<th>Remaining</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=5</td>
<td>N=144</td>
<td>N=95</td>
<td>N=15</td>
<td>N=80</td>
<td>16% 84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of responses (n = 80, 56%) is comparable with the response rates of individuals in organisations, which Baruch and Holtom (2008) found to be 52% across 152 survey studies. The proportion of teachers that responded in each school varied from a minimum of 35% to a maximum of 68%. Nevertheless, a relatively large percentage of teachers did not complete the questionnaire. Furthermore, 36 respondents (45% of total respondents) within the sample of teachers are connected to one school. Therefore, the samples were not equally divided and balanced, which means that the total sample may not be an actual reflection of the teaching population. Resultantly, the data may be skewed and not necessarily be typical of the characteristic views of teachers.

Group interview response
At three of the five schools, more than 30 parents indicated that they were willing to participate in a group interview; however, at the two other schools, only seven parents expressed willingness to participate. These parents provided their names and email addresses. In response to an email invitation (Appendix 2, p. 166), three group interviews were arranged at three different schools.

Among the 80 teachers that responded to the questionnaire, 23 teachers indicated that they were prepared to participate in group discussions. Nonetheless, it proved to be difficult to make an appointment at two of the five schools due to scheduling problems caused by the teachers’ workload. Therefore, group interviews with teachers were conducted at only three schools.
In total, three group interviews with parents and three group interviews with teachers were conducted in May and June 2016, each lasting one hour. Tables 6.3 and 6.4 show the number of participants and the composition of each group.

Table 6.3: Group interview sample of parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Children in grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 male and 5 female</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 5, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 female</td>
<td>2, 3, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 male and 5 female</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=3 interviews</td>
<td>N=17</td>
<td>Male n=2, female n=15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4: Group interview sample of teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Teaching in grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 male and 2 female</td>
<td>1, 3, 5, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 female</td>
<td>3, 4, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9 female</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=3 interviews</td>
<td>N=17</td>
<td>Male n=2, female n=15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire data and group interview transcriptions resulted in a large and rich dataset, which was the basis for the themes and subthemes as presented in the sections that follow.

Characteristics of the sample

In this section, the characteristics of the samples will be presented. To enhance transparency, Greene (2007) argued that it is imperative to provide insight into the composition of the sample to give the reader an idea of the distinctive features of groups of participants. Hence, the characteristics of the group of parents and the group of teachers who participated in this research are presented. First, the characteristics of the sample of parents that completed the questionnaire and participated in the group interviews is discussed. This is followed by a discussion of the characteristics of the sample of teachers who responded to the questionnaire and who participated in the group interviews.

Sample of parents

Table 6.5 shows that most respondents to the questionnaire were mothers.
Table 6. 5: Parents’ age and gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>30-67</td>
<td>26-55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of sample</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution of participants in the sample indicates there were more mothers than fathers, meaning that data will largely reflect the views and experiences of mothers. Resultantly, the sample may not reflect the variation of experiences and views concerning parent-teacher relations that might be expected in the general population. Also, it appears to be reflective of the traditional division of roles between parents. This is in line with Vincent (2017), who argued that parenting and involvement with a child’s schooling in modern society still seems largely to be the responsibility of mothers. Although this might affect the findings, it is difficult to gauge to what extent as, according to Bakker et al. (2013), the differences between fathers and mothers are unclear in terms of their involvement practices. The age of the responding parents varied, although most of the parents who responded (333, 90%) were aged between 31 and 47 years old. At every school involved in this research, parents were spread over different grades, suggesting that the data yields valid information about parent–teacher relations across all the different grades. Nevertheless, the majority of parents had children in Grades 1 to 5 and slightly fewer parents had children in Grades 6 to 8. Table 6.6 shows the proportion of parents in each of the five schools according to the grade their child was attending.

Table 6. 6: Proportion of parents represented per grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.7: Parents’ country of origin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Examples of other countries that were most frequently mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands (n=259, 71%)</td>
<td>Morocco (n=31 = 8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (n=108, 29%)</td>
<td>Turkey (n=15 = 4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surinam (n=5 = 1.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany (n=3 = 0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>France (n=3 = 0.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents had graduated from different levels of education, ranging from being highly educated to having attended lower levels of education. The majority of parents, however, graduated from higher professional education or university (n=239, 65%, N=367). In comparison, 30.1% of the population in the Netherlands graduated from higher professional education or university (Education Numbers, 2017). The over-representation of highly educated parents in the sample could potentially influence the outcomes as parents who are highly educated appear to develop better relationships with teachers (Schools Inspectorate, 2016). One-third of the parents (n=114) reported having either received practical training or completed primary or secondary education. Table 6.8 shows the different levels of education from which parents graduated.

Table 6.8: Parents’ level of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher professional education</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate vocational education</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary or secondary education</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education in country of origin not specified</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to note that the answers to the four open-ended questions of all 367 parents did not differ significantly. In appendix 13.1 (p. p. 194) examples of quotations of parents with different backgrounds are presented to compare their expectations. The only notable differences were for instance the emphasis parents with other backgrounds placed on the child to be successful at school, the wording or the commentary that teachers should be aware of the language difficulties some parents experience in their contact with the teacher. This suggests that parents and teachers construct ideas about their role based on their experiences when entering schools and the structures developed in schools might reinforce these ideas (Ishimaru, 2014). Hence, although the group of parents was not entirely homogenous, they are treated here as such, because the main features of positioning, interaction and transaction have been found to hold true over diverse populations as was demonstrated by, for example, Matthiesen (2016) and Freeman (2010) in their research on distinctive groups of parents.

The parents (n=17) who took part in the group interviews all had one or more children in different grades throughout primary education (Table 6.3). Participating parents primarily graduated from higher professional education or university; two parents graduated from intermediate vocational education. Parents’ ages varied from 27 to 54 years of age, with a median of 40. This suggests that the group interview sample did not differ significantly from the questionnaire sample and therefore only the skewness in education level and as a result of the majority of respondents being mothers (as previously discussed for the questionnaire sample) need to be presumed in the group sample.

Sample of teachers
Among the 80 responding teachers, the majority were women (n=71, 89%). This is likely to influence the data, as the proportion of men and women is not equally divided within this sample (Newby, 2014). Male teachers might develop different views and ideas with regard to parent–teacher relationships. Most teachers graduated from teacher training courses at a university of applied sciences, (n=62, 77.5%). The remaining teachers graduated from a Master of Education (MEd) programme (n=14, 17.5%) or university (n=4, 5%). Table 6.9 shows that the teachers’ ages are widely distributed with a significant amount of variation, as is their work experience.
Table 6.9: Teachers’ age and work experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Range in years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Min. 22 – max. 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Min. 1 – max. 42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the differences observed within the sample of teachers, the data did not indicate any significant differences in the data from male and female teachers, teachers of different ages and teachers with different education levels. Appendix 13.2 (p. 196) provides some examples of quotes from male and female teachers of different ages and different graduation levels.

Within every group of participating teachers (N=17) there were teachers of lower school, middle school and the final years of primary school, spread across grades 1 to 8. Teachers’ ages ranged from 26 – 53 years of age, with a median of 39. The group interview sample of teachers did not differ significantly from the questionnaire sample.

Comparing data

The focus of this research is to compare and contrast parents’ and teachers’ perceived positioning in the relationships they develop. Therefore, the classification of parents and teachers as different groups of participants is considered of primary importance. This distinction is justified by the aim of the research: to determine what ideas parents and teachers construct with regard to their roles and what kind of positions they both assume and assign to each other in their relations. The comparison of data from parents and teachers with their different demographics revealed only minor differences. Hence, it is considered legitimate to make a general comparison between parents’ and teachers’ data. Nonetheless, the detailed account of the composition of the samples provided here is believed to enhance transparency and to support a complete and thorough presentation of the results of this research. Furthermore, a rich and thick description of the samples for research, as presented here, furthers an understanding of the relevance of the data, as was argued by Creswell (2014, p. 252). According to Boeije (2014), this enables the findings to be compared with other situations or populations. This is important as it allows readers to determine whether the findings of this research are relevant to other parents and teachers or in other settings, such as the Dutch scenario or an English environment.
Summary
The results of this research reflect tensions and conflicts that appear to inform parents’ and teachers positioning in their relations. The descriptive analysis of the characteristics of the sample indicated that the data generated for this research incorporated information from a limited group of parents and teachers due to various factors, including the fact that the majority of parents who responded were highly educated and there were higher proportions of both mothers and female teachers. This has to be considered when interpreting the findings of the research. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the presence of fathers and parents from linguistic and ethnic minorities (e.g., Morocco) in the data. Although this is not the focus of the research, the experiences of these parents are likely to be different from the ‘norm’ of Dutch mothers in significant ways and must also be considered when interpreting the research findings. Nonetheless, the large sample of respondents yielded a rich and extensive dataset from which valid conclusions can be drawn. Despite small differences observed within the samples of parents and teachers, the data of parents could be compared with the data of teachers and vice versa. Two overarching themes emerged that are important for understanding parents’ and teachers’ conflicting interests and the tensions observed in practice: strained relations and ambivalence. In the next two chapters, the findings of the empirical research will be presented in relation to the themes.
CHAPTER SEVEN
STRAINED RELATIONS

In this chapter, the first of two chapters about the findings of the empirical research, the themes and subthemes are introduced. Thereafter, the findings are presented and discussed in the light of the theme ‘strained relations’. Parents’ and teachers’ data will be mixed as evidence to support this theme. The data of parents and teachers are compared and contrasted, to gain an insight into the way the perceived positions of parents and teachers locate them within their collaborative relations.

Quotes are presented as follows:
G: group interview
Q: questionnaire
P: parent
T: teacher.

Numbers for group interviews refer to sequence, for example, the third group interview is G3. Numbers for individual parents and teachers in interviews and questionnaires are assigned to anonymise participants, for example Q-P300 and G3-T9.

Themes and subthemes
A schematic overview of the themes and subthemes is presented in figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: Schematic overview of themes and subthemes
As shown in the diagram, on the basis of the qualitative data analysis, two main themes were identified regarding parents’ and teachers’ positioning in the relationship they develop: ‘strained relations’ and ‘ambivalence’. These themes reflect crucial aspects of parents’ and teachers’ transactional positioning at a conceptual level. This adds an important perspective to our understanding of positioning and how the conflicting interests of parents and teachers appear to inform their collaborative relations. To provide a clear view of each theme, the relevant findings are presented in separate chapters. The rest of this chapter discusses the findings for the theme ‘strained relations’, while Chapter Eight discusses the findings for the theme ‘ambivalence’. The remaining themes that were identified are presented as subthemes under these two overarching main themes, as they reflect aspects of either ‘strained relations’ or ‘ambivalence’.

The data analysis showed that the theme ‘strained relations’ reflects how ‘latent tensions’ and ‘strained interactions’ might have influenced parents’ and teachers’ relations. The conflicting interests of parents and teachers in their expectations of each other’s appropriate role enactment seem to create latent tensions that appear to be present in parent-teacher relations. Furthermore, parents and teachers appear to position each other on the basis of their experiences in practice. Parents’ and teachers’ accounts of their interactions in practice show that tensions are enacted, resulting in strained relations.

The theme ‘ambivalence’ refers to the seemingly contradictory way parents and teachers appear to position themselves when explaining what they consider to be a legitimate position in their relations, namely the perceived ‘legitimacy’ of their role. Furthermore, the ways both parents and teachers position themselves in practice also appear to contradict each other. Additionally, parents and teachers seem to modify their behaviour as a result of their ‘appraisal’ of each other, making their positioning appear even more ambivalent.

These themes provided greater insight into the data at a conceptual level which, according to Saldaña (2014), is the result of scrutinising the data for themes and working rigorously and reflexively. The themes ‘strained relations’ and ‘ambivalent positioning’ encompass the overall story that was reported by parents and teachers about their relations.

**Introduction to the theme ‘strained relations’**

Strained relations between parents and teachers can be identified through the data, where parents and teachers explained their expectations of and experiences in collaborating with
each other and when they explained their perceptions of each other’s roles in their collaborative relations. This theme reflects how parents and teachers position each other. In so doing, they express firm ideas about each other’s roles and interests. These ideas are often conflicting and hence might easily result in tensions. For example, some parents in this study express an expectation that teachers should be closely involved with their child as an individual, whilst some teachers stressed that parents need to understand that the child is part of a group. Furthermore, during the group interviews, it was observed that tensions were enacted in practice. For example, parents and teachers discussed the tensions they experienced when interacting if the other was perceived as too definite or too demanding in a conversation. Indeed, there were many other instances when parents and teachers reported experiencing strained interactions with each other. First, the strained relations observed in the data will be discussed in the light of the tensions that seem to underlie parent–teacher relations, as noted above. Secondly, the strained interactions that parents and teachers might have experienced in interaction are discussed in terms of how they seem to be enacted in practice.
Sub-theme 1: Latent tensions
The underlying tensions in parent–teacher relations reported in this study can be inferred as operating when parents and teachers exemplify their positioning of each other. Such latent tensions might arise when parents and teachers develop presuppositions about each other’s role enactment. These presuppositions may include prescriptive ideas about behaviours that are considered as cooperative and beneficial to their own positioning in the relationship. Koenig and Eagly (2014) demonstrated that specific roles in a social context, such as a school, generate ideas as to what is considered socially acceptable behaviour. This underlines the importance of the concept of role, as presented in the model of transactional positioning. However, the findings in this study suggest that, instead of the importance of developing an understanding that one’s own role is conditional for acting appropriately, as stressed by Lynch (2007), ideas about the roles of others also seem to be of importance in parent–teacher relations. Parents, for example, explained that it is important for the teacher to involve them in decisions and to value their opinion, while teachers stressed that parents should support the teacher’s decisions and not undermine them. These contradictory expectations of each other’s position appear to produce latent tensions. This can result in strained relations and even conflict in practice when one party does not seem to act in ways the other considers appropriate for their role.

Group interests versus individuality
Preconceptions of parents and teachers seem to generate unspoken norms for appropriate behaviours prior to interaction, as was also demonstrated by Ishimaru (2014) in a study of parent–school relations. The questionnaire responses particularly appeared to indicate norms that remain unspoken in practice. Parents and teachers explicitly discussed what they consider to be the ‘right’ behaviour of the other when working together. Some teachers (n=34, 42%), for example, expect parents to be involved with their child’s class or with the school as a whole, while parents are focused on their child’s individual experiences and development and, in line with this, also expect teachers to focus on their child as an individual. This seems to indicate that both parties have contradictory expectations of each other’s enactment of roles. For example, teachers explained:

Parents must be motivated for and show involvement with their child’s schooling and their child’s school. Especially collaborating on activities that require help from parents. [...] Parents should show more involvement. Show more interest in
what happens at school. Be present at school more often. Especially information nights are poorly visited. (Q-T6)

Parents must be aware that there are several tasks/odd jobs for them to assist. (Q-T59)

Parents’ role is to show involvement with their child’s school. (Q-T68)

These teachers appear to value parents’ visible involvement with their child’s class or school by assisting where necessary and by their presence at events and information nights. This is in line with the findings of Christianakis (2011) regarding teachers’ perceptions of adequate parental involvement. Teachers who appear to assign increased value to parents’ involvement with the school as a whole seem to be those who teach in Grade three or higher. In fact, only one teacher from Grade two endorsed the importance of parental involvement at the school level.

In contrast to teachers’ expectations of parents being involved with their child’s class or school, a majority of parents (n=294, 81%) expect teachers to be involved with their child at an individual level. This contradicts the expectations of teachers that parents should be involved in their child’s class or at a school level, which could potentially lead to tensions in their relations. Parents explained, for example:

The teacher needs to take care of my son. Report everything, also when he fell or misbehaved. (Q-P10)

Above all, I want that the teachers keep an eye on my child. (Q-P79)

I think they should start with taking time to think about the children that enter their class. And make plans for every child individually. (Q-P90)

Instead of being involved with their child’s class, these parents are strongly engaged in their child’s personal educational trajectory. They want the teacher to report everything that happens with their child, to develop individual plans catered towards each child, and to ensure that the child’s progress is adequately monitored. As Ivan et al. (2015) and Ule et al. (2015) showed, parents expect teachers and schools to support their child’s schooling
and consider proper education to be a top priority, because education is considered to play a decisive role in the child’s future. The data presented above reflect a similar orientation among parents and suggest that they expect teachers to see and treat their child as an individual. Some teachers (n=18, 23%), mainly those who teach in Grade five or higher, appear to notice the individualised orientation of parents, but this contradicts their positioning that they have to work with a group of children and are therefore required to deal with many parents. This suggests that another source of tension, in addition to the tension stemming from the need to show attention to the whole group or individual children, influences parents’ and teachers’ collaborative relations. Teachers explained, for example:

*Sometimes I feel like parents do not fully understand that their child is part of a group and that this requires adaptation to the circumstances. Too often children are viewed by their parents as a little prince or princess for whom everything should be pleasant.* (Q-T48)

*Furthermore, parents seem to forget that we have to deal with 58 other parents. Or with 29 other kids.* (Q-T56)

*Parents should be sympathetic with the fact that the child is part of a group. They should have sympathy for the complexity of the teachers’ profession.* (Q-T69)

The data presented here suggest that latent tensions underlie parent-teacher relations as teachers feel that parents should show understanding and sympathy in regard to their position as group workers. Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) argued that positioning of oneself always involves positioning of someone else. It is interesting to observe that, in the data parents and teachers provided about each other’s position, positioning of oneself is also apparent. This underlines the value of the concept of positioning as explained in the model of transactional positioning, as it can be argued that tensions seem to be displayed in the way parents and teachers position each other. In this case, teachers position parents as being insufficiently sympathetic in regard to their position, while positioning themselves explicitly as group workers. When considering the implications of this, it should be noted that Rodriguez and Elbaum (2013) demonstrated that the student–teacher ratio is an important factor associated with the way parents perceive the quality of their relationships with teachers. Teachers have less time to build and maintain relationships with individual
parents as the number of students for whom the teacher is responsible increases. In particular, when parents expect teachers to inform them personally about their children, this is likely to produce tension, because the average student–teacher ratio in the Netherlands of 23 children per class (Considering Averages, n.d.) does not allow teachers to inform all parents about their children on a daily basis.

The data presented above suggest that some teachers find the individual orientation of parents to be challenging, and position parents as unsympathetic with their role as group workers. In contrast with this positioning, parents (n=263, 72%) frequently explained that they expect teachers to make time and interact with them at a personal level whenever required, which is likely to increase the pressure on teachers. For example, parents explained how teachers should inform them immediately and personally when something important occurs regarding their child:

*When there is even the smallest complaint about my child, the teacher should inform me immediately.* (Q-P24)

*I expect the teacher to call me in if there is anything I can do to support my child at home or at school. Also, that she calls me in or asks questions if there is something that she is not able to place with regard to my child.* (Q-P71)

*[I expect that teachers will] take time for parents (of course it’s allowed to make an appointment) … see every child’s talent, check if the parent understands the teacher’s language, be open and respectful toward parents, approach parents proactively if collaborating is in the interest of the child’s enjoyment of school.* (Q-P277)

Evidence from this study also suggests there are parents who expect teachers to inform them as soon as there is something worth discussing about their own child. Furthermore, they seem to expect the teacher to be proactive and to take the time to approach them in person. This is in line with the findings of Rodiguez et al. (2014), who found in their research on parents’ views of school’s efforts at involvement that parents assign high value to frequent communication with teachers and expect teachers to keep them continuously informed about their child’s progress. The child’s interests seem to be central in parents’ expectations of appropriate role enactment among teachers. Parents’ expectations of
teachers’ positioning toward them indicate that they aim to achieve the best education possible for their child and desire to maintain close involvement in the process. This is in line with the observations of Vincent (2017) and Ivan et al. (2015), who found that parents closely monitor their child’s development and feel a strong sense of responsibility for their child’s schooling. The data presented above suggest that parents expect teachers to acknowledge the role of the parent as vital and to involve them in their child’s experiences at school.

Nonetheless, teachers in each group interview stated that they do not have sufficient time for oral communication or expressed that it is only necessary to communicate at a personal level in case of serious problems. For example, one teacher explained that there is no time to communicate on a daily basis with every parent about their child:

Yes, and parents aren’t ready to let go of their child yet. That’s a process. When parents enter the school, they remember the attention they received at the day-care centre before that; there is always time to hand over the child, at least 10 minutes per child so to speak, anyway there is a moment every day where you speak to your child’s carer. School’s a bit different. We don’t have 10 minutes per child every day to hand over the child to the parent. […] There is less time available. Although you try to stay in close contact with them. (G2-T3)

This teacher suggested that parents have to become accustomed to the fact that at primary school, there is less scope for oral communication about the child’s experiences. Despite the needs of parents, as reported earlier, the data presented above suggest that teachers feel there is no time to hand over children to their parents every day. This underlines the findings of Adams and Christenson (2000) that interacting with the individual parents of all children for whom teachers are responsible is difficult to manage alongside the numerous daily teaching demands. However, in the light of Epstein’s (2011) argument that teachers and parents need to invest in their relations in order to support the child’s schooling, forming a relationship that actually supports the child’s development when there is limited time for interaction creates additional pressure, which is a possible source of strained relations. In fact, Dahl (2017) observed that teachers felt pressurised by parental cooperation because, in their opinion, it distracted them from their major professional responsibility to teach children and establish a pedagogical practice that serves their development of children. In support of the observation that there is limited time for
interaction and communication between parents and teachers, another teacher explained that she talks to parents in person when they approach her in the schoolyard. However, in general, she only approaches parents actively in cases of serious concern, although she informs parents of minor incidents via email or by means of a phone call:

*Parents sometimes approach you to ask something when the children stand in line at the schoolyard. That happens sometimes. Well, you don’t see parents very often. Communication with parents takes place via email or phone calls nowadays, not personally. Only when there’s something seriously going on do I speak to them personally.* (G3-T8)

Having minimal time to talk to parents in person, or making time to talk to parents at a personal level only when there are problems, does not align with the positioning of a teacher by parents as someone who informs them as soon as something is worth discussing or mentioning about their child. This reflects a unilateral approach towards parent–teacher relationships, suggesting that parents have to adjust to the circumstances. According to Ishimaru (2017), this approach is common in traditional parent–teacher relations, despite the fact that Minke et al. (2014) previously identified communication as a vital element in developing positive, congruent relations between parents and teachers. Additionally, Hornby (2011) argued that sharing information on children is an important activity in parent-teacher relations and stressed that two-way communication is required. However, the data presented above suggest there is limited time for communication, which contradicts parents’ expectations of appropriate role enactment among teachers and prevents parents and teachers from working towards a relationship based on shared perceptions. The data presented above also suggest that parents expect teachers to inform them personally and immediately if necessary, while teachers stress that they have to work with a group of children (and parents) and that there is limited time to interact with parents. To complicate matters further, parents’ and teachers’ positioning of each other not only differs with regard to individuality or group interests, but also in terms of teachers valuing parents’ views or parents respecting teachers’ traditional positioning.

*Valuing parents’ views and respecting teachers’ traditional positioning*

This study identified several teachers who still seem to rely on traditional scripts. These teachers gave the impression they expect parents to be committed to supporting their position and appear to consider the school to be the main domain for parent–teacher
relations, as was also found by Pushor (2012). However, as explained in the conceptual framework, the societal position of parents has changed from being dependent to proactively negotiating a position in their relationships with teachers, as Dahl (2017) illustrated in her research on teachers in Denmark. These changes are also observed in the data in this study and it could be argued they form a possible source of tension between parents and teachers. The observed societal changes for parents mean that they not only want to be informed by teachers about their child’s development, they also want teachers to collaborate with them, to listen to and to think with them. Parents (n=246, 67%), for example, expressed these views:

*It’s very important to me as a parent to feel like the teacher really listens to me.* (Q-P22)

*I hope teachers genuinely get acquainted with my child and that they sympathise with my child’s needs and think with us.* (Q-P90)

*[I expect] that they listen very well to me and to the child’s wishes. That they try as hard as they can to provide what the child needs in collaboration with the parent, that they acknowledge things and give information, and if something’s the matter immediately approach me. In short, being transparent and flexible.* (Q-P313)

Parents explained that they not only expect the teacher to involve them in a timely manner, but also to allow them to become engaged and involved in the process of determining solutions that meet their child’s needs. These expectations of parents regarding the social acts teachers should display to enact their role appropriately appear to reflect the fact that parents are self-aware, responsible agents who believe they are able to contribute to their child’s educational trajectory, as Fernandez and Lopéz (2017) also found in groups of marginalised parents. Additionally, the data suggest that becoming engaged in their child’s educational trajectory is considered vital by parents, as they appear to position the teacher as someone who listens to them, involves them and thinks with them. This finding is in line with McKenna and Millen (2013), who found that parents assign considerable importance to a teacher’s personal involvement with both parents and children. Additionally, although Castro et al. (2015) and Harris and Goodall (2008) have underlined that parental engagement in a child’s schooling is more important for the child’s development than the attendance and participation of parents at school, teachers appear to
expect parents to comply with their way of working. This expectation of teachers regarding role enactment among parents seems to contradict with a desire to engage parents in their child’s schooling and parents’ expectations that teachers will think with them or listen to them. Teachers (n=65, 81%) explained, for example, that parents should support the teacher’s decisions and actions, and should fulfil the commitments expected of parents:

*I expect parents to stand behind the teacher and not undermine the teacher’s authority. Parents should show an open and cooperative attitude toward us.* (Q-T4)

*Parents should meet the commitments made during the ten minute meetings, and other conversations. Offer help whenever necessary. Bring their child to school, all the way to the classroom door.* (Q-T28)

*Parents must think with us. They should not come in to tell how it must be done.* (Q-T54)

The strained relations created by this mismatch between teacher and parent expectations are reflected in phrases like ‘not undermine’, ‘should meet’ and ‘not tell how it must be done’. This suggests that teachers sometimes experience parents as not thinking with them or not supporting them, as Dahl (2017) also found in her research on teacher professionalism in relation to parent–teacher relationships. The findings suggest that teachers sometimes experience parents’ positioning in their relations as challenging their own positioning, thus producing latent tensions in their relations with parents. Given the data presented earlier which showed parents appear to be individually oriented and expect teachers to listen to them and inform them as soon as there is something deemed worthy of sharing, it is conceivable that these expectations of parents apply pressure to teachers. Furthermore, as Stefanski et al. (2016) also found, forms of parental involvement, such as ten-minute meetings and information nights, which are still common practice in schools, might even exacerbate the tensions between parents and teachers because these procedures do not allow parents and teachers to develop a relationship based on shared power and decision-making, as Douglass and Gittel (2012) advocated. The data presented above, which suggests that teachers still rely on their position of being in control, do not fit with parents’ positioning of teachers as a partner who supports the child’s individual development at school. Furthermore, some parents (n=203, 55%) explained that it is important that teachers not only listen to and engage with them, but actually value their
opinions. Parents also clarified, for example, that they expect teachers to listen and act in accordance with the information parents provide:

*That the teacher is receptive to our knowledge of our children and takes this seriously.* (Q-P131)

*Be receptive to me, to my view.* (Q-P138)

*Observe the child carefully, taking into account things we indicated as parents.* (Q-P146)

The data presented above suggest that a relatively large number of parents place considerable emphasis on the importance of teachers taking their knowledge of the child seriously and being receptive to their views. McKenna and Millen (2013) also found that parents want to be valued by their child’s teacher as someone who possesses intimate knowledge about the child and that this is of interest regarding the teachers’ approach at school. They expressed the importance of collaborating with teachers who recognise their input, work together with them, and engage them in the process of supporting and guiding their child. Parents said, for example:

*I think collaboration with the teacher is good when I am very well informed about everything that happens to my children. [...] This is especially important to me if my child is not performing well or gets behind. I very much want the teacher to inform me on time, so we are able to think about a solution together.* (Q-P24)

*Inform parents on how it’s going and draw attention to both unwanted and desired changes. Consult with us about how a problem can be solved.* (Q-P194)

These parents suggested they value teachers who engage them in the process of devising solutions collaboratively, and who consult with them whenever problems arise. The findings indicate that parents not only expect teachers to inform them as part of their role as a teaching professional, they also want teachers to view parents as valuable sources of information and actually engage them as such in their child’s schooling, particularly when there is a problem. This expectation of parents regarding the teachers’ role is likely to be the result of parents’ feelings of responsibility in regard to enabling their child to develop
as successfully as possible. This is in line with the observations of Vincent and Maxwell (2016). Expecting teachers to engage parents closely in solving possible problems at school, while teachers indicate that they have limited time to interact with parents individually, is a potential source of tension between parents and teachers. This is particularly the case given that teachers seem to consider parents as informants and recipients rather than as jointly responsible with teachers. A majority of the teachers (n=53, 66%) who participated in this research expressed the view that parents should respect teachers, listen attentively, and appreciate the teachers’ efforts:

Parents need to have a reciprocal conversation with me, with mutual respect and to accept what I say and to carry out what I ask. (Q-T12)

Parents should enter the conversation with an open attitude and listen well to the teachers’ side of the story. (Q-T45)

Parents also should provide clear information about their child. [...] They should appreciate the teacher’s efforts. They should make the effort to read the information school provides and to come when they’re invited for a conversation. (Q-T76)

These teachers explained how parents should listen to them and comply with their requests, provide information about their child, and attend parent-teacher meetings when asked. Expecting parents to comply with teachers’ requests reflects a unilateral approach to parent-teacher relationships which, according to Ishimaru (2017), is a common approach in traditional parent-teacher relations. The way that teachers appear to pre-position parents as needing to support the teacher’s position of authority suggests that these teachers still seem to rely on traditional ideas where teachers maintain control over parental involvement and parental engagement. This is in line with, for example, Van den Berg and Van Reekum (2011) who, in their study of teachers’ professional understanding of parental involvement, found strong power differences in parent–teacher relations. In light of the observed individualised expectations of parents for teachers to enact their role as explained above, it is conceivable that the expectations of teachers for parents to cooperate in compliance with the teacher’s control of their relations has the potential to produce tensions in practice, as these expectations do not correspond to parents’ positioning as responsible agents.
Contradictory expectations

Parents (n=359, 98%) seem to view teachers as responsible, not just when problems arise but in general, for seeking to cooperate with them and believe that the the teachers’ role is to inform parents. Despite parents’ expectations that teachers value their views, parents seem to expect teachers to take the initiative in the relationship and enact their role by providing information. Although surprising and seemingly contradicting the observed need of parents for teachers to engage them when there are problems, McKenna and Millen (2013) also found that parents, despite their engagement in the child’s schooling, still set high expectations for teachers’ communication and expect teachers to initiate most conversations with parents. Parents seem to place significant value on the teachers’ perceived responsibility to inform them personally about their child’s individual wellbeing and development, which is likely to put pressure on teachers.

Table 7.1 summarises the findings of the data in regard to the perception of parents that teachers should approach them proactively as part of their collaborative relations. While some parents mentioned that there are multiple ways in which teachers can enact their role, each of these is listed separately in order to provide an insight into the diverse ways parents explained what actions they expect teachers to take.
Table 7.1: Teachers’ roles according to parents (N=367)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers roles</th>
<th>Parents (n)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide information</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact/inform parents if necessary</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact/inform parents on time/be proactive</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in a conversation with parents (regularly)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate (clearly)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach parents</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to/have an eye for parents</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attune with parents</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give guidance to the child</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer questions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents seem to mainly view teachers as someone who seeks to engage with them. Relatively few parents (n=12, 3.3%, N=367) see the teacher as someone whose primary role is to guide their child. This is striking given the findings reported earlier that parents set a high value on the teacher’s role of informing them about their child’s wellbeing and development at an individual level. The findings suggest that parents want to be informed in a timely manner regarding issues with their child, wish to engage in a conversation with teachers, and expect teachers to approach and listen to them. This indicates that parents perceive the teacher to be someone who is jointly responsible for supporting the child’s educational trajectory, as Ule et al. (2015) suggested. However, the finding that parents seem to look to the teacher and expect to be informed by them is in line with Anderson and Minke (2007), who found that parents wait for the teacher to engage with them and feel they need to be invited by teachers and children before becoming involved. Nevertheless, the findings in this research suggest that parents do not need such encouragement, as they are already closely involved.

Nonetheless, parents’ expectations of teachers to support their position as being equally responsible for providing the best education possible for their child at an individual level appears to contradict how most teachers (n=77, 96%) appear to view parents. Table 7.2 illustrates the expectations expressed by teachers regarding the social acts parents should display in order to cooperate with them and enact their role properly. Teachers sometimes
mentioned more than one way in which parents could enact their role appropriately. However, like Table 7.1 above, to illustrate the multiple ways in which teachers expected parents to enact their role appropriately, all of the different expectations that teachers discussed for parents are listed separately.

Table 7.2: Parents’ roles according to teachers (N=80)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ roles</th>
<th>Teachers (n)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participate</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show involvement</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be present/visible</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help the child with homework</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach the teacher if necessary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet commitments</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in contact with the teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show interest</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think with school/teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen and do as asked</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers’ expectations of parents’ roles appear to signify the expectation that parents will be supportive or visibly involved in the relationship rather than being equally responsible. Only three teachers (n=3, 3.8%, N=80) indicated explicitly that they are appreciative when parents think with them or with the school. Fernandez and López (2017) concluded that schools delineate parents’ involvement, which leads to conflicts and tensions when parents deviate from the social script the school has provided. The latent tensions revealed in the data can be explained by the different expectations of parents and teachers. Furthermore, it appears that teachers expect parents to cooperate in ways that reflect assistance and compliance with requests to support their role, rather than working together towards the objective of jointly supporting the child’s development and schooling. Parents, on the other hand, expect teachers to be equally committed to supporting their child’s individual development.
Summary

Parents’ and teachers’ positioning of each other when describing how they want the other to assume their role are incongruent and sometimes contradictory. This has the potential to lead to tensions and strained relations between parents and teachers. Parents’ positioning, as explained in the conceptual framework, appears to have shifted dramatically due to changes in societal views regarding the responsibilities and position of parents. It is plausible that this puts pressure on teachers; perhaps teachers do not sufficiently recognise the changed positions of parents. Teachers seem to expect support and cooperation from parents, reflecting the traditional view of parents’ positions in their relations, while parents expect teachers to be proactive and inform them thoroughly about their child’s individual situation. Contrary to parents’ expectations of teachers as receptive to their view of their child’s wellbeing and development, teachers expect parents to be assistive and supportive of the teacher’s position. Parents also expect to be positioned by teachers as jointly responsible instead of being accommodating and supportive. These ways of positioning create the risk of developing relations that lack trust, which is likely to have a negative impact on the child’s functioning (Bakker et al., 2013). The latent tensions created by the differing viewpoints revealed in the data can become visible in practice when parents and teachers interact.

Sub-theme 2: Strained interactions

Strained interactions refer to the tensions parents and teachers sometimes experience in their relations while interacting with each other. Parents explained, for example, how they sometimes experience strains when communicating with teachers, and position teachers as peremptory or firm in their communication, while teachers appear to position parents as dominant or challenging. Parents appear to believe that teachers are not in a position to communicate imperatively with parents. When a teacher does not seem to act in a way that is considered appropriate, strains can be observed in interactions with parents. These strains can create situations where parents feel the need to clarify positions, while teachers explain that it is necessary to establish boundaries in their relations with parents.

Teachers’ unilateral communication

Parents appear to experience strains in interactions with teachers as a result of the manner in which teachers communicate with them. In every group interview, parents mentioned several examples of strained interactions with teachers. Furthermore, in the questionnaire data, some parents (n=62, 17%) indicated that they experienced strains in their relations
with one or more teachers. The data suggest that there are no significant differences between institutions or groups of parents. In the lower as well as the upper grades of the primary schools involved in this research, parents sometimes seem to experience strains in their interactions with teachers.

For example, one parent explained in the questionnaire:

*Teachers need to be attentive not to communicate in too commanding a way.* (G2-P2)

Another parent reacted to this and explained:

*Yes, not too peremptory and communicate on time. Then you are able to receive the information as a parent and you are able to act upon that. Teachers will hear from us again in that case. Not ‘he must see a speech therapist’. [...] But first observe and share your observations with me. Yes, that must be done on time, then you are able to sort things out for yourself. You know, that’s when I am able to recognise things.* (G2-P3)

These parents explained that it is important teachers take care not to be too imperative in their communication and give parents the time to consider the information and act upon what they hear. McKenna and Millen (2013) found that parents set high expectations for teachers’ communicative behaviour and perceive teachers as experts. However, the data presented here suggest that parents want to be involved as equally responsible partners and that they need time to process the information they receive from teachers, particularly when the teacher believes there are serious problems in the child’s functioning at school. This is in line with the findings of Matthiesen (2016), who found in her research on relations between Somali parents and Danish teachers that parents place a high value on cooperating with the teacher, and that reaching an agreement with the teacher in regard to a solution to problems was central for parents. The data presented here also suggest that parents would like the teacher to engage them so that they are able to scrutinise the issues themselves in order to be able to understand the teachers’ observations. However, Elbers and De Haan (2014) explained in their research on conflict in Dutch parent-teacher conferences that the institutional setting of parent-teacher conferences means teachers and parents need to express their points of view very clearly and directly, which sometimes
leads to teachers framing the child’s behaviour or intellectual abilities. Nevertheless, the above data suggest that parents need time to adjust to the teachers’ view and to determine their own points of view.

Communicating information to parents in a way that seems to limit their options for interpretation and understanding in fact appears to induce strains in parent-teacher relations, as parents who are highly involved closely monitor their child’s development and want to be engaged in the process, as Ivan et al. (2015) also found in their research on parents’ values regarding education and upbringing. Rather than allowing dialogue, the traditional setting of parent-teacher conferences seems mainly to allow both parties to express their opinions, which can induce tensions. Lemmer (2012) also found that parent-teacher conferences are limited in the opportunities they provide for discussing serious problems or developing a dialogue. Parents want to be equally involved in the process, as another parent explained when she discussed experiencing that the teacher was not right about things that were communicated in a very dictatorial manner. She became sceptical about the teacher’s way of communicating with her:

Well, they got it all wrong twice. So, the next time you enter into a conversation with the teacher, you feel like ‘yeah, whatever’. That’s what they create when things like this happen - When you communicate as if things are definite rather than open to interpretation. With regard to this platform, it is important that you treat each other respectfully and equally. To me, that’s really important; not saying ‘okay, I’m absolutely certain and we decide’. You have to arrange things together.

(G1-P3)

This parent explained how she became critical of the teacher’s message towards her, because she felt that the teacher had been mistaken twice while communicating what seemed to be very definite information about her child’s development and wellbeing. Wanat (2010) also found that parents criticised teachers for being judgmental in their contacts with parents. It appears that the parent quoted above already had a strained relation in her interaction with teachers as a result of her earlier experiences. Adams and Christenson (2000) explained that trust which benefits or sustains the relationship between parents and teachers is important in their relations. However, this parent appears to have experienced a lack of trust. While Deslandes et al. (2015) and Stormont et al. (2013), for example, found that teachers sometimes experience discomfort in their interactions with
parents, the data presented above suggest that parents also experience discomfort in their relations with teachers. Furthermore, the strained interaction observed in the data between this parent and the teacher suggests that the parent employs defensive mechanisms towards the teacher (for instance, by saying ‘yeah, whatever’ and ‘that’s what they create’). Rather than feeling inferior, as Freeman (2010) found in her research on working class parents’ positioning in their relations with teachers, the parent quoted above seems to expect that the teacher should treat her as someone who is equally responsible. Nonetheless, as Goodall and Montgomery (2014) argued, to achieve equitable relations between parents and teachers that support the child’s development, a non-judgemental and supportive relationship is required. The data suggest that this is not always achieved in parent–teacher relations.

Evidence from this study suggests that parents do not expect teachers to only enter into dialogue in circumstances that seem conflictual. Nonetheless, parents do not seem to experience their relations with teachers in a dialogical manner, although several scholars, like Mahmood (2013), and Douglass and Gittel (2012), have advocated that it is vital for teachers to enter into a dialogue with parents in order to develop a relationship that is based on shared power and shared decision-making. A parent explained how she was disappointed when a teacher did not enter into a dialogue with her during a ten-minute meeting:

*During the last ten minute meeting, the teacher carried on a monologue. To me, that’s nothing like a dialogue. You know, I would prefer to enter into a mutual conversation with the teacher. As it was, I just listened to her for ten to twelve minutes. That’s when I thought, okay this is a shame.* (G3-P3)

The data presented above clearly indicates that, for parents, it appears to be very important that teachers consider them to be equal conversation partners and agents who are able to contribute actively to the conversation about their child’s development instead of simply listening to the teachers’ views. While Vincent (2017) argued that parents differ in the extent to which they are able to exercise agency (i.e., feel they have the capacity to act), this parent appears to consider herself as an agent who is capable of forming and communicating her own opinion. This positioning of parents as agents who can make valuable contributions in their relations with teachers was also found by Fernandez and Lopèz (2017). The data above suggest that being able to enter into a mutual conversation
with teachers is important for parents and allows them to participate in the relationship. This parent seems to experience strained interactions with the teacher because of the unilateral position the teacher assumed towards her. Despite the fact that Murrey et al. (2013) found that increased personal interaction and the communication of parents with teaching professionals helped parents to develop better relations with teachers, the data presented here suggest that the structures developed in schools limit the possibilities for parents and teachers to increase personal interaction.

**Parents as challenging**

In some cases, teachers spread across different grades (n=34, 42.5%) suggested they experience challenges with parents in terms of the way they communicate with them. This was endorsed in all three group interviews, where teachers shared experiences of strains in interactions with some parents. This is in line with Dahl (2017), whose research on teachers’ professional experiences with parents showed that teachers experienced parents as demanding or challenging because they felt parents criticised the way in which they fulfilled their responsibilities. The teachers who participated in this research also demonstrated some criticism of parents, which might create difficulty in their contact with parents. For example, one teacher explained that she sometimes perceives parents as being too critical:

*Sometimes you have to deal with parents who adopt a very critical attitude toward everything. Of course it’s alright when parents are critical, but sometimes it’s too awful for words, so to speak. Well, it makes you wonder. The contact with these parents is a struggle.* (G3-T9)

This teacher explained how parents who position themselves critically towards teachers could make the relationship resemble a battle. The expression ‘too awful for words’ indicates the highly strained interactions with parents. Although Ishimaru (2014) argued that teachers have greater power in their relations with parents, the data presented here suggest that this teacher seems to experience some parents as powerful and challenging. This is in line with Barton et al.’s (2004) findings that parents are not powerless in their relations with teachers and deliberately try to author a place in these relations. In particular, in cases where a parent has experienced teachers as too peremptory and even incorrect, it is conceivable that parents will approach the teacher in a critical manner. This is in line with Wanat (2010), who found that parents act in reaction to their experiences in
interaction with teachers. The teacher quoted above appears to experience difficulty in interacting with parents who approach her critically. The positioning of parents as critical, and the strained interactions observed between teachers and parents in the group interviews, also emerged in the questionnaire data.

Although Stormont et al. (2013) found that teachers sometimes experienced discomfort in their relations with parents, the findings of this research go further and indicate that teachers can position parents as having a lack of trust in the teachers’ expertise or their goodwill to cooperate with parents (n = 34, 42.5%, N=80). Teachers indicated that they appreciate parents who ask questions, do not approach them aggressively, or assume demanding positions:

Parents must ask questions and not immediately assume that their child is right. (Q-T9)

Parents should not approach the teacher in high dudgeon, but first ask quietly what’s going on. Cooperate if there’s something going on. The teacher is the expert. Parents should accept the latter more often (enter into a conversation with the teacher). I feel like parents more and more determine how things should be done. (Q-T42)

Parents should be open toward teachers and have sympathy for teachers. We are not able to manage or observe everything. Some parents should alert me less often, while other parents should make themselves heard more often. [...] I think parents are demanding these days; more respect and more sympathy would be in order. (Q-T56)

The data presented confirm the earlier suggestion that teachers seemingly experience strained interactions with parents that influence their relations. Adams and Christenson (2000) argued that trust is a vital element in developing parent–teacher relations that support the child’s schooling and development. However, the quotations above indicate that teachers do not automatically experience trust from parents, as was also found by Ule et al. (2015). The teacher’s opinions appear to indicate that it is important for parents to have faith in the teachers’ ability as the foundation for cooperation between them. This is in line with Mahmood (2013), who found that teachers experienced difficulties and
challenges in building relationships with parents. Indicators of teachers’ desire that parents should cooperate in a manner that supports their position can be seen in expressions such as ‘parents must’, ‘should less often’, ‘should accept’, ‘demanding’ or ‘obliged to’. These verbalisations suggest that teachers feel the social scripts for parents’ role enactment need to change to facilitate cooperation with parents, and they specifically indicate that parents need to change their approach to communicating with teachers. The tensions observed here are concerning as various researchers, including Ishimaru (2014) and Bakker et al. (2013), have indicated that teachers’ perceptions of parents as problematic can hinder the quality of the relationship that is built, which in turn has an impact on the child’s position (Kim et al., 2013). The data suggest that teachers are alert to these issues in their relations with parents. One teacher explained, for example, that teachers have to judge whether it is likely that problems will occur in their relations with parents:

But you also have to realise that there always will be parents who are not able to communicate well. We also have these kinds of parents. When you meet parents, you need to think about this: are there any problems you might expect? (G2-T4)

The data presented above suggest that teachers expect that there will be strained relations with at least some parents. This is helpful, because, as Pushor (2012) argued, changing practices and structures in schools requires reflection from teachers. The data presented here confirms that strained relations between parents and teachers are enacted in practice. The above quotation also indicates that teachers experience differences between parents, which is also confirmed in other data. For instance, a teacher explained how parents differ, and how some parents maintain contact with him while others seem to be antagonistic:

Parents absolutely differ. Some parents listen to their child and see their child as a saint. And in a way I understand that. To me my child is a saint too. So things you do can be interpreted differently. And parents become angry with you, without consulting you first. But there are parents who take up a different position. They...well... these are also difficult students. But these parents stay in contact with me as a teacher. And there are parents who are like “my child never does anything wrong, so...”. That way you are opposites instead of standing together. (G2-T1)

This teacher appears to experience the behaviours of some parents as challenging, particularly parents who do not contact him to verify what their child tells them about his
approach and who appear to assume that their child can do no wrong. He seems to experience these parents almost as opponents. The teacher recognises the primacy of children’s wellbeing as a driver for parents, as Ivan et al. (2015) also found with regard to the upbringing of children in European countries. However, this tendency seems to constrain him in his role as a teacher, as parents who put their child first do not appear to work cooperatively with the teacher. Dahl (2017) also found that the primacy of children in parents’ approach to teachers hindered the development of equal and collaborative relations between parents and teachers. Nevertheless, some parents do seem to assume a favourable position and to communicate with the teacher. Maintaining contact with the teacher seems to be an important social act for parents to perform in their relationship with the teacher. As Mutch and Collins (2012 argued, this underlines the fact that personal interaction and communication is an important factor in strengthening parent–teacher relations, not only in parents’ experiences but also for teachers.

Dependency and differences: parents’ experiences

In all three group interviews with parents, they explained their perceptions of the different ways in which teachers approached them. One parent mentioned, for example, that there are a variety of different approaches taken by teachers in their relationships with parents, resulting in different amounts of contact and communication:

*I found that it [the relationship] is left extremely up to the teacher. So, well, the one I have to do with now, if something is the matter she rings me up and sets up an appointment for the next day. But another one, I never heard of her. Yes, you strongly have to depend on the teacher.* (G3-P7)

In accordance with the findings of Rodriguez et al. (2014), the above data also seem to underline how parents depend on the teacher in the relationship they develop. This parent explained how she feels significantly dependent on the teacher for the way in which their relationship develops. In her current situation, there is immediate and personal contact if necessary, but she has also experienced a teacher who did not maintain frequent communication. This suggests that teachers still control the contact moments for parents, as Lemmer (2012) observed in her research on parent–teacher conferences. However, despite the observed need of parents to be closely involved in their child’s development (Ule et al., 2015), parents seem to resign themselves to the circumstances. This is an important observation. The suggestion that parents adapt to the given circumstances does
not align with the expectation parents appeared to express that teachers engage them in their relations and the impression of the perceived responsibility parents have for their child’s development and education that seems to be reflected in the data. Additionally, despite the changed societal positions of parents (e.g., Ivan et al., 2015), the data suggest that structures within schools still reflect the unequal positions of parents and teachers, as was argued by Tveit (2009). A parent endorsed how parents appear to depend on their relationship with a teacher in order to be able to discuss differences of opinion about their child’s development:

Earlier this year I debated with the teacher about... well, we differed in opinions about our child’s development. Well, sometimes you might differ in opinion [with the teacher]. But, well, I agree, when you are in a debate and differ in opinion with the teacher, you reason like ‘I think I know my child best’. So, I think it is really important how you go around with each other. It depends whether they see you as equal. (G2-P1)

It appears that parents recognise that they differ in opinion with teachers about their child’s development or wellbeing. However, whether they can in fact discuss these differing opinions seems to depend on the relationship they have developed with the teachers. When parents experience the teacher treating them as equals, it is likely that they will be able to discuss their differences. Nevertheless, when the relationship is perceived as unequal, parents may emphasise their authority with regard to their child, as this parent demonstrates. Although Hobbins-McGrath (2007) found that it is common for parents and teachers to have different views and expectations of their relations, and Deslandes et al. (2015) argued that tensions and dilemmas are inevitably part of parent-teacher relations, it appears that parents are more likely to act defensively when they experience tensions in their relations with teachers than they are to assume a resigned position. Experiencing strained relations with teachers appears to induce parents’ scepticism. Ule et al. (2015) found that the perceived responsibility of parents to provide the best education for their child and the individualised orientation of parents leads to increased involvement of parents in school affairs, as they do not automatically trust the teachers’ judgement in regard to the right approach. The data suggest that this adds to strained relations between parents and teachers, in that the parent cited above resorts to the position of ‘I think I know my child best’. In the process of experiencing different approaches from different teachers, parents may encounter teachers who seem judgmental, and these parents explain how this
has a significant impact on the relationship they are able to develop with teachers. One parent explained, for example, that it is difficult when teachers categorise parents as difficult or challenging:

*It really depends on the relationship you developed with the teacher, you know. If they see you as a bit of a suspicious parent or a nag or something else, it’s completely different than being on good terms with the teacher.* (G1-P3)

This parent explained how being on good terms feels entirely different from being perceived by the teachers as hard to please. The teachers’ judgement of the parent seems to be an important determining factor in the way relations between parents and teachers are developed. Kim et al. (2013) confirmed that teachers’ perceptions of parents as problematic can hinder the quality of the relationship that is built. Furthermore, Wanat (2010) found that parents are sensitive to teachers’ judgements. In line with Mahmood (2013), the data suggest that teachers still appear to be the key factor in the process of developing relationships with parents. It seems that parents still feel significantly dependent in their relations with teachers, as Rodriguez et al. (2014) found. Deslandes et al. (2015) determined that the way in which the school positions parents (e.g., as clients, partners or recipients) is important for parents’ positioning in their relations with teachers. The data presented here indicate that, as observed by Stefanski et al. (2017) amongst others, traditional relations where parents depend on teachers for information and opportunities for contact or consultation are still prevalent. Thus, evidence from this research suggests schools still seem to position parents as recipients and, according to Deslandes et al. (2015), this determines how they behave.

**Trust**

Despite the concerning evidence in this research which suggests latent tensions and strained relations appear to underlie parent-teacher relations, the data also suggest that parents and teachers sometimes experience trust in their relations. Some parents (n=16, 4%) explained in the questionnaire that they trust the teacher of their child to involve them when necessary. Also, in the group interviews, parents mentioned experiencing positive positioning in their relations with some teachers, which supported their trust in teachers to enact their role in ways that support the relationship. According to Adams and Christenson (2000), communication and contact are vital for enhancing the trust parents have towards
teachers. In this research, there was some evidence that parents trust in teachers is formed through positive communication experiences. Parents explained, for example:

*I expect that the teacher and I share the same interests (i.e., providing a safe environment for our child to enable optimal development) related to our child. I expect the teacher to inform me openly and honestly whenever there are small problems/challenges to face or other issues that are relevant to discuss. Speaking of the teachers’ role, we believe that our cooperation with the teacher is very satisfactory.* (Q-P232)

During a group interview, one parent explained:

*In my experience, it [collaborating equally with the teacher] varies with every teacher. Thinking back, I think that most of the teachers asked me if I recognised what they had told me or whether I had questions. Things like that. With one teacher it is, well…This year I think it is really comprehensive and that’s great. […] That’s my experience with her. It is not a matter of unilateral communication.* (G1-P4)

These parents explained that they appear to experience satisfactory contact with the teacher in the form of two-way communication. They appreciate the teacher’s efforts to communicate or cooperate with them for the benefit of the child’s development. This is in line with the findings of McKenna and Millen (2013), who found that successful communication between parents and teachers in regard to the child’s development is an important factor in the way parents experience their relations with the teacher. Some teachers (n=18, 22%) invest in their contacts with parents through communicating and explained that they expect and trust parents to act accordingly. Adams and Christenson (2000) suggested in their research on trust in parent-teacher relationships that teachers might look for specific behaviours that parents display which signal they are trustworthy. Nevertheless, some teachers in this research appear to invest in their relations with parents in order to enable or support parental trust. One teacher explained, for example:

*I talk to parents about their child. I discuss the child’s progress as well as things in class that are of interest for parents. Build a trusting relationship. Show interest in the things parents are involved in. Try to put yourself in their position, be open*
This teacher appears to strive for a supportive relationship with parents, as was advocated by Goodall and Montgomery (2014). The teacher clearly invests in her relations with parents and, resultantly, she seems to have the expectation that parents will feel comfortable when approaching her. According to Epstein (2011), building mutual trust and respect in parent-teacher relations is a fundamental requirement and the process of establishing this respect and trust can take time. Evidence from this research suggests that some teachers seem to be aware of the need to establish trust. For example, a teacher explained the following during one of the group interviews:

*Being approachable, yes, that they [the parents] are able to drop in for a moment. You sometimes notice that parents, well, they say ‘I might come in, but there’s really nothing very important to discuss’. I actually try to emphasize that they walk by whenever necessary. You know, then it’s also, well, the problem is just eliminated. That’s what you notice, otherwise it could easily become a big issue.*

(G1-T1)

This teacher explained that parents approach her whenever they feel need to share something with the teacher. Hornby (2011) endorsed that, for teachers, it is important to be friendly towards parents and to listen to them whenever necessary. The data presented above suggest that some teachers consciously invest in their contacts with parents and trust that the outcomes will be positive. Nevertheless, the teacher cited here also seems to indicate that positioning herself as approachable for parents is a method of preventing problems and the parents cited above also explained that teachers differ. Furthermore, there were some examples in the data that suggest that parents and teachers seem to be capable of building a trusting relationship. It appears that teachers’ encouragement, support, and frequent communication facilitate the development of their relations with parents, as was also suggested by Jeynes (2011).

**Summary**

The data analysis revealed that the latent tensions that appear to underlie parent-teacher relations might lead to strained relations between parents and teachers. In practice, this
could be observed as enacted tension. The latent tensions that emerged from the data appear to be the result of conflicting interests between parents and teachers in their expectations of each other’s appropriate role enactment and the positions they expect each other to assume in their relations. In practice, strained interactions between parents and teachers seem to add to the development of strained relations as they react to their differing experiences with each other. Parents still appear to depend on the teacher for the way the relationship develops and seem to experience a traditional, unilateral and sometimes peremptory positioning of teachers towards them. However, the positions of parents have changed due to societal changes and the associated responsibility for parents to provide their child with the best schooling possible. As a result of this changed position, parents expect teachers to engage them in school affairs concerning their own child and to involve them as soon as is considered necessary. Additionally, parents expect teachers to engage them in devising mutual solutions. Teachers do not seem to recognise the changed position of parents. Instead, they seem to interpret this changed positioning as a challenge to their role, which could lead to tensions in parent-teacher relations. Teachers expect parents to support their position, and still seem to dominate the relationship. Teachers also stress that, in contrast with parents’ individualised orientation, they are required to work with a group of children. Contrary to what could be expected on the basis of the changed societal positions of parents as highly responsible actors who are fully and closely engaged in their child’s schooling and development, parents seem to resign themselves to the circumstances and appear to feel very dependent in their relations with teachers. This adds another layer to the strained relations observed in the data. The structures developed in the school and teachers’ perceptions that parents need to adjust to the reality that they have limited time available to interact with parents seems to apply greater pressure on the development of a dialogic relationship. Nevertheless, there are some encouraging examples of parents and teachers who seem to be able to develop a trusting and dialogical relationship despite the latent tensions and strains that appear to be reflected in the data.

In the next chapter, the way parents and teachers position themselves will be explored with regard to the theme ‘ambivalent positioning’.
CHAPTER EIGHT
AMBIVALENCE

In this chapter, the second of two presenting the findings of the empirical research, the analysis is presented and discussed in the light of the theme ‘ambivalent positioning’. Parents’ and teachers’ data will be combined as evidence to support this theme. The data are compared and contrasted to gain an insight into the way the perceived positions of parents and teachers locate them within their collaborative relations.

Introduction to the theme ‘ambivalence’

When parents and teachers explain their own positioning in their collaborative relations, the evidence shows that ambivalent positioning can be observed. Such ambivalence is reflected in the conceptions of their roles, positions that seem to be contradictory, and the mixed signals they appear to send to each other. For example, parents expressed the view that they are the experts on their child’s development and at the same time explained that their role is to be present when the teacher deems it necessary. Teachers, on the other hand, discussed how they want to be open and accessible for parents, while also stating that they are responsible for determining what parents should do and when they are allowed to talk to the teacher. Parents and teachers explained different ways of positioning that sometimes do not seem to align with the intentions they picture for their own role in their collaborative relations. Furthermore, evidence from the group interviews suggests that the observed ambivalence was more prevalent and their explanations of experiences and actual practices sometimes seemed to contradict the descriptions parents and teachers gave of their perceived roles and positions in their relationships. The subthemes ‘legitimacy’ and ‘appraisal’ will be presented and discussed successively. First, the ambivalence observed regarding the perceived ‘legitimacy’ of parents’ and teachers’ positioning and the legitimated social acts they describe is discussed. Secondly, parents’ and teachers’ ‘appraisals’ of each other are discussed, as these also reflect ambivalence in their positioning.

Sub-theme 3: Legitimacy

‘Legitimacy’ reflects how parents and teachers explain that their role and the way they enact it is valid and how they appear to justify their position and their behaviours. In positioning theory, the perceived legitimacy of actions in relation to positions is acknowledged, as Van Langenhove (2017) and Matthiesen (2016) indicated. However, this
is linked to rights and duties that accompany certain positions or that are immanent in certain situations. The findings of this research, however, suggest that parents and teachers appear to attach particular weight to legitimising their own position in relation to each other. Parents and teachers both appear to advocate for their own interests, (i.e., assume a position they believe is legitimated by their role). Both parents and teachers explained that they consider themselves experts or an important factor in the relationship with each other. An important function of stressing the legitimacy of their position appears to be gaining the recognition of the other. Nevertheless, the perceived legitimacy of their role does not always seem to align with the behaviour they consider to be legitimate for that role.

**Ambivalence in legitimated positions and behaviours**

Teachers stress that they occupy a legitimate position that parents should acknowledge. Teachers legitimise their behaviour on the basis of their perceived position as being a teacher and expert in education. However, some teachers (n=27, 34%), spread across different ages and teaching different grades, explained on the one hand that it is important for them to be open and accessible for parents, while on the other hand stating they are the experts or should determine how things should be done. For example, two of the teachers explained:

*I want parents to see me as open and accessible as an equal human being, but they must see me as expert when it comes to education.* (Q-T15)

*I want parents to see me as someone who steers and directs things. But also as equal supervisor of their children.* (Q-T29).

The quotations above illustrate the ambivalence that can be observed in the data, as the first teacher starts her explanation by stressing that she is an open, accessible, person who values equality, yet, at the same time, stresses that parents should see her as a legitimate expert in education. The other teacher first stresses that she is responsible for steering and directing their relations, yet on the other hand she feels that parents need to see her as an equal supervisor of the children. Although these can be regarded as different ways in which teachers can enact their role, the teachers appear to emphasise that on the one hand they want to be open, accessible and equal, while on the other hand they want parents to acknowledge the teachers’ position as experts or managers in their relations. This is in line with the findings of Van den Berg and Van Reekum (2011) and Wiseman (2010) that
strong power differences exist in parent–teacher relations. However, the observed ambivalence is not explicitly described in these studies. Furthermore, although Hobbins-McGrath (2007), in her observations of parent-teacher interactions in early education settings, concluded that parents and teachers are ambivalent partners, she related the ambivalence to the fundamentally unequal positions of parents and teachers in their relationships. Nevertheless, the observed ambivalence in the teacher’s own positioning is relevant, as Bakker et al. (2013) stressed that teachers’ attitudes are determinate in developing cooperative and supportive relationships with parents. The impression of mixed signals from teachers who appear to present themselves as equal human beings while also stressing the legitimacy of being an expert or director, as observed in the quotations above, suggests it is might be difficult to work towards a relationship with parents based on power, as Bakker et al. (2013) suggested. These teachers also seem to place emphasis on their power as educational professionals.

Furthermore, it is conceivable that parents perceive the ambivalence that seems to influence teachers’ attitudes. For example, Wanat (2010) found in her research on parents’ perceptions of collaborative relations with teachers that parents are sensitive to teachers’ attitudes. However, this is further complicated by the fact that parents’ descriptions (n=187, 51%) also seem to reflect mixed signals in their positioning, namely ambivalence. The data suggest that there are no significant differences between parents and institutions in this regard. Parents said, for example, that:

*I want the teacher to see me as an important person who, amongst other things, is able to offer help.* (Q-P50)

*I would like the teacher to see me as helpful and as the ‘expert’ with regard to our own child.* (Q-P37)

One parent first states that the teacher needs to acknowledge her legitimacy as an important person yet, in the same sentence, she indicates that she is able to offer help. The other parent starts to present herself as someone who provides help and then also states that the teacher needs to regard her as a legitimate expert with regard to her own child. On the one hand, these parents appear to seek recognition for occupying an important position in the relationship with teachers, and on the other hand, they appear to assume an obliging position. Although scholars like Kim et al. (2013) and Keyes (2002) have demonstrated
that parents’ role construction is vital for the way they position themselves in relationships with teachers, the quotations above reflects the way in which the position of the parent appears to be unclear and reflects mixed signals of the legitimacy of being vital on the one hand and being supportive on the other. The belief that they are an important actor in the relationship with teachers is in line with the findings of Vincent (2017), who indicated that parents feel a significant sense of responsibility for their child’s schooling and upbringing. However, the more amenable positioning seems to reflect a traditional form of positioning that is still common in schools, as Stefanski et al. (2016) also observed. The divergence that is observed in these mixed positions might be a result of the routines and structures in schools, as observed in Chapter Seven, which are still based on traditional ways of positioning parents by schools. Teachers’ perceived legitimated positions also seem to reflect this traditional positioning in parent–teacher relations. For example, teachers explained their positioning as follows:

*In contact with parents, I am the professional who asks parents questions about their child or who provides information with regard to their child.* (G2-T1)

*I am the one who knows how, what and where. The overall management is mine.* (Q-T52)

*The teacher is the expert. A parent should accept this much more often.* (Q-T43)

Teachers expressed their conviction that they can legitimately assume the position of expert or leader in asking parents questions and providing information because they are the ones acting in a professional capacity. This positioning of teachers as the leader in the relationship suggests that parents depend on the teacher to engage with them and should accept that the teacher is in charge (as Teacher 43 explained). When examining parents’ views of school involvement, Rodriguez et al. (2014) also found that parents have to depend on teachers for information. The evidence presented here suggests that teachers place a high value on their expert position because of their professional role. Van den Berg and Van Reekum (2011) endorsed the view that teachers attach great importance to their professional position and consider it legitimate to exert control in the relationship. In line with this observation, teachers explained how they appear to consider it legitimate to assume control in their contact with parents. Teachers explained for example that:
We are allowed to say “this is what we expect from parents”. (G2-T3)

Mostly I discuss the child’s cognition, behaviour and social emotional experiences. Mostly I direct these conversations and try to arrive on the same wavelength. (Q-T20)

The professional or expert position seems to legitimise the role of teachers to inform parents as to what they expect from them and to direct conversations in which they discuss the child’s functioning and experiences with parents. These explanations suggest that teachers still consider it legitimate to possess power and control in parent-teacher relations, as Pushor (2012) also found in her research on parent engagement. However, despite the undeniably powerful positioning of teachers, the data suggest that this is not how teachers primarily see themselves when describing their role. When teachers explained what their role conception is or explained how they operate in practice, the data also reflect a reasonable and constructive tone on the part of teachers, as exemplified below:

I try to take up an open and honest position, to be easily accessible. I approach parents positively as much as I can and show that I appreciate their contribution, take them seriously. (Q-T21)

I listen carefully, take time and ask them to sit down. I respond quickly to messages. Always take them seriously although you don’t agree with them. (Q-T68)

Sometimes you have to invest in your contact with parents. You might, for instance, make an extra appointment to make the most of it. (G2-T3)

These data suggest that teachers assume a sympathetic position, appreciate parents’ contribution and make time to listen to parents and take them seriously. Teachers also report that they invest in their contacts with parents through making extra appointments and responding quickly to messages. This suggests that teachers are able to develop communication practices that support the development of their relations with parents. Murrey et al. (2013) found that the increased interaction and communication of parents with teachers supported the active participation of parents in the relationship. Thus, the way of positioning themselves as presented above is expected to function effectively in relationships with parents. Nevertheless, according to these quotations, it is still the teacher
who seeks to engage with parents. It is confusing that the perceived legitimated positioning of teachers mainly appears to reflect their positioning as an expert or controlling in their relationships with parents. This still appears to reflect the traditional positioning of teachers in their relations with parents, while teachers also report that they assume a sympathetic and open attitude towards parents. However, controlled opportunities for communication with teachers (discussed in Chapter 7, in the section titled ‘Dependency and differences’, p. 69) are considered to hinder the development of a true dialogue, as Lemmer (2012) also argued. The ambivalence of positioning oneself as open, accessible, and cooperative on one hand, and with the perceived legitimacy to control the relationship based on a traditional and unequal division of roles on the other, seems to be reflected in two responses given by a teacher to questions about her role conception and how she wants parents to see her:

[My role is to] keep parents informed about their child’s progress at school. This can be done on occasion and via ten minute meetings that are scheduled throughout the school year. Approach parents personally or via email when help is required. (Q-T55)

[I want parents to see me] as sympathising with them, thinking with them; as inspiring, friendly and cooperative. (Q-T55)

The teacher explains a traditional way of enacting her role, which is achieved through informing parents, asking parents to help when required, and mainly talking to parents at scheduled meetings; however, at the same time, she wants to be positioned by parents as someone who sympathises and thinks with parents, who is likeable and cooperative. Again, this appears to reflect mixed signals from teachers towards parents. The perceived legitimacy of the teacher to control the relationship with parents suggests there is little room for parents to participate in a relationship with the teacher, as the teacher only approaches them on occasion or talks with parents during ten-minute meetings. Controlling contacts with parents serves the teachers’ professional autonomy (Bakker et al., 2013). Bakker et al. (2013) concluded in their review that teachers can easily feel threatened when parents take control and are perceived as powerful. Additionally, Lemmer (2012) argued that the limited time for parent-teacher interactions is inadequate for developing relationships between parents and teachers. Therefore, it seems unlikely that parents perceive the teacher mentioned here as cooperative, as this is contradictory to the way she
feels legitimated to arrange her contacts with parents. Furthermore, the traditional approach that seems to be reflected in her explanation of how her role is enacted appears to be antithetical to parents’ positioning, suggesting that the observed ambivalence between parents and teachers as partners, as Hobbins-McGrath (2007) observed in parent-teacher interactions, is also reflected in the data. For example, parents positioned themselves as follows:

*I would like the teacher to see me as the person in charge, as the authority with regard to my child.* (Q-P57)

*I would like the teacher to see me\ as the expert with regard to my child, equally qualified.* (Q-P100)

*I would like the teacher to see me as the most important ‘supervisor’ of the child.* (Q-P185)

These parents stress that they perceive their legitimate position as being the person in charge, the authority, the expert, and the most important supervisor who is equally qualified. It appears from the discussions above that the reflective accounts on the positioning of parents and teachers contradict each other. The data in this research suggest that a majority of the parents (n= 251, 68%) stress that their legitimate position is that of a vital partner, which should be acknowledged by the teachers, while teachers (n=69, 86%) seem to attempt to maintain their position as a professional who is in control, despite also presenting themselves as cooperative. Dahl (2017) also found that parent–teacher relations are characterised by opposing positions of parents and teachers, which might cause tensions and conflicts in their relations. This is likely to provoke situations where positions are challenged (Van Langenhove, 2010), which emphasises the need for teachers and parents to clarify their role conceptions to allow them to be more attuned with each other and support their positioning in practice. This is particularly important as analysis of the data revealed that the legitimated social acts teachers’ mention when explaining their role conception confirm that they are still reliant on traditional norms and positions. Teachers seem to consider it legitimate to take control of parent–teacher contacts, as also indicated by Stefanski et al. (2016).
Table 8.1 provides an insight into teachers’ answers when describing their legitimated role. Some teachers mentioned more than one of the social acts listed in Table 8.1 as a legitimate part of their role enactment. However, to provide an insight into the ideas that are common and most frequently discussed, the different social acts that teachers mentioned are listed separately.

Table 8.1: Legitimated social acts of teachers (N=80)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Teachers (n)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide information</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask parents to support in class or during school trips</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak to parents</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities for contact</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite parents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address parents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advise parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate on things with parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although, researchers such as Bakker et al. (2013) and Epstein (2011) have advocated that teachers need to coordinate with parents on children’s development, the findings of this research seem to confirm that customary practices still determine teachers’ positioning, in line with Fernandez and López (2017). Teachers seem to cling to the perceived legitimacy of their traditional position as being the person in charge and only a limited number of teachers (n = 3, 3.8%, N=80) mentioned that they coordinate with parents. The social acts that teachers reported they display are congruent with their positioning as legitimated experts who are in control in the relationship. For example, providing information, asking parents to help, and speaking to parents were most commonly mentioned by teachers when explaining how they enact their role in the relationship with parents. However, as indicated earlier, teachers also appear to value being open and accessible. This suggests that ambivalent ways of positioning by teachers complicate the relationships they have with parents.

Additionally, parents’ social acts do not seem to align with the perceived legitimacy of their expert position. A majority of the parents (n=246, 67%) explained their legitimacy as being vital or primary in their relations with teachers and the data suggest that they want
teachers to acknowledge the legitimacy of their position. Ule et al. (2015) found that parents are convinced that they are as equally responsible for their child’s educational development as teachers. Therefore, for parents, it is important that teachers acknowledge the legitimacy of their vital position as a partner as well as their responsibility for the child’s education. For example, parents stated:

I would like the teacher to see me as vital to and as a partner of the school with regard to the development of our daughter. (Q-P36)

I would like the teacher to see me as primarily responsible and I want to be of equal standing. (Q-P230)

However, despite the impression that parents position themselves powerfully as legitimized partners or persons who are primarily responsible for the child’s upbringing, as presented in the data, the social acts of parents appear to reflect a contradictory, accommodating positioning. The social acts parents (N =367) discussed as being legitimate for their role do not seem to align with their positioning as significant agents; on the contrary, they seem to comply with the controlling positioning of teachers. Table 8.2 illustrates the actions parents consider to be legitimate. Some parents mentioned more than one social act as part of their role conception. The different social acts are listed in Table 8.2 to provide an insight into what parents consider are legitimate social acts in parent–teacher relations.
Table 8.2: Legitimated social acts of parents (N=367)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Parents (n)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be involved</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help at school/in class</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support my child</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact the teacher regularly</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be present at parent evenings or when asked to</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform/contact the teacher if necessary</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to the teacher</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To attune with the teacher</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take the teacher seriously</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be approachable</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to the teacher</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be open toward the teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read correspondence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data suggest that parents assume a supportive and even deferential position, as illustrated by the social acts they claim to display, such as helping at school or in class and being present at parent evenings. Parents appear to be oriented towards trying to become involved or staying involved in their child’s educational life instead of engaging proactively as legitimate significant agents in building relations with teachers and positioning themselves as vital partners in supporting the child’s educational development. Ule et al. (2015) also found that parents, despite their changed societal positions, experience schools as places that continue to follow traditional standards. This disjunct can be confusing and might cause ambivalence in parents’ positioning, because they appear to perceive that it is legitimate to be highly involved and responsible, while at the same time they seem to be required to assume a deferential position in their relations with teachers. The findings in this research suggest that parents appear to modify their positioning as a result of their experiences. Woodward (2000) explained how persons act in reaction to what they observe and experience. This is in line with the findings of McKenna and Millen (2013) and Wanat (2010) that parents act in reaction to what they perceive from teachers. The findings presented here are important, as they suggest that parents’ (initial) positioning might not be congruent with the social acts they display in practice. Harré and Van
Langenhove (1999) stressed that in conversations social acts need to be aligned with the positions of participants, otherwise positions will be challenged or need to be revised.

The ambivalent positions and social acts that parents reported appear to be problematic because the incongruence observed is likely to produce a lack of clarity regarding the storyline, namely the narrative or convention that is to be followed in parent–teacher relations and the legitimated positions of parents and teachers (Van Langenhove, 2010). The impression of ambivalence in the positioning of parents and teachers as well as in their relations seems to further complicate the development of dialogue between parents and teachers. The findings of this research seem to underline the difficulty of developing dialogical relations, as was also demonstrated by Mahmood (2013), who found that it is difficult to develop mutual understandings of viewpoints, expectations, and values.

**Summary**

To summarise, both parents and teachers appear to place a high value on their important or expert positions in the relationship. This is significant as parents and teachers seem to assume opposing positions, at least initially. Thus, parents and teachers could be regarded as ambivalent partner because parents seem to depend on teachers in practice despite their positioning as important actors. The perceived legitimacy of being expert or important is seen by the parties to bestow certain rights. Teachers in particular seem to derive the right to stay in control of parent–teacher relations from their legitimate positions. Parents, on the other hand, appear to be more ambivalent in their positions and the social acts they display. Teachers also give the impression of positioning themselves in ambivalent ways, as they suggest parents should see them as partners who cooperate and think with parents. The observed ambivalence is likely to cause uncertainty in parent–teacher relations because it is unclear what position will be assumed in interaction, and because the ambivalence is not actually discussed in practice.

The observed need of both parents and teachers to be recognised as legitimate parties appears to reflect a certain tension, as both try to establish their entitlement in the relationship. The data suggest that parents and teachers are oriented to achieve or maintain a legitimate position for themselves instead of weighing both sides of the story to achieve mutually beneficial relations. In combating this problem, it is important for parents’ and teachers’ to acknowledge the legitimacy of their positions and to clarify what the rights of parents and teachers are. Explicating their positions is also important, as it is believed that
providing clarity about parents’ and teachers’ positions in their relations eliminates or at least diminishes the ambivalence observed in the data.

An additional factor that requires attention is that parents and teachers seem to appraise situations as a way of finding an appropriate position in their relations. This will be discussed in the next section.

**Sub-theme 4: Appraisal**

Evidence from this research suggests that parents and teachers appraise each other’s functioning and presence in order to determine their own positioning. Appraisal refers to the fact that parents and teachers extensively explained in every group interview how they appear to assess both each other and the situation before they assume a certain position. As a result of their appraisal, they modify their behaviour. This presumably leads to ambivalent ways of positioning in practice, which complicates the relations between parents and teachers. Furthermore, teachers appear to position parents differently and seem to be ambivalent towards parents. Parents might perceive the ambivalence of teachers towards them when they appraise situations. The ambivalence observed might be confusing and could possibly prevent parents and teachers from building a reciprocal relationship.

*Appraisal and modifying behaviour: approaching and withdrawing*

In every group interview, parents and teachers explained how they modify their behaviour as a result of their appraisal of the situation. As Harré (2012) noted, different outcomes of assessments lead to differing social acts and modified positions. Hence, appraising each other or assessing the situation is important in parents’ and teachers’ position-finding process. Parents and teachers seem to be highly self-conscious while positioning in the relationship. This suggests that, in line with Bandura’s (2006) theory of human agency, parents and teachers as agents act deliberately and reflexively. However, the data suggest that their appraisals lead to modifications that might be confusing in that the behaviour of a parent or teacher might reflect mixed signals or lead to different outcomes in their relations. One teacher explained, for example, that:

*You automatically adapt to what you observe from parents. [...] Automatically you recalibrate and that determines what you say and do. When you recall what you*
The teacher explains how she adapts her behaviour as a result of her appraisal of parents. Her appraisal of parents thus seems to determine what she says and does. Therefore, she communicates in different ways with different parents. This is probably confusing for parents as it appears that the relations they are able to develop with teachers are highly dependent on the teachers’ appraisal. This is in line with Rodriguez et al. (2014), who found that parents feel dependent in their relations with teachers and that parents experience differences between teachers. A teacher explained in more detail how her appraisal of parents leads to different approaches:

*It differs what position you take up with every parent. I choose to truly stand next to some parents. […] But sometimes I consciously choose to maintain my position as a teacher with some parents. Like “You should try this or that or do that”. Or “He comes with this story at school, I don’t think that videogame is suitable for your child”. Something like that. You take a more leading position.* (G2-T2)

Teachers appear to have mixed feelings about parents, which might lead to ambivalence in their positioning. The teacher cited above chooses to stand next to parents or to assume a more steering position towards parents on the basis of her appraisal of them. This is in line with the findings of Stormont et al. (2013), who found that teachers’ perceptions of parents influence their relationships with them. Another teacher explained how she reacts differently to parents whom she perceives as demanding and other parents who are allowed to visit at any time:

*You cannot eliminate that you are a human being. But these parents from X, they demanded something […]. Well, at that point I am no longer the sympathising teacher. […] I become hot-tempered and short-spoken. But with other parents, when they approach me, I think “okay, please come in”.* (G1-T4)

The teacher explains that she reacts humanly to the situation and changes her attitude as a result of her appraisal of the parents of X as demanding. Towards other parents, she appears to adopt a more sympathetic attitude. Deslandes et al. (2015) argued that tensions and dilemmas are inevitable because of the differences between parents that influence the
teachers’ positioning in the relationship. However, the data suggest that teachers consciously approach parents differently as a result of their appraisal of those parents. Hence, it appears that teachers’ appraisal of parents might be more problematic for developing relations between teachers and parents compared to the differences between parents, as teachers are considered to be the key factor in parent-teacher relations because of their professional position, as Pushor (2012) demonstrated. Furthermore, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) argued that it is essential to adopt a non-judgemental attitude in the relationship with parents to foster engagement. Nevertheless, teachers seem to assume an ambivalent position towards parents, depending on their appraisal of them. Although Dahl (2017) found that parents appeared to outrank teachers in Danish schools, it appears that the teachers who participated in this research outrank parents and exert power in their relations through a process of appraising parents and assuming positions that support their own positioning in parent-teacher relations and remaining in control.

Parents appear to perceive the ambivalence in teachers’ attitudes towards them and react accordingly. Parents’ reaction to their appraisal of teachers as a source of tension and conflict in parent-teacher relations was suggested by Stormont et al. (2013) as a possible explanation for problematic relations between parents and teachers. Parents’ appraisal of the teachers’ attitude towards them influences their relations with the teacher. One parent stated, for example:

*I noticed, well, we have to deal with two teachers [who are jointly responsible for a class and work part-time] and with one teacher we have more, you know, that is the one you usually end up with. While, well, they are jointly responsible and have to hand things over to inform each other. I think that’s not an ideal situation […] because one of them is more receptive. And therefore more proactive. Well, it clicks better or something.* (G3-P5)

In reaction to this, another parent explained:

*Indeed, it clicks better with one teacher then with another teacher. But you also need to communicate with this other teacher, without being in combat.* (G3-P6)

Additionally, in the questionnaire data, a parent explained:
When I ask a question, I sometimes feel stigmatised: oh she’s that kind of mother who wants this and that....(Q-P151)

These parents explain that the different ways of being positioned by the teacher they perceive create tension in the relationship. The appraisal they sense from teachers or teachers who appear to be more or less receptive toward parents seems to produce ambivalent feelings. According to Van den Berg and Van Reekum (2011), when teachers position parents as difficult or challenging, this hinders parents’ empowerment in the relationship they develop with the teacher of their child. Feeling stigmatised or perceiving that teachers are more or less receptive to them can create insecurity for parents and might limit their ability to be proactive. This is in line with the findings of Goldkind and Farmer (2013), who found that openness, safety, and respect shown by school personnel towards parents are significant aspects that influence parents’ engagement. The data presented here suggest that the perceived appraisal or openness of teachers might have an impact on parents’ levels of safety and comfort in their relations with teachers. Parents (n=29, 8%) explained that the perceived appraisal of teachers as being difficult indeed seems to have an impact on their own positioning. This is illustrated in the following examples:

[Teachers should] not act defensive toward parents [.... They should] make me feel that I can safely and with trust leave my child behind. (Q-P37)

It’s important not to feel troubled because you ask the teacher for some time after school hours. (Q-P168)

These parents of children across different grades indicate that teachers sometimes seem to act defensively and suggest they need the teacher to approach them in a way that allows them to trust the teacher and to feel that they can leave their child safely at school. Also, it appears that the parents’ own appraisal of teachers sometimes makes them worry or feel troubled when approaching the teacher after school hours. The importance of parents’ appraisals of teachers’ attitudes is underlined by McKenna and Millen (2013), who found that parents need teachers to be open and sensitive. An inviting attitude of teachers is more likely to support parents’ positioning in the relationship, as Anderson and Minke (2007) demonstrated. Contrary to the findings of Rodriguez et al. (2014) that parents initiate involvement and persistently try to manage resources in their relations with teachers, parents in this research explained in all three group interviews that they decide to withdraw
when they sense there is no room for them, or they weigh the advantages and disadvantages before approaching the teacher on their own account:

*Sometimes I feel the need to share information, to check something or to coordinate on something with the teacher. However, I don’t feel there is space for that in the morning and leave it then.* (G1-P1)

*I think it’s awkward that some teachers seem to be overloaded. So, with everything you ask, you hesitate. To me it’s always a matter of weighing the pros and cons. Do I send an email, or not? It always makes me think.* (G3-P5)

The data above suggest that parents might sometimes experience mixed feelings, such as ambivalence in their positioning toward teachers because, in their judgement, the teacher has not indicated that there is room to share information or to check something or coordinate. This could lead to hesitation in parents’ positioning and their decision not to pursue the issue. These parents seem to add another source of ambivalence to the relations between parents and teachers. Not only does feeling judged by teachers influence parents’ positioning, as Wanat (2010) found when she interviewed parents, it also influences parents’ appraisal of the teachers’ openness or room for questions or a conversation. The observed ambivalence experienced by parents in their positioning towards teachers is likely to complicate their relationship, as parents appear to withdraw despite their belief there is something worth sharing with the teacher or questions need to be asked. This suggests that parents are reticent while simultaneously feeling the need to be in contact with the teacher. This seems to underline the fact that the teacher is still dominant in the relationship, as Tveit (2009) also found. However, the ambivalence observed is problematic. It is conceivable that tensions arise when problems are not solved and parents do not feel they are heard or seen by teachers.

Nonetheless, the data suggest that teachers’ positioning toward parents might be unclear, because teachers’ appraisal of parents seems to lead to different attitudes towards parents. This suggests that teachers’ approach to parents is unpredictable and therefore ambivalent, because the appraisal of the situation dictates whether they approach parents in a more open and inviting manner or choose to assume a more controlling position. Bakker et al. (2013) concluded in their review of parent-teacher relations that teachers’ attitudes towards
parents are highly influenced by their perceptions of parents. The data from this research seems to corroborate this conclusion. A teacher explained, for example:

*I think we all try to adjust our behaviour in contact with parents. But I think that in my case, what plays an important role is the fact that in our group we don’t have nagging parents. You can come across parents that pass criticism on everything; only point out mistakes. In that case, I definitely would behave differently.* (G1-T1)

The teacher who is cited here explained how she adjusts her behaviour as a result of her appraisal of parents. When she perceives parents as ‘nagging’ or experiences parents who ‘criticise everything’, she behaves differently and probably develops a less positive relationship with parents. Fernandez and Lopez (2017) found that teachers appraise parental actions based on the discursive script of parental engagement that is common in the school. The equivocal approach of parents that seems to be reflected in this quotation could be problematic because, on the one hand, teachers’ attitudes seem to be highly dependent on the perceived behaviour of parents toward them, which appears to reflect little professional responsibility, yet on the other hand seems to indicate that teachers are more concerned with exerting power and domination and trying to attain a controlling position. Dahl (2017) found that teachers feel easily threatened when parents pass criticism and that their professional responsibility sometimes seems lost when parents assume a powerful position. A teacher explained how she feels powerless when she perceives a parent as being excessively powerful:

*To me it is important, you know, to try to reach for equality in contact with parents. When parents make themselves smaller, you know, I make myself smaller too. I say “You know, I don’t know either. You know your child better than I do. So tell me”. But when someone adopts a dominant position, like you said, [....], that’s difficult. It’s almost impossible to achieve some sort of equality when in contact with a parent like that.* (G3-T3)

The teacher explains how she strives for equality in contact with parents and adjusts her behaviour in reaction to what she observes. When parents seem to make themselves smaller, she tries to achieve the same level of positioning and presents herself as more vulnerable to parents. However, when she perceives a parent as being dominant, she experiences that way of positioning as something difficult and threatening. The negotiation
of power that seems to be reflected in the data, as was also prevalent in the research of Van den Berg and Van Reekum (2011), is likely to produce tensions and conflicts. This is because teachers seem to be positioning themselves in reaction to their appraisal of parents instead of trying to understand parents’ positioning and social acts from a professional point of view. This appears to prevent them from building dialogical relationships based on shared power with parents, as was suggested for schools by Douglass and Gittel (2012) to generate change in parent-teacher relations. Pushor (2012) added that teachers need to understand that they are responsible as professionals for their relations with parents. It is important for practice to acknowledge the ambivalent and conditional positioning of teachers that has emerged from the data and to encourage teachers to acknowledge that parents’ attitudes and behaviours are related to their storyline regarding their own position and the child’s situation, as suggested by Mahmood (2013).

Parents appeared to be aware of the ambivalent positioning of teachers and explained that this influences their relations with teachers. For example, in a discussion during a group interview, two parents discussed how they observe the ambivalence in teachers’ attitudes towards them:

Well, I think one teacher is far more aimed at ‘okay we are in this together’ than the other. (G3-P4)

In reaction to this observation, another parent remarked:

Yes, I sometimes experienced, well, some of them actually see you as equal, but others are afraid. Well, I wouldn’t exactly call it afraid, but you notice that they think ‘oh there she comes again to ask for attention, or....well, nag or complain, or...’. Okay, and that makes you feel like you are trouble for them, you know. And I think that in some cases, well the reciprocity is not good in cases like that. (G3-P7).

Thus, parents seem to be fully aware of the ambivalence of teachers towards them and the appraisal of teachers. At the same time, the quotations above suggest that parents’ appraisal of teachers is also important. The perceived appraisal of teachers makes parents feel like they are a burden. The parent above also explained that, in her experience, this directly influences the reciprocity in the relationship with teachers. These observations
reflect the transactional nature of positioning. Hirvonen (2013) and Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) stressed how, in interactional episodes, perceived changes in positions lead to adjustments in the positions of the other, while Woodward (2000) indicated how thoughts and behaviours might be adjusted in interaction. The data suggest that parents and teachers adjust their behaviour as a result of their appraisal of each other or the situation, which seems to complicate the relationship because of the ambivalence observed in their adjustments and because the different positions parents and teachers occupy in their relations remain unspoken in practice.

Reactions to appraisal
The data on ‘appraisal’ illustrate how parents’ and teachers’ positioning seems to be ambivalent because of their evaluations of each other or the situation. As a result of their appraisals, teachers appear to modify their behaviour and position themselves equivocally in relations with parents by either being open and inviting or more controlling. Parents, however, may experience some discomfort as a result of this ambivalence in the teachers’ positioning, and may therefore decide to withdraw from their contact with the teacher. Teachers appear to be focused on maintaining a powerful position and are occupied with their own positioning in reaction to parents, while parents appear to be aimed at carefully positioning themselves to avoid becoming a difficult parent. The careful positioning of parents in reaction to their appraisal of teachers suggests that tensions can easily arise because parents withdraw in their contact with teachers at the expense of their own needs. Furthermore, the observed modification of positions by parents suggests they are also occupied with their own positioning instead of developing dialogic relationships with teachers. Additionally, the ambivalent positioning of teachers might be regarded as problematic, as they seem to allow themselves to be guided by their feelings instead of assuming a professional position towards parents aimed at developing mutual understandings and viewpoints. This requires teachers to reflect on their positioning in parent-teacher relations and their professional role in the relationship.

Harmony
Although evidence from this research suggests that ambivalence in parents’ and teachers’ positioning appears to complicate their relations in practice, there is also some evidence that suggests parents and teachers are able to cooperate in harmony. In the group interviews with parents, parents discussed the differences between teachers and explained situations in which they felt that their views and experiences conformed with the teachers’
positioning towards them. Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) explained that it is important in conversations that the ways in which people position themselves and each other align, as this results in positive positioning. One parent said, for example:

*I think my husband and I are very open toward, well, how should I say, yes, toward the observations of the teacher. [...] Yes, we absolutely take this very seriously, and act upon it. We don’t always agree, but in my experience, our relation with this teacher is like, well this is open for debate. So, we experience a very open and enjoyable relation with the teacher of our son. We therefore value the teacher’s view on our son’s functioning.* (G1-P3)

This mother explained that the positive way in which they experience the relationship with the teacher appears to allow them to be open towards the teacher and to value the teacher’s opinions. In line with Matthiesen (2015), who concluded that parents’ positioning in their relations with teachers seems to be the result of an interaction process rather than the result of parents’ backgrounds, such parents appear to value the teacher’s opinion due to their positive experiences interacting with this particular teacher. This underlines the importance of the transactional nature of positioning, as suggested in the conceptual framework of this research. Furthermore, the fact that they feel comfortable disagreeing with the teacher and discussing their point of view seems to generate openness and acceptance from these parents towards the teacher. Mahmood (2013) concluded in her research on building relations with parents that it is important for parents and teachers to exchange different viewpoints through dialogue. Furthermore, some parents (n=27, 7%) explained that they experience harmony in their relations with teachers who communicate open and honestly with them about their child’s functioning at school, who listen to parents, and who allow parents to ask questions. One parent explained, for example:

*[The teachers’ role is] to allow parents to ask questions regarding subject matter or the child’s functioning. Next to that, maintain honest communication. Also, listen to what parents have to say about their own child. By the way, this is what happens in our relation with the teacher.* (Q-P209)

This parent contends that open communication from the teacher and room for parents to ask questions supports the development of good relations between the parents and teacher. Additionally, the parent above emphasises that, in their experience, the teacher acted
according to his expectations of the teachers’ role in their relationship. Despite the positive positioning that seems to be reflected in the data, this parent also appears to expect the teacher to be the key in their relationship, in line with the findings of Pushor (2012).

Some teachers (n=11, 14%) appear to concur with the expectation of parents that teachers need to be responsive and to communicate frequently and clearly. It is likely that these teachers are able to develop positive relations with parents. One teacher explained, for example:

I regularly send informative emails to all parents. If there is something the matter with a child, I inform parents and take the time to come to a solution together with them. Parents can always email me. They can also come in after school hours and, for example, have a look at their child’s school work. I spend a lot of time on writing reports carefully. (Q-T77)

Another teacher suggested that:

Parents must feel that they are taken seriously. (Q-T30)

The first teacher explains how she tries to inform parents precisely and carefully at all times, while the second teacher suggests that it is vital parents feel that the teacher takes them seriously. McKenna and Millen (2013) also found that parents place a high value on good communication practices that allow parents to maintain involvement in their child’s schooling alongside the importance of parents feeling valued and been taken seriously in their relations with teachers. Thus, it is likely that teachers who invest in communicating with parents and who take parents seriously will experience harmony in their contact with parents. In group interviews two and three, the teachers explained how they invested in their contacts with parents. One teacher said, for example:

I always mention during the parent information night, you know, we are in this together. If there is anything going on or if we need help to realise good things. If we need to organise a trip. Indeed, if there is something going on. But also the smaller positive things. At the door, like a parent who is pregnant. So you know, well, ‘how are you’. Sometimes the very small things, well, they make the contact. (G2-T2)
This teacher explains that clear communication and showing attention to parents appear to support good contact between parents and teachers. This is in line with Murrey et al. (2013), who found that personal interaction and clear communication support the development of positive relations between parents and teachers. Furthermore, this teacher seems to place a high value on subtle communication practices, as suggested by Jeynes (2011), for example by focusing on the small details and brief moments of contact at the classroom door. It is conceivable that this teacher will be able to work together effectively with parents. Bakker et al. (2013) concluded that teachers are important stakeholders in the relations with parents and, besides communicating openly and transparently with parents, their attitudes towards parents are particularly vital. Therefore, it is important for teachers to try to avoid ambivalence in their attitudes toward parents and to strive to achieve harmony in their relations. Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) suggested that intentional positioning might support the positions of participants in interaction, since positioning-talk (i.e., talking about the perceived or initial positions) supports the development of a joint storyline. It is believed that developing a shared storyline in parent-teacher relations supports clear and transparent communication as well as parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their relations.

**Summary**

Evidence from this research suggests that parents’ and teachers’ positioning toward each other could be interpreted as ambivalent in different ways, which appears to endorse how challenging it can be for parents and teachers who are attempting to develop collaborative and dialogical relations. The perceived legitimacy of teachers signals that teachers seem to prefer to assume a controlling or expert position in their relations with parents and the seemingly opposite positioning of parents as authoritative or expert appears to result in the ambivalent positioning of both parents and teachers, even before interactions occur. The relations between teachers and parents seem to become further complicated as a result of the observed desire of teachers to be regarded as sympathising with parents and cooperative. This does not seem to align with the observed traditional positioning of teachers. Furthermore, in practice, parents’ positioning seems ambivalent as they appear to assume a more amenable position instead of positioning themselves as the responsible and involved agents they consider appropriate for their role. This is confusing, but it is possibly a reaction to teachers’ attitudes towards them or might reflect compliance with the common routines and structures that appear to be prevalent within schools. Additionally,
teachers seem to develop ambivalent attitudes towards parents as a result of their appraisal of parents. The data suggest they choose to either stand next to parents or assume a more controlling position towards them. Parents appear to be aware of the appraisal of teachers, which induces them to assume ambivalent ways of positioning. Parents seem to be occupied in appraising the situation and trying to position themselves in reaction to what they observe, instead of proactively positioning themselves as agents in the relationship with teachers.

The ambivalence observed at different levels in the positioning of parents and teachers seems to complicate relations between parents and suggests that tensions and conflicts can easily arise in practice. The ambivalence observed might lead to unclear ways of positioning by parents and teachers and is likely to produce indistinctness in the relations of parents and teachers. Furthermore, parents and teachers both seem occupied in position-finding for themselves instead of developing collaborative relationships with each other. The way parents and teachers are located within their relationship appears to be based on individual reflections and assessments, rather than being the result of explicit coordination of their mutual positioning aimed at supporting the child’s educational development. The results presented here are concerning and suggest that it is important to clarify the roles and positions of teachers and parents before they can develop dialogical relations with each other. Additionally, it is essential that instead of being occupied with their own positioning, parents and teachers mutually position themselves around the child as the central objective for their collaborative endeavours. Nevertheless, there are some examples in the data that suggest it is possible for parents and teachers to experience positive positioning in their relations. These experiences seem to be a result of deliberate positioning by teachers, which involves open and clear communication towards parents and provides room for parents to contribute to the relationship as valuable partners who possess intimate knowledge of their own child.
CHAPTER NINE
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study developed and applied a framework of transactional positioning to gain an insight into parent–teacher relationships and consider how such insights might benefit children’s schooling. In so doing, this study explored the perceptions of parents and teachers connected to five Dutch primary schools with regard to their collaborative practices and their role conceptions. These provided an insight into the complex social reality of parent–teacher relationships. This chapter thus reflects on these insights and discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and the literature. Conclusions are presented and the limitations of this study are addressed. A discussion of the contribution to new knowledge is provided, and implications arising from this research that are considered relevant for practice, policy-makers, and researchers will be proposed. Finally, reflections on the research are presented to provide an understanding of the knowledge learned and how this has affected my development as a researcher, professional, and individual person.

Conclusions
This study aimed to investigate the positions that parents and teachers assume and are assigned in the relationships they develop. Positioning theory and role theory formed the basic theoretical principles for this research, which was also guided by the utilisation of the concepts of agency and transaction. The transactional positioning model developed for this research provided an original framework through which parents' and teachers’ reflections on their perceived relationships could be examined. An important assumption inherent in the conceptual framework is that people are able to give an account of what they do and say through reflection on practices, rules, and conventions. The interpretivist framework and pragmatic approach adopted for this research served to develop meaningful and contextual knowledge regarding parent–teacher relations as well as theoretical and practical knowledge.

This research yielded novel yet concerning insights about parents’ and teachers’ preconceptions and their conflicting positions that support further understanding of parent–teacher relations in practice. Two main themes emerged from the data: ‘strained relations’ and ‘ambivalence’. The findings showed that strained relations appeared to complicate the parent–teacher relationships revealed in the study. This appeared to be caused by two
important issues. The first was the implicitly constructed ideas teachers and parents had about each other’s roles; the second was the conflicting interests that reflected latent tensions in the relations between parents and teachers. These latent tensions might sometimes have resulted in strained interactions in practice.

Additionally, it became apparent that the ambivalent or even contradictory positions of parents and teachers appeared to further complicate their relations. The perceived legitimacy of their positions did not seem to be aligned and ambivalence could be observed between their own positioning and the social acts displayed in practice. Furthermore, the appraisal by parents and teachers of each other’s positioning seemed to make their relations even more diffuse. The findings also suggested that the primary focus of parent–teacher relations in supporting the child’s educational position could be lost, because both parties tend to focus instead on their own or the other’s position instead of trying to coordinate their efforts towards supporting the child. This is likely to have a major impact on the child’s experience and requires both parents and teachers to reflect on their roles and positions before they are able to mutually support the child’s educational development. Nevertheless, there is some encouraging evidence to show that parents and teachers are able to develop dialogical relations based on trust. Further evidence from this research suggests that the deliberate positioning of teachers might support the development of such relations.

The findings discussed in the previous chapters will now be considered in relation to the research questions that initiated this study:

(1) To what extent are tensions in parent–teacher relations a product of their conflicting positionings?

(2) To what extent does the transactional positioning of parents and teachers in their collaborative relations lead to possible conflict and tensions in their interactions with each other?

**Conflicting positionings: the unspoken impact**

This research has shown how parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their collaborative relations appears to be informed by conflicting interests that might result in strained relations. Latent tensions, which appear to be based on diverging and compelling role conceptions, remain undiscussed in practice and appear to be underpin parent-teacher
relations. Furthermore, the data reveals that tensions are sometimes enacted in strained interactions between parents and teachers. These observations suggest that where these latent tensions exist, tension and discomfort are inevitable in practice. This is similar to the point made by Deslandes et al. (2015), who found that teachers inevitably experience tensions and dilemmas in their relations with parents. The findings from this research suggest that parents also experience tensions in their interactions with teachers. The latent tensions and discomfort might be explained by the diverging expectations of parents and teachers in regard to appropriate role enactment. A majority of the teachers expected parents to acknowledge their position as a teaching professional who is responsible for the child’s schooling and to support their professional role. However, in for the majority of parents, the findings suggest that this contradicts and even conflicts with their expectations that teachers will engage and cooperate with them in supporting their individual child’s educational trajectory. The findings further indicate that, for some teachers in the upper grades in particular, expectations of parents’ roles are based on their own positioning as a group worker. Teachers who teach in the upper grades of primary schools might feel more challenged by parents’ individualised positioning, as parent-teacher relations in the upper grades traditionally seem to be more distant. Although scholars such as Gastaldi et al. (2012) and Price Mitchell (2009) have indicated that parents and teachers play different roles in their relations and operate from different contexts, the findings of this research indicate that the different roles of parents and teachers have a more profound effect. Beyond being simply ‘different’, parents’ and teachers’ positions appear to be conflicting, even before interaction occurs. This is important as conflicting parent–teacher relations are known to have a negative impact on the child’s position. This also has significant implications for practice; therefore, to prevent tensions and conflict in parent–teacher relations, implicitly developed positions need to be explicated.

Additionally, Vincent (2017) and Ule et al. (2015), among others, established that parents’ positions have changed dramatically as a result of societal changes. Consequently, parents feel highly responsible for their child’s educational trajectory. The findings of this research appear to confirm this and show how parents are closely involved in their child’s educational development. Teachers do not seem to have responded to these significant societal changes; on the contrary, the data suggest that they continue to maintain a traditional, authoritative position. Therefore, as Stefanski et al. (2016) and Stormont et al. (2013) suggested, reflection by teachers on their role and position is required in order to
transition from expecting parents to enact their role by being supporting or accommodating to recognising parents as equitable and valuable partners in the relationship.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that in practice, tensions are enacted, and both parents and teachers explained how experiencing strained interactions has an impact on their relations. Teachers might sometimes experience parents’ positioning as challenging, particularly when parents do not seem to act supportively in interaction with teachers, while parents seemed to experience strains when the teacher assumes a position that is unilateral and sometimes even peremptory in interaction. Contrary to Stormont et al. (2013), who found that teachers experience discomfort in their relations with specific groups of parents, the data suggest that teachers seem to experience discomfort in their relations with parents in a more general manner. Teachers’ traditional way of positioning might even result in strained interactions because, as endorsed by the findings, their approach to parents did not seem to align with the position of parents as being highly involved with, and feeling highly responsible, for their child’s schooling and development. Furthermore, there is evidence in this research that parents appeared to feel dependent in their relations with teachers, which could limit their opportunities to be proactive and to enact their role as responsible educators, or might prevent them from becoming engaged in their child’s schooling through the development of an equitable relationship with teachers. According to Goodall and Montgomery (2014), parents’ agency in their relations with teachers can be increased through the development of a dialogue with parents. However, the findings reported in this research suggest that some parents experienced tensions in their relationships with teachers because they were mainly viewed as recipients in the interactions. These findings underline the fact that teachers are the key in changing relations with parents.

In the model of transactional positioning, it was presumed that parents and teachers position themselves as well as each other in an equitable way. Nevertheless, the data suggest that the expectation of the other’s role was very explicit, while it appeared that their own role was not as actively considered. When describing their conceptions of their own roles, parents and teachers indicated how they positioned themselves in practice. This observation underlines the implicit nature of the different roles they play in their relations, which results in tacit positioning. This is of significance in practice, as it suggests that developing a dialogue between parents and teachers regarding their expectations of each other, as suggested by Broersen and Klapwijk (2017), is likely to support parents’ and
teachers’ positioning in their relations. They can mirror their role conceptions and positions to each other to develop mutual understandings of their relations. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002) showed that developing knowledge of each other’s perspectives supported both parents and teachers in their positioning. However, evidence from this research suggests that awareness of each other’s perspectives is not enough to support the development of dialogic relations between parents and teachers. In order to achieve this, it seems to be more important to discuss expectations of appropriate role enactment as well as parents’ and teachers’ perceptions regarding their own positioning in the relationship. This is expected to support the development of a shared storyline. The findings further suggest that parents and teachers who had experienced positive positioning appeared to trust each other to enact their role in ways that support their relationship.

In summary, in this research, parents’ and teachers’ conceptions of each other’s roles appeared to reflect conflicting interests that might induce strain in their collaborative relationships. These strained relations appeared to locate parents and teachers as opposite parties with differing interests, instead of collaborators with a joint responsibility for the child’s schooling and development. It appears to be important to develop trust in the way the other enacts their role. Discussing expectations and role conceptions is considered to be an important facilitator for developing trust regarding role enactment. The findings from this research further suggest that intentional positioning will support parent-teacher relations.

**Parents’ and teachers’ transactional positioning: ambiguity in action**

This research indicated that the parents and teachers in this study located themselves within collaborative relations through ambivalent ways of positioning themselves. The theme ‘ambivalence’ encapsulates how parents’ and teachers’ positioning in practice seemed to be guided by the perceived legitimacy of their own positions, which appeared to be contradictory, and how social acts and perceived legitimate positions might have resulted in mixed signals in their interactions with each other. Furthermore, the findings suggest that their appraisal of each other led to ambivalent, unclear ways of positioning in practice, which complicated their relations. The observation of ambivalent positioning between parents’ and teachers’ provides further understanding of the complex nature of parent-teacher relations in practice. It also supports the significance of the notion of transaction as part of the model of transactional positioning.
The findings show that this sample of parents and teachers actively and deliberately located themselves in their relationships with each other, acting whenever possible as agents in their relations. Although it has already been acknowledged and observed that parents and teachers are active agents who possess choice of action (e.g., Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Westergård and Galloway, 2010), the findings of this research confirm that parents and teachers operate as agents in practice. These findings highlight the importance of the concept of agency, as reflected in the model of transactional positioning. This is important as it indicates that an acknowledgement of teachers’ as well as parents’ agency in their relations will support the development of equitable relationships between parents and teachers.

Although parents and teachers act as agents, the findings also suggest that the agency of parents and teachers contradicted each other. The perceived legitimacy that was observed in the data whereby parents and teachers both considered their own position as expert and important shows how conflicting interests appeared to locate parents and teachers in opposition to each other. There seemed to be a need for the teachers and the parents in the study to establish their own entitlement in the relationship. This way of positioning is likely to produce conflict and tensions. According to Westergård and Galloway (2010), strains have an impact on the quality of the relationship that parents and teachers are able to develop. One way of reducing this discomfort would be to clarify both the roles and positions of parents and teachers by discussing expectations at the start of the school year or by explaining the roles and positions at the start of a conversation.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the social acts parents displayed in practice did not align with their perceived positions. Parents seemed to settle for limited agency in practice based on their judgements and previous experiences. While this appears to confirm the findings of scholars like Anderson and Minke (2007) that parents occupy a dependent position in their relations with teachers, it goes further by suggesting that parents reconcile themselves to the situation rather than simply depending on an invitation to become involved. These findings underline the transactional aspect of positioning, as was suggested in the model of transactional positioning. Evidence from this study suggests that parents modify their position as a result of their experiences. This decision by parents to settle for limited agency also seems to create ambivalence for parents in their positioning.
which in turn can have the effect of reinforcing teachers’ sense that parents are difficult or challenging.

The transactional nature of the parent–teacher relationship was also demonstrated in the evidence presented under the subtheme ‘appraisal’. Parents and teachers discussed how they adapted their behaviour to the perceived circumstances and positioning of the other. Appraisal, however, led teachers to adopt different ways of positioning in their interaction with different parents, either as more receptive or more controlling, which might be confusing for parents and could induce tensions in their relations. Teachers seemed to allow themselves to be guided by their own feelings about parents, instead of assuming a professional position in which they could reflect on their relations with parents. Furthermore, parents appeared to perceive this appraisal by teachers and this seemed to produce ambivalent feelings. They appeared to interpret the teachers’ shifting positioning as not being open, which seemed to limit the parents’ agency, as they withdrew when they sensed that teachers were not receptive to their attempts to contact the teacher, even at the expense of their own needs. This difference in positioning in practice endorsed the fact that parents’ and teachers’ positions are fundamentally unequal: teachers try to avoid tensions and stay in control, while parents try to navigate through their interactions with teachers. However, the ambiguity in parents’ and teachers’ positioning observed in this study also indicates that, despite the predominant position of teachers in practice, when they are functioning in their relationship with parents, the power lines are not as clearly delineated as one might expect. This supports the idea that tensions are inherent in parent–teacher relations and reinforces the notion that coordination of mutual relations is required to ensure that teachers and parents develop actual collaborative relations.

Additionally, these findings illustrate how parents and teachers operate as agents and how they locate themselves within their relations by negotiating their positions. A factor that has greater importance is the observation that parents and teachers seemed to work hard to position themselves in their relations individually, rather than aiming for mutual positions that would enable them to jointly support the child’s educational development. This is a significant finding as it suggests the child’s educational development seems to be neglected as a joint aspiration of their relations, not only in their positioning but also in their reflections on practice. The benefits of relationships that support the child’s schooling are abundantly clear. Therefore, it is striking to find that an unfortunate outcome of a lack
of transparency in their engagement appears to be that this objective of their relations is not their primary focus.

In summary, the positioning of parents and teachers in this research was, in practice, influenced by ambivalence and tensions. Two major troubling points of interest for practice arose. First, in general, both parents and teachers sometimes appeared to overlook the fact that the child’s educational development was the main objective of their relations. Secondly, parents and teachers did not seem to coordinate their positioning, but instead tried to maintain or achieve a position in their relations through individual endeavours. These findings emphasise the urgent need for a reconsideration of practices surrounding shared relations. A conversation about the goal of the relationship as well as roles and perceptions on collaboration is essential. The multidimensional model that was developed for this research could be useful in practice as it has the potential to resonate with teachers and parents in other contexts who have had similar experiences and may thus contribute to their understanding of teacher-parent collaborative relations.

**Model of strained relations**

As a result of the findings from this research, the model of transactional positioning derived from the literature has been amended. The possible sources of tension observed in this study have been added. The amendments reflect the source of the strained relations observed in practice. The ambivalent positioning as a result of the perceived legitimacy in relation to parents’ and teachers’ own roles and the impact of their mutual appraisal on transactional positioning are also included in the model. The possible sources of tensions and conflicts are emphasised in grey and surrounded by dotted lines to help readers visualise where teachers (and parents) might have experienced tensions or where conflicts may arise. Figure 9.1 presents the amended model resulting from this study. The model is focused on parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their relations and reflects possible sources of tensions and conflict, despite there also being a number of positive elements identified in the data. The latter, although identified in the relationship between teachers and parents, were not sufficiently prominent in the data to warrant inclusion in the model. Overall, the model, as well as the main direction and focus of this research, are concerned
with the tensions and conflictual experiences of the parents and teachers studied.

**Figure 9.1: Model of strained relations**

The model presented in Figure 9.1 shows that parents and teachers are *agents* who are able to develop a *role definition* for their own and each other’s roles. From their *role* follows
their role enactment in practice, which leads to particular social acts that parents and teachers display.

The social acts parents and teachers display reflect their positioning in interaction. Resultantly, different storylines are conceivable in parent–teacher interactions. They mutually influence each other during their interactions (i.e., the process of transactional positioning occurs).

As a result of their transactional positioning, parents’ and teachers’ agentic reflections and assessments might change their views and, consequently, they might modify their behaviour. The modified behaviours that result from these transactions change the social acts the parents and teachers display. These modifications have an impact on the positioning and the storyline in interaction and thus on the way parents and teachers enact their roles.

Furthermore, modified role enactment might lead to modified ideas about the way their own or each other’s role should be enacted. Consequently, their role definition for themselves and each other as agents might change, leading to another episode of transactional positioning.

The emergent themes from the empirical research introduce a number of other dimensions that can be incorporated into the model of transactional positioning.

As can be seen in the model, the role definition they form for themselves and for each other and the perceived legitimacy that follows from their own role initially inform parents’ and teachers’ role enactment in practice.

When their role enactment and the social acts displayed do not align with their storyline about the appropriate role enactment and their positioning conflicts, latent tensions underlying parents’ and teachers’ positioning in interactions can be observed. These might induce strained interactions because their appraisal of the social acts displayed do not align with the initial role definition or the perceived legitimacy to enact their role. At this point, strained relations might be experienced.
Furthermore, parents’ and teachers’ appraisal of each other’s social acts might lead to observed ambivalence, which is likely to induce strained interactions that could possibly lead to strained relations.

For example, a teacher who expects parents to support the teacher and who believes that it is legitimate on the basis of their role to give parents the assignment to register themselves for a parent night that has been arranged to clean their child’s classroom, enacts their role by approaching parents in the schoolyard and notifying them that it is important to register. However, a parent who believes that their role is to support their child’s educational development and who believes that it is legitimate for them to contribute to their child’s schooling by devising solutions to tailor it to the child’s needs, uses the moment to discuss one of their ideas. These different storylines about their roles reflect latent tensions underlying their positioning in practice. This is likely to result in a strained interaction, as the teacher might not be receptive to the way the parent enacts their role or might not agree that this is in fact their role. However, another scenario is possible. The teacher might expect the parent to enact their role as described above and, to avoid a discussion about meeting the child’s needs, might choose to discuss the weather and endorse that the child is doing well as a way of enacting their role and positioning themselves before asking the parent to register. However, it is likely that this will confuse the parent when they appraise the teacher’s social acts, as they may have overheard the teacher urgently notifying other parents to register, while the parents’ storyline of the child’s wellbeing does not align with what the teacher is saying. This ambivalent positioning of the teacher also leads to strained interaction between the parent and the teacher and may lead to modified behaviour of the parent in reaction. The parent, for example, might withdraw or interrupt the teacher to state that they are concerned about their child’s progress. When these different factors are not acknowledged and discussed, experiences like this have the potential to result in the strained relations that develop between parents and teachers.

The model provides an insight into important factors that appear to influence parent–teacher relations and supports a deeper understanding of possible tensions and conflicts that can arise as a result of the conflicting interests observed in parents’ and teachers’ reflections on their roles and positions within their collaborative relations. Reflecting on these factors supports schools, teachers, and policy makers in the development of an understanding of areas in which they can make changes in their relations with parents and what impacts these changes will then have. Furthermore, the model facilitates the process
of guiding future researchers in selecting particular areas for research and assessing its effect.

Original contribution to new knowledge
This research offers a new and innovative contribution to both theory and practice.

The contribution to theory is a multidimensional framework for use as a structure for the conceptualisation of parent–teacher relations. Combining role theory and positioning theory, together with the concepts of transaction and agency, proved to be useful in developing further understanding of parent-teacher relations. The framework of transactional positioning provides explanatory insights into parents’ and teachers’ agency, their differing roles and positioning in practice, and the transactions that occur. Additionally, the findings showed that expectations of each other’s roles and the perceived legitimacy of their own role were important factors that informed parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their relations. Their appraisals of each other and ambivalent ways of positioning seemed to locate parents and teachers in interaction within their collaborative relations. This provides further understanding of the dynamic nature of positioning, as initially outlined by Harré and Van Langenhove (1999). The framework of transactional positioning offers new insights into the different roles that parents and teachers, as agents, play in their relations and supports further understanding of the complexity of those relations.

The contribution to practice provides a framework for practitioners, policy-makers, and teacher educators to support teachers and schools in coordinating the development of mutual relations between parents and teachers by creating transparency regarding the agency, roles and positions of both actors. Explicating and acknowledging the different interests of parents and teachers as agents, in addition to clarifying the shared objective of their relations, can support the development of better and more effective parent–teacher relationships. In practice, the framework of strained relations can be used to reflect on teachers’ strained interactions as a way to gain an understanding of the possible sources of tension that led, in this research, to the strains observed. Furthermore, the framework could be used as a tool to support teachers in conversations by explicating the roles, definitions and positions of both the parent and teacher, and to discuss social acts (e.g., how this conversation occurs) as a means to prevent possible tensions.
Limitations
The conclusions presented have to be considered in the light of limitations that pertain to this research.

Sample
Although the sample was large, it cannot be considered a typical sample for Dutch primary education because it is not clear whether or not the sample represents the true characteristics of the population, which is, according to Newby (2014), an indication of a typical sample. This results from the fact that the research was informed by parents and teachers who were all linked to urban schools situated within a one-hour drive from the researcher’s residence, and a self-selecting sample of highly educated parents participated in the group interviews. Moreover, the sample mainly consisted of females. Therefore, the conclusions cannot necessarily be viewed as typical of parents and teachers in Dutch primary education, and as such, generalisations from the findings should be treated with caution. However, this study succeeded in its aim to collect empirical data from parents and teachers as authoritative sources which, according to Plowright (2011), leads to warrantable knowledge (in the case of this research, about parent–teacher relationships), which can be used to develop policy and inform practice.

To address issues of participation and equality of contribution in the group discussions and to achieve respondent validation, parents and teachers were asked, as suggested by Creswell (2013), to reflect on the accuracy of my account of the group interviews and they were invited to add insights that appeared to be missing in the account. Nevertheless, despite this precaution, questions may still arise over whether the group interview participants were able to contribute equally to the discussion and whether the responses of the participants were honest. These factors may affect the extent to which the current research is an accurate account of the phenomenon of parent–teacher collaborative practices.

Additionally, one-third of the questionnaire sample consisted of non-Dutch participants, while the group interview sample consisted entirely of native Dutch participants. The result of this may be that the data generated in the questionnaires was affected by language difficulties, resulting in superficial or obvious answers by parents who did not comprehend the questions and therefore might not be an adequate reflection of cultural differences. Also, at the school in The Hague, some parents translated the questions for other parents,
which might have influenced their answers, or completed the questionnaire for other parents and modified their answers in the process. Thus, it is conceivable that the various perspectives of participants in the current research were not equally represented and therefore, according to Scott and Usher (1996), the results cannot be carefully weighed and generalised. Nevertheless, analysis of different answers from different participants showed that the cultural differences seemed to be minor in the reflections of parents on their role conceptions and their collaborative relationships with teachers. This suggests that differences between parents are layered and complex and it is not simply class differences and cultural differences that are decisive in their role conception and positioning (Vincent, 2017).

**Methodology and methods**

This study used a mixed methods design in the sense that different methods of data collection were used to provide evidence from different sources (Creswell, 2013) to corroborate the findings and to shed light on parent–teacher relationships from different perspectives. However, this involved questionnaires comprised of open-ended questions. Some parents and teachers appeared to experience difficulties answering the questions, which was reflected in their very short or meaningless answers. Additionally, at one school, parents helped other parents to complete the questionnaire, which might have led to answers being influenced by other participants. Furthermore, the wording of the questions might have led to certain answers when asking about expectations and roles, and, as such, this may have led parents and teachers in the direction of role theory and positioning. During the group interviews, it was occasionally difficult to estimate whether all participants were able to contribute equally to the conversation. Also, during the group interview with nine teachers – which was a surprise in itself because only six teachers had registered to participate – the discussion was difficult to manage and it was hard to initiate a genuine discussion.

**Data analysis**

Because the large dataset yielded considerable amounts of rich narrative data, the data analysis was time-consuming and complex. To render it more manageable, as well as creating an opportunity to yield a richer and deeper analysis, it may have been worthwhile establishing a research study group to analyse data collaboratively, as proposed by Dean et al. (2017). Additionally, choices had to be made concerning what would be presented in this report, as it was not possible to report all the aspects that parents and teachers value in
detail with regard to their roles and the relationships they develop. However, the peer review offered by three colleagues, and the sending of a condensed account to parents and teachers who participated in the group interviews to ask for their comments, supported the interpretations and choices made and helped me gain some distance from the subject matter. Although this proved to be a useful way of checking and corroborating interpretations, the data analysis is also influenced by the theoretical framework adopted for this research and my personal experiences as a parent, a teacher, and a teacher educator. Nevertheless, the approach taken, the thematic analysis of the data, the verification of interpretations, and the discussion of the research with others supported continuous reflection and justification of the choices made (Boeije, 2014). The findings of this study revealed important insights with regard to parent–teacher relationships and the practices in the schools involved in the research and also provided sufficient information to address the research questions.

**Implications and recommendations**

Firstly, an important implication of the findings is the observed importance for teachers to cooperate with parents to re-establish the position of the child in their relations by explicitly determining that supporting the child’s educational development is the shared objective of their relationship (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Lemmer, 2013). Additionally, an implication for practice is the observed need to make implicit ideas about roles and positions explicit (Broersen and Klapwijk, 2017) to support parents’ and teachers’ positioning in practice. It is important that schools, policy-makers, and teachers develop an awareness of the changed positions of parents (Ule et al., 2015) and that traditional practices are reviewed (Stefanski et al., 2016) so that schools are able to develop opportunities for parents and teachers to develop their relations in ways that do justice to parents’ and teachers’ positions.

The finding that parents and teachers locate themselves within their relations through individual endeavours suggests that an important implication for practice is that particular attention should be given to the process of developing mutual relations. This can be accomplished through explicating the roles and positions of parents and teachers as well as reviewing practices (Goodall, 2018) in schools in the light of the model of transactional positioning. It is essential that a dialogue is created (Deslandes et al., 2015) between teachers as a starting point for reflection and between parents and teachers as equal partners in the relationship. It is important to engage parents as agents in this so that they
are able to think along with the school about how practices can be developed that fit the context of the school and the families involved (Rodriguez et al., 2014). Additionally, it is suggested that the Schools Inspectorate and the government explicitly encourage schools to develop ongoing conversations between parents and teachers in order to support children’s academic development.

Furthermore, the framework of transactional positioning offers a foundation for teacher trainers and novice teachers to construct meaning with regard to the different roles and (pre-) positions of parents and teachers. The framework may support novice teachers in practice to seek agency and assume a position that supports the development of mutual relations with parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2002). Furthermore, it is recommended that, in teacher training, the societal positions of parents are discussed to prepare novice teachers on how to prevent tensions (Dahl, 2015) by working with parents within the existing societal discourse.

Although the body of research on parent–teacher relationships and parental involvement is extensive, further research is necessary to corroborate or further elaborate the findings of this study. Some preliminary recommendations are described, but other suggestions are conceivable. Important implications for future research are to investigate parents from different cultural and social backgrounds in greater detail to see if they might have different expectations and to investigate possible differences between teachers with varied work experiences and differing backgrounds. Additionally, it would be interesting to extend the knowledge of parents’ and teachers’ positioning through actual observation of their interactions in practice. Furthermore, it is necessary to elaborate the findings of this research in other schools, for instance in schools with a multi-ethnic population, to corroborate or contrast the findings of the current research. The findings of this research could also be presented in a survey to a representative sample of parents and teachers to underpin or contradict the findings, and the model developed can then be further elaborated or potentially evaluated through further research.

**Final reflections**

The aim of this research was to determine how parents and teachers are positioned in the relationships they develop for the benefit of children’s schooling. Engaging in this research yielded new insights and experiences. The initial study, for instance, was important in helping me understand the difficulties involved in developing actual partnerships between
parents and teachers and how the divergent positions of parents and teachers appear to be crucial factors in this process. This led to a new research title and revision of the research questions. This also informed my practice as a teacher trainer.

Throughout the process, my own presuppositions continually changed as a result of the new insights that were gained, and this consciousness-raising helped me to reflect on my practice, my research, and my own position as a parent and teacher trainer. For example, I initially focused on the positions of parents and, due to my own experiences of strained relations with teachers, I was very sympathetic to the cause of parents. However, as a result of reading the literature and reflecting on the findings of this research, my perspective changed and I became aware of the individualised positioning of parents and the compelling expectations this positioning involves for teachers. This supported my understanding of the teachers’ position. On the other hand, I was surprised by the traditional ideas of teachers and the observed need to maintain control. The ambivalence observed in the data also struck me and led to an adjusted view on parent–teacher relations, endorsing the need to clarify roles and positions in practice. During the different phases of the data analysis process, I began to realise how both parents and teachers seem to struggle and how important it is to clarify roles and positions and be able to explicitly discuss them in interaction with each other. In practice, this formed the key to approaching my daughter’s teachers differently and positioning myself explicitly, but it also led me to invite parents to my class and help teachers understand parents’ positions. Teachers were amazed by the experiences of parents and were shocked to hear what parents sometimes perceive from teachers or experience in their interactions. It was very rewarding to observe the interaction between the teachers in my class and the parents. However, a disappointing aspect for me, and one that requires further development, is the fact that most teachers appeared to attribute the experiences of these parents to their particular circumstances and even condemned their (anonymous) colleagues instead of reflecting on their own practice. In fact, it seemed difficult for teachers to reflect on their own practices as a result of the shared experiences of these parents.

I also developed as a researcher. Through this project, particularly through analysing the rich and extended dataset, I developed my understanding of thematic coding and how time-consuming the process can be, in addition to the management skills required to comprehend all the information.
The tensions and conflictual interests that I observed in parent-teacher relations in this thesis research are worrying and might be interpreted as a reason for pessimism regarding the possibility of building truly equitable, collaborative parent–teacher relations. The differing positions as well as the different roles parents and teachers play in their relations and in the child’s life seem to complicate their relations. Explicating these different roles and positions might be the key to resolving tensions and conflicting interests in their relations. Acknowledging the agency of parents and teachers in their relations and appreciating their different interests and roles offers a promising pathway for developing mutual relations in the future.
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Appendix 1. Letter for schools

Dear Ms/Mr…………….. ,
I have request to make. My name is Geke Klapwijk, and I am a doctorate student at the Open University. For my Doctoral thesis I wish to conduct a research which involves the exploration of parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of their relations in practice. The aim of the research is to investigate the positions parents and teachers take up and are assigned in their collaborating relations in Dutch primary schools. The importance of parental involvement is underlined by an extensive body of research. The research can be used by schools and teachers to understand needs and strengths of parents and teachers and to use this as a starting point for building educational partnerships.

If you are happy for your school to participate in the study, I hope to carry out a series of questionnaires with parents and teachers and group interviews with parents and teachers. In consultation with you, we schedule a suitable moment to carry out the questionnaires and group interviews. The group interviews will be audio taped and transcribed, and the conversations should be no longer than 60 minutes. Once I have received your consent (attached) to approach parents to participate in the study, I will obtain informed consent from each participant (a copy is available for your attention).

However, if you are willing to participate in this research, I would like to offer something in return for your school. I am willing to write an evaluation report on parents’ and teachers’ assessments of their relationship practices that will be based on the questionnaire data. It is for instance possible to use this report for the biennial satisfactory investigation that you are required to conduct.

Information collected from all participants will be kept anonymous and stored securely. Only myself and the project supervisor will have access to the data and, in accordance with the requirements of some scientific journals and organisations, the coded data may be shared with other competent researchers. If there is a withdrawal of consent before the point of data collation, the data will be destroyed. No information leading to the identification of your school or the individual parents or teachers will be included in any publication or distribution of the results. Your school’s involvement is voluntary and you may withdraw permission at any time during the project.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.
Yours sincerely,
Ms Geke Klapwijk MSc.
Appendix 2. Inviting letters for participants

Invitation for parents:
Dear parents/carers,
We wish to have your opinion on this!

Today, you received an email from school. In this message you will find a hyperlink to an online questionnaire. In this questionnaire you are being asked to give your opinion on collaborating with the teacher of your child.
It is important that as many parents and caretakers as possible complete the questionnaire.

If you don’t own a computer, you may ask the teacher to provide a paper questionnaire. If you have trouble writing in Dutch, you can maybe ask your child, a family member of a neighbour to help you fill in the questionnaire.

Your child’s school will receive a report of the anonymised answers, to provide the school with information that is crucial to develop good relationships with parents.

Furthermore, the answers will be used in a research project on parent–teacher collaboration. Names will not be used. The data will be processed anonymously.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.
Kind regards,
Geke Klapwijk
Doctoral researcher

Invitation for teachers
Dear teachers,
We wish to have your opinion on this!

Today, you received an email from the school director. In this message you will find a hyperlink to an online questionnaire. In this questionnaire, you are being asked to give your opinion on collaborating with the parents of the children that attend your class.
It is important that as many teachers as possible complete the questionnaire.

The school will receive a report of the anonymised answers, to provide the school with information that is crucial to develop good relationships between parents and teachers.

Furthermore, the answers will be used in a research project on parent–teacher collaboration. Names will not be used. The data will be processed anonymously.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.
Kind regards,
Geke Klapwijk
Doctoral researcher
Invitation for group interviews

Dear Parents/Teachers,

First of all, I would like to thank you wholeheartedly for participating in my research and filling in the questionnaire. The answers provided by all of you yielded important insights for my research. However, it is important to develop even deeper into the positioning of parents and teachers in their relations. Therefore, I asked you if you would be willing to participate in a group interview.

You indicated your willingness to take part in a group interview. Hence, I am sending this email to invite you to a meeting which will be arranged at (possible dates and hours) at the school. I hope you are able to participate at one of the scheduled times. You can indicate the day and time of your preference in response to this email until Friday (date). A scheduled interview will be held only when a minimum of five participants are able to be present. I will inform you on Monday about which interviews will take place and also let you know about those times which have been cancelled.

The group interview will last approximately one hour and the data gathered from these interviews will be stored separately from any personal information. Your contribution will be used to develop further insight into parent–teacher relations, and all quotations that are used in the research report will be presented anonymously.

I hope to meet you during one of the interviews.

Kind regards,

Geke Klapwijk
Appendix 3. Letter for MEd students

Email invitation sent Master of Education students

Dear students,

My name is Geke Klapwijk. As a teacher educator in the Master of Education programme, I am also conducting a study to achieve my Doctorate in Education, an EdD. In this context, I am conducting research on parent–teacher collaboration. To be specific, my study focuses on the relations between parents and teachers and how they position themselves within these relations.

Being familiar with the MEd programme, I am aware that you are required to conduct a research project for your Master’s thesis, which is a significant challenge for a lot of students. Therefore, I am sending you this email to invite you to take part in my research and to make use of the anonymised data that is generated at your school to answer your own research questions regarding parent–teacher relations at your school. I will provide the descriptive information, i.e. the relevant information about parents’ and teachers’ backgrounds, like age range, education level and what groups their children attend.

If you are interested in taking part in this research and conducting a research project on parent–teacher collaborative relations at your own school, please contact me via email or the mobile phone number provided in my electronic signature. When you have registered your interest, we will discuss the possibilities for joining the current research and your questions and expectations, as well as the terms involved in taking part.

Kind regards,
Geke Klapwijk

Educationalist | Teacher educator | Seminarium voor Orthopedagogiek |
Hogeschool Utrecht | geke.klapwijk@hu.nl | 06-51180065 | Padualaan 97 |
3584 CH | Utrecht | Accessible on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday |
Appendix 4. Questionnaire for Parents

Introduction
As a parent, there are different ways of being involved in your child’s education and collaborating with the teacher or teachers of your child. The aim of this survey is to investigate what positions parents and teachers take up in their collaborative practices. The results will be used to gain insights into the views and experiences of parents in Dutch Primary Education. Complementary group interviews will be set up for in-depth investigation into positions of parents and teachers. The outcomes of the research can be used by schools and teachers to understand parent teacher relationships.

You will be asked to give your opinion on different aspects of involvement, collaboration and partnership with teachers. The information will be treated strictly confidentially as indicated below:

1. Upon receipt, the questionnaire will be coded and your name and address kept separate from it.
2. Any information that you provide will not be made public in any form that could reveal your identity to an outside party, i.e. you will remain fully anonymous.
3. Aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
4. Individual results will not be released to any person except at your request and on your authorisation.
5. You are free to withdraw your consent up to the point of data analysis [January 1st 2015], in which event your participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from you will not be used.

Consent form (appendix 6)

Demographic information:

I am a:
Man
Woman
What is your age?
What is the highest education level you have obtained?
0 Secondary school
0 Vocational training
0 Bachelor degree
0 Master degree
0 Other, namely:
School name:
Place:

The school my children attend is a (more than one answer possible):
State school 0 Catholic school 0 Protestant school
Reformed school 0 Inclusive school 0 Jenaplan school
Montessori school 0 Dalton school 0 Waldorf school
Other, namely:

How many of your children attend this school?

What grade are they in?
Grade 1 – 8 (elementary school grades)
Questions:
What are in general your expectations in working together with the teacher or teachers of your child or children?

What do you consider as your role in working together with the teacher of your child?

What do you consider the teacher’s role in working together with you as a parent?

How do you want to be seen through the teacher?

For the research, I would like to discuss with teachers on a voluntary basis what they experience and what they do in parent-teacher relationships. Do you want to take part in a group interview?

Yes/no

If yes, please leave your email address below:

You have completed the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your cooperation.
Appendix 5. Questionnaire for Teachers

Introduction
As a teacher you collaborate with parents. There are different ways parents can be involved in their child’s education. The aim of this survey is to investigate what your position is in this collaborative practice. The results will be used to gain insights into the positions of teachers in Dutch Primary Education with regard to collaborating with parents. Complementary group interviews will be set up for in-depth investigation into the positions of parents and teachers. The outcomes of the research can be used by schools and parents to understand parent-teacher relationships.

You will be asked to give your opinion about different aspects of involvement, collaboration and partnership with parents. The information will be treated strictly confidentially as indicated below:

1. Upon receipt, the questionnaire will be coded and your name and address kept separately from it.
2. Any information that you provide will not be made public in any form that could reveal your identity to an outside party, i.e. you will remain fully anonymous.
3. Aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
4. Individual results will not be released to any person except at your request and on your authorisation.
5. You are free to withdraw your consent up to the point of data analysis [January 1st 2015], in which event your participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from you will not be used.

Consent form (appendix 6)

Demographic information:
I am a:
Man
Woman
In what year were you born?
Year:
What is the highest education level you have obtained?
0 Bachelor degree
0 Master degree
0 Other, namely:

How many years have you worked as a teacher?

The school I work for at the moment is a (more than one answer possible):
State school 0 Catholic school 0 Protestant school
Reformed school 0 Inclusive school 0 Jenaplan school
Montessori school 0 Dalton school 0 Waldorf school
Other, namely:

What grade or which group do you teach in at the moment?
Grade 1 – 8 (elementary school grades)

Questions:
What are in general your expectations in working together with parents?
What do you consider as your role in working together with parents?

What do you consider the parent’s role in working together with you as a teacher?

How do you want to be seen through the parents?

For the research, I would like to discuss with teachers on a voluntary basis what they experience and what they do in parent-teacher relationships. Do you want to take part in a group interview?

Yes/no

If yes, please leave your email address below:

You have completed the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your cooperation.
Appendix 6. Group interview guide and elicitation tools

Group interview guide

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewees:

Positions of the interviewees:
Before starting:
- Obtain consent from every interviewee;
- Explain the project and research goal;
- Explain how data will be processed;
- Explain that the interview will take one hour;
- Explain ground rules (e.g. listen to each other, let everyone talk, do not judge each other);
- Let everyone introduce themselves.

Present the first discussion prompt to parents/teachers. Every participant is asked to complete the sentence. Allow interviewees to explain their answer and to ask questions. Allow participants to interact with each other and to respond to each other. When every participant has completed the sentence and explained their answer, the second discussion prompt is presented. Ask each participant to complete another sentence. Third, the model is presented to parents/teachers asking them to place themselves on the platform when interacting with the teacher and to explain how they take up a certain position on the platform.
**Elicitation tools parents**

1. When interacting with the teacher of my child, I am someone who….

2. When interacting with me, the teacher of my child is someone who……

3. Podium

**Elicitation tools teachers**

1. When interacting with the parents of my students, I am someone who…….

2. When interacting with me, a parent is someone who………..

3. Podium
Appendix 7. Approval Human Research Ethics Committee

From Dr Duncan Banks
Chair, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee
duncan.banks@open.ac.uk
Extension 59198

To Geke Klapwijk, CREET

Subject “Developing and managing educational partnership using parent voice and presence in Dutch primary schools.”

Ref HREC/2014/1742/Klapwijk/1
AMS/RED n/a
SRPP n/a
Submitted 15 July 2014
Date 16 July 2014

Memorandum

This memorandum is to confirm the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted for ethics review, has been given a favourable opinion by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee by Chair’s action as it is thought to be low risk.

Please make sure that any question(s) relating to your application and approval are sent to Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk quoting the HREC reference number above. We will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible so that your research is not delayed in any way.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

Regards,

Dr Duncan Banks
Chair OU HREC

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (number RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (number SC 008302)
HREC_2014-1742-Klapwijk-1-approval-chair’s-action
Appendix 8. Request for permission letters

Request for permission to conduct research in schools

Date: 27.05.2016
Dear Ms/Mr…………….. ,
My name is Geke Klapwijk, and I am a doctorate student at the Open University. The research project I wish to conduct for my Doctoral thesis involves the exploration of parent’s perceptions on using parent voice and parent presence in Dutch primary education to assist schools and teachers in developing educational partnerships based on an informed level of understanding. The aim of the research is to investigate the positions parents and teachers take up and are assigned in their collaborating relations in Dutch primary schools. The importance of parental involvement is underlined by an extensive body of research. The research can be used by schools and teachers to understand needs and strengths of parents and teachers and to use this as a starting point for building educational partnership. This project will be conducted under the main supervision of Dr David Plowright-the Open University.

I am hereby seeking your consent to approach a number of parents and teachers in your school to provide participants for this project. If you are happy for your school to participate in the study, I hope to carry out a series of questionnaires with parents and teachers and group interviews with parents and teachers. These conversations will be audio taped and transcribed, and the interviews should be no longer than 60 minutes. Once I have received your consent (attached) to approach parents to participate in the study, I will obtain informed consent from each participant (a copy is available for your attention).

Information collected from all participants will be kept anonymous and stored securely. Only myself and the project supervisor will have access to the data and, in accordance with the requirements of some scientific journals and organisations, the coded data may be shared with other competent researchers. If there is a withdrawal of consent before the point of data collation, the data will be destroyed. No information leading to the identification of your school or the individual parents or teachers will be included in any publication or distribution of the results. Your school’s involvement is voluntary and you may withdraw permission at any time during the project.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.
Yours sincerely,
Ms Geke Klapwijk MSc.
School Permission to Conduct Research

Dear Human Research Ethics Committee at the Open University;

I, Ms..........................Head teacher of ........................................ Dutch Primary school hereby give permission for Ms Geke Klapwijk to conduct the research titled “Dutch parents’ and teachers’ positioning in their collaborative practices”:

I understand that
1. The aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study, have been explained to me.
2. I voluntarily and freely give my consent for the institution/organisation to participate in the above research study.
3. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained through this institution/organisation will not be used if I so request.
4. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.

I agree that
5. The institution/organisation MAY / MAY NOT be named in research publications or other publicity without prior agreement.
6. I / We DO / DO NOT require an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the research findings related to the institution/organisation.
7. I / We EXPECT / DO NOT EXPECT to receive a copy of the research findings or publications.

Signature:  
Date:
CONSENT FORM: INTERVIEWS

I, hereby agree to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by G.J. Klapwijk, M.Sc.
and I understand that the purpose of the research is to investigate what positions parents and teachers take up and are assigned when collaborating with each other for the benefit of the child.

I understand that
1. the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study, have been explained to me.

2. I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in such research study.

3. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.

4. Individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.

5. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Signature: Date:

The contact details of the researcher are: gekeklapwijk@live.nl
The contact details of the secretary to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee are Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk
Appendix 9.1 Fragments questionnaire data

*Initial codes questionnaires*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fragments Questionnaire</th>
<th>Initial codes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answers parents provided with regard to the question: What do you expect when collaborating with teachers?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| To be informed with regard to my child’s progression at school and help at school every now and then. (P5) | *Child is central*  
*Get informed*  
*Help* |
| Collaborating well means that parent and teacher listen to each other and agree on things. I expect my child to get good grades and behave well. (P6) | *Listen to each other*  
*Child is central*  
*Child doing well* |
| Stay in touch and exchange information to achieve good grades. (P7)                       | *Stay in touch*  
*Exchanging information*  
*Child doing well* |
| Whenever there’s a question that remains open, provide a good explanation! Pay attention and provide structure in a sound way. Talk about the content of a school book or sums so that the operations become easier to perform for the child. (P8) | *Explain if necessary*  
*Pay attention*  
*Structured approach*  
*Child doing well* |
| Good communication on both sides – finding time to discuss educational/behavioural/emotional/possible health issues connected with school, strong and weak points, ways to improve. (P9) | *Communicating well*  
*In concert*  
*Child doing well*  
*Regarding school issues* |
| For the teacher to provide information on time and be friendly toward children. (P10)   | *Teacher-directed*  
*Get informed*  
*On time*  
*Friendly* |
Appendix 9.2 Fragments group interviews

*Initial codes group interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fragment</th>
<th>Initial codes</th>
<th>Merged codes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T= Teacher – PC = panel chairwoman</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

T2: Well, as a teacher in the lower grades I think for me it also concerns working with parents as co-educator. So, actually I cooperate with parents to see how we can help John, Peter or Nick develop further.

PC: You specifically mention ‘as a teacher in the lower grades’. Is there a difference with teaching in the upper grades?

T2: Yes, I think that’s obviously different. Parents are parents of course, but in the lower grades you are more focused on ‘how do you take up a position in relation to others?’ or ‘how do you properly ask a question?’, ‘how are you supposed to play with others?’. In the upper grades you address these kinds of things differently.

T3: Yes, in the upper grades they’re more aimed at supporting cognitive development I think.

T1: Well, I reconsidered that. I too thought this way for a very long time. Until I, actually it was about half a year ago. I realised it was a missed opportunity. Not only the cognitive development, but also social emotional development should considered as very important. You know, to let the child feel at home, at home at school. That’s one thing. But what I consider even more important is not to provide a distorted picture to the home front. As a teacher, you have to stay in very close contact with parents of difficult students. And after this many years of experience in education, I feel I have been mistaken about this somehow. But I just noticed, and it has been something I needed to learn. Don’t
postpone. Make a note and keep in close contact with the parent.
Appendix 10. Fragments of Dutch data

Fragment group interview (G1) transcript teachers with translations

T3: Ja, en ook wel… in groep 7 nu ook. Wat in groep 7 al gebeurt. Dan denk ik, ja,…ouders zijn hier wel heel mondig. En ondanks dat wij heel eh….dat ouders ook heel goed aangeven, maar ik denk dat wij er eh, vergeleken met andere scholen, er soms voor moeten oppassen dat we niet té sociaal worden. En eh të…eh het moet eh ook wel een beetje zakelijk, nou ja niet zakelijk, maar…..

T3: Yes, and also….in grade 7 at the moment. What already happens in grade 7. That’s when I think, yes….the parents here are really terribly articulate. And despite the fact that … eh….that parents contribute very well, I think that we, similarly to other schools, have to be careful sometimes not to become too social. And eh too….eh, well it all must remain a bit more professional, alright not too business-like, but…..

T4: Eh dat ze op een gegeven moment die familie bij mij hebben gezegd van eh I leest haar mail niet meer. Je kunt mailen wat je wilt, maar dat leest ze niet meer. Nou ja, dat werkt niet helemaal want ik lees ze alsnog. Maar ik hoef d’r niet meer op te reageren en dat is gewoon ffft klaar.

T4: Eh, that at a certain point, this particular family in my class said that eh she doesn’t read her email anymore. You can email what you like, but she doesn’t read that anymore. Well, it didn’t work that way, actually, because I still read their emails. But it was no longer necessary for me to respond and that is just usually it…ffft …finished.

T1: En daar zou je denk ik bijna centraal eens een eh afspraak over kunnen maken. Als er problematiek is ga dan niet op de mail zitten, maar eh wij zijn een school wij zijn open en eh, eh…Ja, noem maar op. Zo van, wij zijn er voor het kind, maar juist met problemen. Kijk gewoon zakelijke dingetjes of gewoon dingetjes van eh even melden of zo van ik wil graag een afspraak maken want iets zit me eigenlijk niet lekker. Dat mag best via de mail. Zoiets van eh. Maar we gaan niet problematiek via de mail eh….

T1: And that’s what we should do, I think, as a team we need to enter into an agreement on that. If there are problems, don’t take up your pen and email, but eh we as a school, we are very open and eh, eh…Yes, you name it. Like, we are there for the child, and especially when there is a problem. Look, just ordinary stuff or business-like stuff like informing about ordinary things and so on, like I would like to make an appointment today because I am troubled by something. That’s allowed via email. Like eh. But we are not discussing problems via email eh…

T5: Maar eh, wat je ook zegt, eh ouders durven ook gewoon heel veel in het gesprek aan te geven. En ook heel veel ruimte in te nemen om te bepalen hoe ze ‘t hebben willen. Nou, en daarvan denk ik daar kunnen we als school best een standpunt hebben van nou, dit is onze deskundigheid en eh, dat eh, zo doen wij het hier. Dus dat ouders zich daar in aanpassen.
T5: But eh, as you said, eh parents have the courage to say a lot of things in conversations. And they take up a lot of space demanding things they want. Now, as a school, I think we can take a clear stance, this is our expertise and eh, here’s eh how we do it. And parents should fit in with that.

1. Fragment group interview (G1) transcript parents

GL: Presenteert vignet.

PC (panel chairwoman): Presents discussion prompt

P1: Eh…iemand die op de voet volgt wat de eh leerkracht aangeeft van eh wat er in de klas gebeurt. En daar waar mogelijk feedback op geeft.

P1 (F): Ehm….someone who closely monitors what eh the teacher indicates about eh what happens in class. And if possible, provides feedback on that.

GL: Kan je dat toelichten?

PC: Could you explain that a bit?

P1: Nou, in groep 5 wordt er een hele goede gewoonte van gemaakt om via een soort van nieuwsbriefje de ouders op de hoogte te houden van wat er speelt. En eh met name wat er te doen valt. En dat eh, dat vind ik heel interessant om te lezen en eh waar mogelijk daar ook een reactie op te geven, dat gebeurt dan via de mail. Dat is meestal complimenterus. Dat vind ik echt leuk en belangrijk dat een leerkracht van een ouder te horen krijgt wat er volgens die ouder goed gedaan wordt.

P1: Well, in grade 5 it is a good habit of the teacher to keep parents informed about what happens in class through a newsletter. And eh, especially what we plan to do. And eh, I find it very interesting to read this and if possible, comment on it via email. Most of the time that’s complimentary. I like to do that and I think it is very important for a teacher to hear from a parent what the parent appreciates about their way of working.

P2: En eh, als je wat minder enthousiast bent, laat je dat dan ook weten?

P2: And eh, when you are not that enthusiastic about what happens, you let them know as well?

P1: Ja, maar dan doe ik dat niet via de mail, maar dan zou ik dat in het 10minutengesprek doen.

P1: Yes, then I would not do it via email. In that case, it would be done during the ten minute meeting.
GL: Oké. En anderen?

PC: Okay, what do others think?

P3: Ja, eh…ik denk dat mijn man en ik heel erg open staan voor eh…ja hoe moet ik het noemen de eva…eh…ja de observaties van de leerkracht. Daar gaat het vooral wel om in groep 1 en 2 hè. Ehm, met betrekking tot ons kind en ehm…Ja, eh, dat we dat absoluut serieus nemen. Ehm….daar ook iets mee doen. Het er niet altijd mee eens zijn, maar ik vind het contact met de leerkracht zo….dat is ook bespreekbaar. Dus we hebben denk ik een hele open en eh plezierige relatie met de leerkracht van onze zoon. Ja, we vinden het ook heel belangrijk om te horen wat eh hoe zij het contact met ons kind ervaart.

P3: Yes, eh, I think my husband and I we are very open to eh, yes, eh, how do I say this? Eh yes, the observations of the teacher. That’s what it’s mostly about in grade 1 and 2, you know. So, in relation to our child and eh we take these observations quite seriously. Eh do something with it, although we don’t always agree with the teacher. But our contact with the teacher at this point, I think is like eh it’s….debatable. So we have, I think, a very open and eh pleasant relation with the teacher of our son. Yes, we also value to hear from her eh how she experiences her relationship with our child.

2. Fragment questionnaire data parents

Question: What do you consider as your role in working together with the teacher of your child?

P17: Dochter helpen met huiswerk en overleggen wat er gedaan moet worden met de leerkracht.

P17: Help my daughter with homework and consult the teacher about what needs to be done.

P18: Breng mijn kind elke dag naar school. Vraag naar de ontwikkelingen van mijn kind. Ben betrokken bij de school.

P18: Bring my child to school every day. Ask about my child’s progress at school. Be involved with the school.

P19: Veel bespreken hoe het gaat

P19: Often discuss how things are going.

P20: Vaak me dochter van school halen of brengen, belangstelling tonen, betrokken met diverse. Activiteiten en als hulpouder klaar staan.

P20: Bring to or collect my daughter from school as often as possible. Generally show interest. Participate and stand by as a parent who can offer help.
P116: I try to ask as many relevant questions as possible about my children’s development, show interest, check homework and potentially guide with homework, attend ten minute meetings.

P117: Every now and then, I talk briefly with the teacher. I told the teacher that she can always approach me if there is any concern about my child.

P118: Indicate things at an early stage, keep the teacher informed if anything changes in our family, my child’s behaviour or when something happens. The teacher can take that into account in her approach.

P119: Regarding everything; keep the teacher involved. And as a parent, I expect the same from the teacher.

P296: My role as a parent, is to be present at information nights and ten minute meetings and to absorb the information provided. Besides that, as a parent I also make observations about things that could have an impact on my child’s development and I can consult the teacher about this.

P297: Regularly go to the ten minute meetings. Offer help with projects every now and then.

P298: Zelf initiatief nemen als er vragen zijn of dingen spelen naar elk gesprek gaan, mailcontact, inzet bij activiteiten op school.
3. Fragment questionnaire data teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: What are in general your expectations in working together with parents?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>T23:</strong> Voor allerlei 'bijzondere' zaken op school is er meestal wel wat hulp nodig van ouders, dus dan is het leuk als ouders kunnen helpen zodat de activiteit loopt en de ouders ook wat zicht krijgen op het reilen en zeilen in de school. Verder denk ik dat het goed is dat ouders op het niveau van advies/besluiten ook regelmatig worden geraadpleegd. Het zorgt ervoor dat de school alert blijft en er vanuit verschillende invalshoeken naar zaken op school wordt gekeken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T23:</strong> For all kinds of special activities at school some kind of assistance from parents is always welcome. It’s nice if parents are able to support so that it can be a success and they are able to get an impression of the ins and outs of the school organization. Furthermore, I think it’s a good thing if parents are consulted on advice/decisions on a regular basis. It offers the possibility for the school to stay alert and to look at several issues from different perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T24:</strong> Dat ze interesse tonen in de ontwikkeling van het kind in de klas/school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T24:</strong> That they show interest in the child’s development in class/at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T25:</strong> Dat ouders belangstelling krijgen/hebben in wat er op school en met hun kinderen op school gebeurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T25:</strong> That parents start to take an interest/show interest in the school and what happens there and in anything that happens with their child at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T26:</strong> Open houding, oplossingsgericht.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T26:</strong> Open attitude, solution focused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T27:</strong> Ik verwacht dat de samenwerking goed tot stand kan komen middels goede communicatie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T27:</strong> I expect that cooperation will develop through good communication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
T28: Ik verwacht dat veel ouders naar informatieavonden komen en rapportavonden. Ouders die thuis ook de kinderen stimuleren om het huiswerk te maken dat zij samen met de leerkracht er voor willen zorgen dat er uit hun kind wordt gehaald wat er in zit, en dat kan op veel manieren: hulp bij huiswerk overhoren stimuleren om op de computer te gaan uitstapjes met hun te maken assistentie te verlenen bij schoolactiviteiten.

T28: I expect most parents should visit information nights and come to ten minute meetings. Parents should be willing to encourage their children at home to do their homework; that they, together with the teacher should make every effort to help the child make the most of it and that is possible in many ways: help with homework, test, encourage work at the computer, make trips with them and provide support at school activities.
Appendix 11. Reflexive notes

Examples of reflexive notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atlas.ti</strong></td>
<td>It is striking that so many parents discuss communication practices instead of collaborating relations. And almost every parent, no matter what their background, expects the teacher to inform them on time or if necessary. Is it the dominant discourse in parent–teacher collaborative practices developed over the years? Or is it truly an urgent need of most parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questionnaires</strong></td>
<td>It is astonishing that so many teachers report that they expect parents to assist on school trips or to help. Also, quite a lot of teachers explain that parents need to listen to them, need to show more involvement or commitment. Power issues? Some teachers on the other hand seem to really value parents’ contributions and see the parent as important stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notebook</strong></td>
<td>Comparing the different interviews with teachers, it appears that teachers seem to value their professionalism quite highly in the way they determine their position. Teachers tell how they assess parents’ actions and how this influences their approach to parents or they tell stories of parents who take up a demanding position, which in turn influences how they react or how much attention they pay to parents. These descriptions of assessing parents and ways of reacting support the impression that a fair number of teachers explain in the questionnaire that parents should act in certain ways that seem to be desirable. Thus, teachers assess parents’ actions and act according to their judgement of that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group interviews</strong></td>
<td>There are some noticeable differences with the interview data. Parents seem to be pretty much aware of the teacher’s position and seem to judge the situation before getting in touch with teachers. Like assessing the teacher as being overburdened or reluctant to take time to talk to them. On the other hand, teachers seem to argue strongly from their own position. For instance, indicating whether it’s really necessary to contact parents or to prevent a problem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix 12.1. Development of the theme ‘strained relations’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme:</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Strained relations:** Strained relations can be observed in the data as a result of parents’ and teachers compelling and conflicting expectations of each other’s appropriate role enactment on one hand and enacted tensions in strained interactions on the other hand. In interaction strained relations can be observed in the way parents and teachers perceive each other’s behaviour as challenging or difficult. | **Latent tensions** Potential tensions appear to play a role in parent–teacher relations. Expectations of parents and teachers are contradictory or are likely to induce tensions. Parents and teachers expect from the other to support their own position which potentially leads to tensions, because their interests are conflicting. Teachers expect parents to be involved at school level or to assist on school trips, be involved at class level. However parents appear to be individually oriented. | **Teachers:**  
To be present  
To be involved  
Be visible  
Participate  
Stay in contact with the teacher  
Think with school/teacher | Q-T30: Parents should show their involvement by volunteering for excursions or by indicating that they are not able to attend (sometimes we don’t get any response).  
Q-T32: I appreciate it if parents show involvement with their child’s class and assist if necessary. |
| | **Parents:**  
Listen to parents  
Engage parents  
Listen to/pay attention to parents  
Keep an eye on the child | **Q-P10:** The teacher needs to take care of my son. Report everything, also when he fell or misbehaved.  
**Q-P79:** Above all, I want the teachers to keep an eye on my child.  
**Q-P90:** I think they should start with taking time to think about the children that enter their class. And make plans for every child individually. |
Strained interactions

Parents and teachers explained how they experience strained relations in interaction with each other. Teachers explained how they perceive parents sometimes as challenging or demanding interaction and discussed their discomfort with some parents. Parents however, felt dependent and explained that teachers sometimes communicate in a peremptory fashion, which causes discomfort on the side of the parents.

Teachers:

Impact of parents on reflections and actions

Setting boundaries

G1-T1: You have to say to some parents “this is absolutely unacceptable behaviour, it has to stop”. Sometimes you’re obligated to take action.

G3-T9: A parent who places himself above you, that’s hard. It affects you personally because he expresses it toward you and that’s a bad experience.

Parents should be open toward teachers and have sympathy for teachers. We are not able to manage or observe everything. Some parents should alert me less often, while other parents should make themselves heard more often. [...] I think parents are demanding these days; more respect and more sympathy would be in order. (Q-T56)

Parents:

Differences within the school

Differences between teachers

Ten minute meetings

Teacher’s imaging

Teacher’s perspective

Determinant in contact with teachers

G1-P1: Sometimes the teacher provides feedback about the child. This depends. One teacher can provide more feedback than another.

G2-P2: Teachers need to be attentive not to communicate too imperatively.

I found that it [the relationship] is left extremely up to the teacher. So, well, the one I have to do with now, if something is the matter she rings me up and sets up an appointment for the next day. But another one, I never heard from her. Yes, you strongly have to depend on the teacher. (G3-P7)

P37: Not act defensively toward parents [...] and give the clear sense that I can safely and with trust leave my child behind.
Appendix 12.2. Development of the theme ‘ambivalent positioning’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ambivalent positioning: Ambivalence in the positioning of parents and teachers is reflected in contradicting conceptions of their roles and positions, and the mixed signals they send to each other in their collaborative relations. The ambivalence observed in the data is likely to induce tensions and lead to unclear positions for parents and teachers. | Legitimacy | Teachers: Professional Equal Expert Responsible Good intentions of the teacher Allowed to Questioning | Q-T14: I want parents to see me as an equal human being, but they have got to see me as expert when it comes to education.  
Q-T43: The teacher is the expert. A parent should accept this much more often.  
Q-T54: Parents are allowed to work with me regarding the learning process of their child. But teachers remain ultimately responsible. They have the expertise and thus take the final decision. |
| Ambivalence | Teachers: Professional Equal Expert Responsible Good intentions of the teacher Allowed to Questioning | | |
| | Parents: Expert Authority Knowledge Interest of the child | Q-P27: I would like the teacher to see me as equal. The teacher is a continuation of me as a parent.  
Q-P50: I want the teacher to see me as an important person who, amongst other things, is able to offer help.  
Q-P57: I would like the teacher to see me as the person in charge, as the authority with regard to my child.  
Q-P230: I would like the teacher to see me as primarily responsible and I want to be of equal standing. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Appraisal</strong></th>
<th><strong>Teachers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Parents and teachers explained how they appraise each other’s behaviour, i.e. perceived social acts and positions and determine how they position themselves in reaction to these appraisals. This leads to ambivalent ways of positioning themselves in practice, either not in line with their role conception or | *G1-T4:* You cannot eliminate that you are a human being. But these parents from X, they demanded something [...] Well, at that point I am no longer the sympathetic teacher. [...] I become bad-tempered and short-spoken. But with other parents, when they approach me I think “okay, please come in”.

*G2-T2:* The position you take up with every parent differs. I choose to truly cooperate with some parents. [...] But sometimes I consciously choose to be very direct as a teacher with some parents. Like “You should try this or that or do that”. Or “He comes with this story at school, I don’t think that videogame is suitable for your child”. Something like that. You take a more leading position. |
Parents
Being expectantly in contact with teachers
Call for attention
Being proactive
Being reactive
Approach teachers
Listen
Think with Support
Asking questions
Help at school
Be present
Show interest
Support the child
Approachable
Be informed
Willing

G1-P2: Sometimes I feel the need to share information, to check something or to make sure the teacher and I are on the same page. However, I don’t feel the space for that in the morning and leave it then.

G3-P4: Also, I get the impression that teachers are awfully busy and I don’t want to overburden them. And of course, you don’t want them to think ‘Look, this mother is nagging’. The chairs of the children are already on the table and it looks like everyone is ready to leave. Well, you have doubts.

Q-P151: When I ask a question, I sometimes feel stigmatised: oh she’s that kind of mother who wants this and that…
### Appendix 13.1 Data fragments parents

**Quotations from parents with different backgrounds (n=10)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Education in country of origin, not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-P28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalian</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Education in country of origin, not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-P114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Secondary education in country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-P22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Lower general secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-P104</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Pre-university education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-P7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Intermediate vocational education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-P24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>University in country of origin, not completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-P99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-P149</td>
<td>Bosnian Mother</td>
<td>Intermediate vocational education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-P149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Higher professional education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-139</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
questions about my child, approach in a friendly manner. The teacher should more actively approach me.

| Dutch Parent | University | Clear communication. Pleasant and informative contact. Provocative and enjoyable lessons. Personal approach of the teacher while having thought for the child. I am an interested parent who is willing to support at school. |
## Appendix 13.2 Data fragments teachers

*Quotations of male and female teachers of different ages and education levels (n=7)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q-T7</td>
<td>Master of Education</td>
<td><em>I hope to communicate well with parents. Be approachable and that they sense they can trust us regarding the fact that we are there for their child. Parents should ask questions and not presume that their child is right.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-T12</td>
<td>Teacher training</td>
<td><em>Parents need to have a reciprocal conversation with me, with mutual respect and to accept what I say and to carry out what I ask. I give direction and guide parents.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-T17</td>
<td>Teacher training</td>
<td><em>Parents should always take the teacher seriously as a professional. At the same time, they should see you as partner. That would be the ideal situation. Mostly I discuss the child’s cognition, behaviour and social emotional experiences. Mostly I direct these conversations and try to be on the same wavelength.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-T28</td>
<td>Teacher training</td>
<td><em>Parents should be involved in their child’s development and be visible at school. Parents should meet the commitments made during the ten minute meetings and other conversations. Offer help whenever necessary. Bring their child to school, all the way to the classroom door.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-T61</td>
<td>Master of Education</td>
<td><em>I make sure I show an open attitude and let parents know that they are always welcome. [Role of parents] Openness toward the teacher regarding things that are important for him/her. Support the teacher’s decisions in front of the child.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-T74</td>
<td>Teacher training</td>
<td><em>General expectation: openness and consulting each other. Not have unreasonable expectations of each other [Role of parents] Support the teacher regarding their approach and work together.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-T80</td>
<td>University</td>
<td><em>Parents should see me primarily as the one who passes on knowledge to others[...] Parents should trust me, the teacher, see me as confidential advisor and also realise that I am an important educator at the school. [Role of parents] Parents should take the initiative to make an appointment for a conversation with the teacher when things are going well and also when they are not going well.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 14. List of quotations in Dutch

Page 83


Q-T59: Ouders moeten zich er van bewust zijn dat er verschillende taken en klussen zijn waarbij ze kunnen ondersteunen.

Q-T68: De rol van ouders is om betrokkenheid te tonen bij de school van hun kinderen.

Q-P10: De leerkracht moet voor mijn zoon zorgen. Alles doorgeven, ook wanneer hij is gevallen of zich niet goed heeft gedragen.

Q-P79: Het allerbelangrijkste is, dat ik wil dat leerkrachten mijn kind zien.

Q-P90: Wat mij betreft zouden ze moeten beginnen met de tijd nemen om over ieder kind na te denken dat in hun klas komt. En plannen maken voor ieder kind apart.

Page 84

Q-T48: Ik heb soms het gevoel dat ouders niet helemaal begrijpen dat hun kind onderdeel is van een groep en dat dit aanpassing vereist aan de omstandigheden. Te vaak worden kinderen gezien als prinsje of prinsesje voor wie alles leuk moet zijn

Q-T56: Verder lijken ouders te vergeten dat wij te maken hebben met 58 andere ouders. Of met 29 andere kinderen.

Q-T69: Ouders zouden begrip moeten hebben voor het feit dat hun kind onderdeel is van een groep. Ze zouden begrip moeten hebben voor de complexiteit van het beroep van leraar.
Q-P24: Ook al heeft de leerkracht maar de kleinste opmerking, hij zou me direct moeten informeren.

Q-P71: Ik verwacht dat de leerkracht me belt als er iets is dat ik kan doen om mijn kind te ondersteunen, thuis of op school. Ook verwacht ik dat ze mij belt of vragen stelt als ze iets niet kan plaatsen van mijn kind.

Q-P277: [Ik verwacht dat leerkrachten] tijd maken voor ouders (natuurlijk mogen ze een afspraak maken)…Het talent van ieder kind zien, nagaan of de ouder de taal van de leerkracht begrijpt, open en respectvol zijn naar ouders, ouders proactief benaderen als samenwerking in het belang is van het plezier van het kind in school.

Page 86

G2-T3: Ja, en ouders zijn nog niet toe aan het loslaten van hun kind. Dat is een proces. Als ouders de school binnenkomen, hebben ze de aandacht die ze kregen op het kinderdagverblijf nog in hun gedachten. Daar is altijd tijd om kinderen persoonlijk over te dragen, tenminste 10 minuten per kind zeg maar. In ieder geval is er elke dag wel een tijd om met de begeleider over je kind te praten. School is anders. Wij hebben geen 10 minuten per kind per dag om over te dragen. […] Er is minder tijd. Ook al probeer je wel nauw contact te houden.

Page 87

G3-T7: Ouders benaderen je soms met een vraag als de kinderen in de rij staan op het schoolplein. Soms doen ze dat. Maar, je ziet ouders niet zo vaak. Communicatie met ouders vindt tegenwoordig plaats via e-mail of via een telefoontje, niet persoonlijk. Alleen als er echt iets is, dan spreek ik ze persoonlijk.

Page 88

Q-P22: Voor mij als ouder is het heel belangrijk om het gevoel te krijgen dat de leerkracht echt naar me luistert.

Q-P90: Ik hoop dat leerkrachten zich echt interesseren voor mijn kind en dat ze begaan zijn met de behoeften van mijn kind en met ons mee denken.
Q-P313: [Ik verwacht] dat ze heel goed naar mij luisteren en naar de wensen van mijn kind. Dat ze zo goed mogelijk hun best doen om tegemoet te komen aan de behoeften van mijn kind in samenwerking met de ouder, dat ze dingen erkennen en informatie geven, en als er iets is, dat ze direct naar me toekomen. Kort gezegd: transparant en flexibel zijn.

Page 89
Q-T4: Ik verwacht dat ouders achter de leerkracht staan en zijn gezag niet ondernemen. Ouders zouden een open en coöperatieve houding moeten hebben naar ons.

Q-T28: Ouders zouden zich moeten houden aan afspraken die tijdens de tien minuten gesprekken zijn gemaakt en bij andere gesprekken. Hulp aanbieden wanneer nodig. Hun kind naar school brengen, helemaal tot bij de deur van de klas.

Q-54: Ouders moeten met ons meedenken. Ze zouden niet binnen moeten komen en vertellen hoe dingen gedaan moeten worden.

Q-P131: Dat de leerkracht open staat voor onze kennis over onze kinderen en dit serieus neemt.

Page 90
Q-P138: Open staan voor mij, voor mijn visie.

Q-P146: Het kind heel goed observeren, meenemen wat wij als ouders hebben aangegeven.

Q-P24: Ik denk samenwerking met de leerkracht is goed als ik heel goed geïnformeerd word over wat er gebeurt met mijn kinderen. […] Dat vind ik vooral belangrijk als mijn kind niet goed presteert of achter raakt. Ik wil graag dat de leerkracht met op tijd informeert, zodat we samen over een oplossing kunnen nadenken.

Q-P194: Ouders informeren over hoe het gaat en wijzen op zowel wenselijke als onwenselijke veranderingen. Met ons overleggen hoe een probleem kan worden opgelost.

Page 91
Q-T12: Ouders moeten een wederkerig gesprek met mij voeren, met wederzijds respect en accepteren wat ik zeg en doen wat ik vraag.
Q-T45: Ouders zouden met een open houding in gesprek moeten gaan en goed moeten luisteren naar de kant van de leerkracht.

Q-T76: Ouders zouden ook duidelijke informative moeten geven over hun kind. […] Ze zouden de inspanningen van de leerkracht moeten waarderen. Ze zouden de moeite moeten nemen om informatie die gegeven wordt door de school te lezen en te komen als ze worden uitgenodigd.

Page 95
G2-P2: Leerkrachten moeten er op letten dat ze niet te stellig zijn in hun communicatie.


Q-P151: Ik voel me bij een vraag soms in een hokje geduwd: oh dat is zo'n moeder die dit en dat wil... wat meer openheid en meedenken met de ouder mag.

Page 96

Page 97
G3-P3: Tijdens het laatste tien minutengesprek hield de leerkracht een monoloog. Wat mij betreft heeft dat niets weg van een dialoog. Weet je, ik zou liever een wederkerig gesprek voeren met de leerkracht. Nu luisterde ik tien tot twaalf minuten alleen maar. Toen dacht, nou, dat is ook zonde.
G3-T9: Soms heb je te maken met een ouder die zich heel kritisch opstelt. Natuurlijk is het prima als ouders kritisch zijn, maar soms is het te erg voor woorden, zeg maar. Nou ja, het zet je aan het denken. Het contact met deze ouders is echt een worsteling.

Q-T9: Ouders moeten vragen stellen en er niet direct van uitgaan dat hun kind gelijk heeft.

Q-T42: Ouders zouden niet op hoge poten naar de leerkracht naar de leerkracht moeten gaan, maar eerst rustig vragen wat er spelt. Meewerken als er iets is. De leerkracht is de expert. Ouders zouden dat laatste vaker moeten accepteren (in gesprek gaan met de leerkracht). Ik heb het gevoel dat ouders steeds vaker bepalen hoe de dingen gedaan moeten worden.

Q-T56: Ouders zouden open moeten staan voor leerkrachten en begrip moeten hebben voor leerkrachten. We kunnen niet alles regelen en observeren. Sommige ouders zouden me minder vaak mogen aanspreken, terwijl andere ouders zichzelf vaker zouden mogen laten horen. […] Ik vind dat ouders tegenwoordig veeleisend zijn. Meer respect en meer begrip zou passend zijn.

G2-T4: Maar je moet je ook realiseren dat er altijd ouders zijn die niet goed kunnen communiceren. Wij hebben die ouders ook. Als je ouders ontmoet, moet je hierover nadenken: zijn er problemen die je kunt verwachten?

G2-T1: Dat zijn dus de verschillen tussen de ouders. Sommige ouders luisteren naar hun kind en zien hun kind als een heilige. En ik begrijp het ook wel. Mijn kind is voor mij ook heilig. Dus dingen die je doet kunnen verschillend geïnterpreteerd worden. En dan worden ouders boos op je, zonder eerst vragen aan je te stellen. Er zijn ook ouders die er anders in staan. Die eh, het zijn ook moeilijke leerlingen. Maar die ouders hebben meer contact met de leerkracht. En je hebt de ouders die zo zijn van ‘het is mijn kind, dat doet nooit iets verkeerd dus…’. Dat je tegen elkaar staat, in plaats van naast elkaar.

P232: Ik verwacht dat de leerkracht en ik met dezelfde doelstelling voor ogen (nl. ons kind een veilige omgeving bieden om zich zo goed mogelijk te kunnen ontvouwen) met ons
kind omgaan. Ik verwacht dat de leerkracht mij open en eerlijk informeert in het geval er probleempjes/uitdagingen zijn of andere relevante zaken te bespreken zijn. Over de rol van de leerkracht: in ons geval zijn we zeer tevreden over de samenwerking met de leerkracht.

G3-P7: Ik heb dus gemerkt, dat het [de relatie] ontzettend afhankt van de leerkracht. Dus, nou ja, degene waar ik nu mee te maken heb, als er iets is belt ze me op en maakt een afspraak voor de volgende dag. Maar een ander, daar hoorde ik nooit iets van. Ja, je bent heel erg afhankelijk van de leerkracht.

Page 101
G1-P4: Het verschilt wat mij betreft best wel per docent. Als ik nu terugdenk, ehm, dan heb ik wel altijd te horen of altijd wel de vraag gekregen van goh herken je dit of heb je nog vragen ofzo. Wat is je reactie op het rapport. Weet je, dat soort dingen. Ehm…en bij de ene docent is dat eh ja, in groep 5 vind ik het nu echt top uitgebreid. […] Dat is mijn ervaring met haar. Ik zie dat niet echt alleen als eenrichting verkeer.

Q-T38: Ik praat met ouders over hun kind, zowel over de vorderingen als over dingen die in de klas gebeuren of die je opvallen vertrouwensrelatie opbouwen, belangstelling hebben voor wat hen bezig houd, je er in proberen te verplaatsen laagdrempelig zijn, open staan voor hun verhalen en vragen. […] [Ouders] delen relevante informatie met de leerkracht. […] binnen durven lopen om dingen te bespreken.

G1-T1: Laagdrempelig, ja eh, dat ze makkelijk even binnen kunnen lopen. Je merkt soms ook aan ouders dat ze best wel eh……’ja kan ik wel komen hè, want ik heb eigenlijk niks belangrijks’. En eh dat probeer ik te benadrukken, je kunt altijd even komen, hè, dan is ’t ook eh, gewoon uit de lucht. En dan merk je ook, dat het anders heel groot had kunnen worden.

Page 102
G2-P1: Begin dit jaar had ik een discussie met de leerkracht over, nou ja, we verschillen van mening over de ontwikkeling van mijn kind. Goed, soms verschil je van inzicht. Maar, goed, ik ben het er mee eens dat als je een discussie hebt met de leerkracht of je verschilt van mening, dan heb je zoiets van ‘ik ken mijn kind het beste’. Dus ik denk dat het heel belangrijk is hoe je relatie is met elkaar. Het hangt er van af of ze je zien als gelijke.
Page 103
G1-P3: Het hangt echt af van de relatie die je hebt met de leerkracht, weet je. Als ze je zien als een beetje achterdochtige ouder of een zeur ofzo, dan is het heel anders dan wanneer je een goede verhouding hebt met de leerkracht.

Page 106
Q-T15: Ik wil dat ouders mij zien als open en benaderbaar, als een gelijkwaardig mens, maar ze moeten me zien als expert als het gaat om onderwijs.

Q-T29: Ik wil dat ouders me zien als iemand die de leiding heeft en dingen aanstuurt. Maar ook als gelijkwaardig opvoeder van hun kinderen.

Page 107
Q-P50: Ik wil dat de leerkracht me ziet als belangrijk persoon die, onder andere, hulp kan bieden.

Q-P37: Ik zou graag willen dat de leerkracht me ziet als behulpzaam en als ‘expert’ als het gaat om mijn eigen kind.

Page 108
G2-T1: In contact met ouders ben ik de professional die ouders vragen stelt over hun kind of die informatie geeft over hun kind.

Q-T52: Ik ben degene die weet hoe, wat en waar. De algehele leiding ligt bij mij.

Q-T43: De leerkracht is de expert. Een ouder zou dat veel vaker moeten accepteren.

G2-T3: Wij mogen tegen ouders zeggen “dit is wat we verwachten van ouders”.

Q-T20: Meestal bespreek ik de cognitie van het kind, gedrag en de sociaal emotionele ontwikkeling. Meestal heb ik de leiding in deze gesprekken en probeer ik met ouders op één lijn te komen.

Page 109
Q-T21: Ik probeer een open en eerlijke positie in te nemen, makkelijk benaderbaar te zijn.
Ik benader ouders zo positief mogelijk en laat zien dat ik hun inbreng waardeer, ze serieus neem.

Q-T68: Ik luister goed, neem tijd en vraag ze even te komen zitten. Ik beantwoord berichten snel. Neem ze altijd serieus, ook als ik het niet met hen eens ben.

G2-T3: Soms moet je in het contact met ouders investeren. Je zou bijvoorbeeld een extra afspraak kunnen maken om er het beste van te maken.

Page 110
Q-T55: Ouders geïnformeerd te houden over de voortgang van hun kind op school. Dat kan zo nu en dan tussendoor en tijdens tien minuten gesprekken door het jaar heen. Ouders persoonlijk benaderen of via e-mail als er hulp nodig.

Q-T55: Ik wil dat ouders me zien als begripvol en meedenkend met hen, als inspirerend, vriendelijk en coöperatief.

Page 111
Q-P57: Ik zou willen dat de leerkracht me ziet als de persoon die de leiding heeft. Als de autoriteit voor wat betreft mijn kind.

Q-P100: Als expert met betrekking tot mijn kind, van het zelfde opleidingsniveau.

Q-P185: Ik zou willen dat de leerkracht mij ziet als de belangrijkste ‘opzichter’ van mijn kind.

Page 112
Q-P36: Ik wil graag dat de leerkracht mij ziet als belangrijk voor en als partner van de school als het gaat om de ontwikkeling van mijn kind.

Page 113
Q-P230: Ik zou graag willen dat de leerkracht mij ziet als eerste verantwoordelijke en ik wil gelijkwaardig zijn.
G2-T3: Je stent automatisch af. […] Automatisch level je en dat bepaalt wat je zegt en doet. Als je terugdenkt aan wat je deed, dan kan je zeggen “ja, met die ouder doe ik dit en met die ouder doe ik dat, maar voor die andere ouder is dat niet nodig”.

G2-T2: Het verschilt per ouder hoe je je opstelt. Ik heb wel ouders waar ik echt naast ga staan. Maar bij sommige ouders ga ik er ook meer als leerkracht echt opzitten van “moet je dit eens proberen, of zo doen of hij komt met dit verhaal en het lijkt me niet heel goed dat hij deze video game speelt”. Of iets dergelijks, dat je meer….ja, sturend bent daarin.

Page 117
G1-T4: Ja, je kunt het niet helemaal uitschakelen. Maar zoals die van L. die eisten iets […]. Nou, dan draai ik het wel heel snel…dan ben ik niet meer de meedenkende leerkracht dan…word ik ook wel wat eh wat feller en wat eh wat korter en… Terwijl een andere ouder, dan denk ik oh kom maar binnen eh ja, ja.

Page 117-118
G3-P5: Ja, ik merkte wel dat, we hebben nu te maken met twee leerkrachten en met een leerkracht heb je meer, weet je, dat is degene waar je dan meestal bij terecht komt. Terwijl ze samen verantwoordelijk zijn en dingen moeten overdragen om elkaar te informeren. Ik denk dat het geen ideale situatie is […] want de een staat er veel meer open voor dan de ander. En is dus ook veel proactiever. Nou ja, het klikt beter ofzo.

Page 118
G3-P6: Klopt, het klikt beter met de ene leerkracht dan met de andere. Maar je moet ook met die andere communiceren zonder in gevecht te zijn.

Q-P151: Als ik een vraag stel voel ik me soms veroordeeld: oh dat is die moeder die dit en dat wil…

Q-P37: Leerkrachten zouden niet defensief moeten reageren naar ouders. Ze zouden met het gevoel moeten geven dat ik veilig en vertrouwd mijn kind kan achterlaten.

Q-P168: Het is belangrijk om je niet bezwaard te voelen omdat je na schooltijd wat tijd vraagt van de leerkracht.
G1-P1: Soms heb ik de behoefte om iets met de leerkracht te delen. Om iets te checken of om af te stemmen. Alleen, ik heb het gevoel dat daar dan geen ruimte voor is, dus dan laat ik het maar.

G3-P5: Ik denk dat het heel lastig is dat sommige leerkrachten zo overbelast lijken. Dus met alles wat je doet aarzel je. Voor mij geldt dat ik steeds afweg wat de voor- en nadelen zijn. Stuur ik een e-mail of niet? Daar denk ik altijd over na.

G1-T1: Ik denk dat we allemaal proberen af te stemmen met ouders. Maar in mijn geval, wat een belangrijke rol speelt, is het feit dat we in onze groep geen zeurende ouders hebben. Je kunt van die ouders tegenkomen die overal kritiek op hebben. Alleen maar fouten benoemen. In dat geval zou mijn afstemming zeker anders zijn.

G3-T3: Ik vind wel, ik probeer altijd die gelijkwaardigheid te zoeken. Ik probeer altijd wel als mensen zich kleiner maken om ook mezelf wat kleiner te maken. Zo van “ik weet het ook niet. Ik ken uw kind ook niet, u kent het zelf het beste”. Maar, ja zeker wat jij zegt die mensen die zichzelf groot maken en… […] Maar dan kan je bijna niet meer die gelijkwaardigheid zoeken. Dat kan vanuit die positie bijna niet meer. Maar het is wel lastig om dan die gelijkwaardige positie dan weer te zoeken, als het heel ver uit elkaar gaat liggen. Ja.

G3-P4: Nou, ik denk dat de ene leerkracht veel meer gericht is op ‘oké, we doen dit samen’ dan de andere leerkracht.

G3-P7: Ja, ik merkte soms, nou ja, sommigen zien je inderdaad als gelijke, maar anderen zijn bang. Nou ja, bang is misschien niet het juiste woord, maar je merkt dat ze denken ‘oh daar komt ze weer om aandacht te vragen of…nou ja, zeuren of klagen of….’. Nou en dat maakt dat je het gevoel krijgt dat je lastig bent voor ze, weet je. En ik denk, in sommige gevallen dat de wederkerigheid niet goed is in dat geval.
G1-P3: ik denk dat mijn man en ik heel erg open staan voor eh…ja hoe moet ik het noemen de…eh…ja de observaties van de leerkracht. Ja, eh, dat we dat absoluut serieus nemen. Ehj….daar ook iets mee doen. Het er niet altijd mee eens zijn, maar ik vind het contact met deze leerkracht zo….dat is ook bespreekbaar. Dus we hebben denk ik een hele open en eh plezierige relatie met de leerkracht van onze zoon. Ja, we vinden het ook heel belangrijk om te horen wat eh hoe zij ons kind ervaart.

Q-P209: De ouders de ruimte geven om vragen te stellen. Mbt de leerstof of het functioneren van hun kind. Tevens weer een open en eerlijke communicatie. Ook luisteren naar wat de ouders te zeggen hebben over hun kind. Dit gebeurt trouwens in ons contact met de leerkracht.

Page 123
Q-T77: Ik stuur regelmatig informatieve mails naar alle ouders. Als er iets is met een kind, stel ik ouders op de hoogte en neem de tijd om samen naar oplossingen te zoeken. Ouders kunnen mij altijd mailen. Ze kunnen ook na schooltijd binnenlopen en evt. werk van het kind inkijken. Ik besteed veel aandacht aan zorgvuldig invullen van de rapporten.

Q-T30: Dat de ouders het gevoel moeten krijgen om serieus genomen te worden.

G2-T2: Ik noem ook bij de informatieavond altijd eh…we doen het samen. Als er eens wat is of eh, eh als we eens een keer hulp nodig hebben om eh om mooie dingen te realiseren. Als we iets moeten organiseren om ergens naar toe te gaan. Inderdaad, als er iets is. Maar ook even de gezellige kleine dingen. Eh zo van, eh, even aan de deur zo van eh, iemand die bijvoorbeeld zwanger is eh…Dat je weet, zo van eh ‘hoe gaat het…?’ ’t Zijn soms hele kleine dingetjes, maar ehm, die maken het contact.