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APPROACHING TRUST AND CONTROL IN PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Trust is a crucial factor in parent–teacher relationships. However, research on this subject to date has largely concentrated on a narrow range of theoretical perspectives and empirical methods. Most studies collect, analyze, and aggregate quantitative data on trust from a psychological or sociological perspective. The present paper starts by reflecting on previous research in brief and discussing its limitations with regard to a selected case: parents' relationships with educational institutions. On this basis, the paper aims to contribute to the scientific exploration of trust as a holistic phenomenon that encompasses explicit as well as implicit dimensions. In this context, we argue for a broader range of theoretical and empirical methods in research on the phenomenon of trust and its apparently tight entanglement with control in education settings. To this end, we focus on the one hand on the five distinctive facets of trust introduced by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001): benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. On the other hand, we refer to Möllering's understanding of trust and control as a duality (2005) where trust and control can go hand-in-hand instead of being understood as inherently conflicting phenomena. Because of this assumed duality, efforts to explain the relationship between trust and control need to be able to account for the complex interplay between the two on different levels of interactions between parents and schools. To demonstrate this point, this paper presents three studies using different methodological approaches: study 1 analyzes relationships between parents and educators in childcare centers, focusing on the collective relevance accorded to trust by educators. Applying the qualitative, reconstructive documentary method to the analysis of group discussions among educators and video-recorded parent–educator meetings, the study places particular emphasis on reconstructing the implicit knowledge underlying educators' implicit orientations toward parents. Its result show that, in contrast to the common rhetoric of partnership between childcare centers and parents, educators perceive and enact their relationships with parents in very different ways. Study 2 aims to shed light on how trust is shaped differently in various settings of interactions between parents and schools. To this end, a survey is being conducted using a vignette design which provides descriptions of eight forms of parent–school interactions followed by a number of questions corresponding to each of the five facets of trust. The study, which is still in its pilot phase, will thus provide insight about which facets of trust are triggered by the different forms of interaction and, consequently, how the relationship between trust and control is affected by these interactions. Similarly to study 1, study 3 uses a qualitative approach to the analysis of trust. In contrast to study 1, however, the focus of the episodic interviews lies in exploring different elements that shape parental perceptions of teachers' trustworthiness in the transitional phase from primary to secondary school. Using qualitative content analysis, the study remains open to new and unexpected aspects of trust and is thus able to provide a deeper understanding of trust and trustworthiness in parent–school

relationships. The results reinforce the notion that parents' educational backgrounds play an important role with regard to trust and control, with higher-educated parents placing less trust in teachers and exercising a higher degree of control in order to ensure their children's educational success. We conclude that qualitative and context-sensitive approaches focusing on the implicit and behavioral dimensions of trust seem particularly promising for developing a more accurate understanding which shows how trust and control simultaneously refer to and create each other while remaining mutually distinctive. Through this example, the paper aims to show how researchers can avoid a one-dimensional or fragmented view based solely on either trust or control.

Keywords

parent–teacher relationship, trust, control, methodologies

Trust and control in education – Dualism or duality?

Trust is considered to be an ineluctable base of social interactions (Lewis & Weigert, 2012). It can be established between individuals, between individuals and organizations, and even when people place their trust in complex institutions. It is considered a functional, relational feature because it enables people's to act without engaging in an elaborate evaluation of another person's motives while, at the same time, allowing for an individual's vulnerability (Misztal, 2011).

Trust is a crucial factor in relationships between parents and their children's schools. It has been well established that trust generally enhances parental involvement in school and their interactions with teachers, their support of school reforms, and, last but not least, their children's educational achievements (Adams & Christenson, 1998; Beycioglu, Ozer, & Sahin, 2013; Janssen, Bakker, Bosman, Rosenber, & Leseman, 2012; Mitchell, Forsyth, & Robinson, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). But why is trust so crucial? And can trust be influenced by mechanisms of control?

From an institutional perspective, trust can be understood as an essential feature, particularly in such complex systems as the world of education. This can be attributed to the fact that interactions between parents and schools cannot be regulated in their entirety. Instead, borrowing from an institutional theory of the commercial world (Grossman & Hart, 1986), it can be argued that parent–school relationships are marked by "incomplete contracts" (Baurmann, 2002). As it is impossible to account for every possible contingency beforehand, the parties involved retain a certain room for maneuvering. Therefore, it remains uncertain whether the different actors' expectations will be met. Clearly, this applies to parent–school relationships. Although such measures as regulations, instructions, and administrative supervision are in place to ensure the functional and legally compliant operations of schools and their staff, teachers as pedagogical professionals act rather

autonomously. Despite the fact that they bind themselves through an official oath to obey and be committed to legal requirements, their actions are barely subject to direct control. Schools can thus be considered unique social organizations where cause-and-effect relationships can rarely be substantiated, so that knowledge concerning teachers' effectiveness, motivation, and performance—and their capability to educate and promote children while leading them to graduation—remains incomplete (Bormann & Adamczyk, 2016).

At the same time, school attendance is compulsory and parents are legally obliged to send their children to school. Although in most cases they do not know the teaching staff personally, they must surrender their children to this staff. In so doing, parents have only limited means of knowing a priori how teachers will treat their children and act in class. Due to this lack of knowledge, parents take a risk when they submit their children to an educational organization, and their relationships with their children's schools are characterized by uncertainty. There are different ways for parents to overcome this lack of knowledge; for example, by using official sources such as school inspection reports, websites, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences, or informal sources such as word-of-mouth recommendations. Even if parents gather large amounts of information, however, this information will remain incomplete and the choice of school will therefore not be fully rational. In fact, "[p]eople act in an environment of limited, approximate, and simplified models of reality, and their decisions depend more on already-established patterns of behaviour, traditions, routines, and schemata" (Khodyakov, 2007, p. 122).

That is why trust becomes crucial. Trust can be defined as "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 189).[1] Taking a risk and

[1] Understandings of confidence and trust slightly differ from each other. Most scholars consider confidence to be based on predictability and knowledge while trust is necessary in the absence of such knowledge (Seligman, 1998). Luhmann (1988) also states that the "distinction between confidence and trust … depends on perception and attribution" (p. 97) and that confidence is based on neglecting the possibility of disappointment or the opportunity to intervene. Some approaches distinguish between trust and confidence by considering trust as a phenomenon based on proximity, commonly shared values, and empathy, and confidence as based on knowledge and control, mutual dependence, and hierarchies (e.g., Cofta, 2007; Noteboom, 2006; Seligman, 2011). In the following, we refer to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's notion of trust including confidence as its foundation.

making oneself vulnerable, therefore, are key principles for trusting relationships and establishing a mutual trusting relationship takes time (Petermann, 2013). Due to their contract's being incomplete, however, parents and teachers (as the schools' representatives) find themselves in an asymmetric relationship in which risk is unequally distributed. The risk—that of investing their children's precious lifetimes—rests with the parents. When registering a child at a school, they cannot ensure in advance that the child will be treated as hoped and eventually attain the desired level of education. As a consequence, parents have to trust in teachers' benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness, and the perception of these traits is regarded as an important predictor of trust (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007).

Having discussed the fundamental role of trust in parent–teacher relationships, we now turn to the issue of whether trust can be influenced by mechanisms of control. Based on our understanding, control consists of a factual and a social level. First, we conceive of control as comprising more or less formalized opportunities to procure and assess information from which consequences can be drawn. In this broad sense, parental control might involve participation in parent–teacher conferences or gaining information from a school's website. Second, we conceive of control as momentous as it can result in mutual appreciation or in commonly shared values and norms which might, in turn, pave the way for trust.

For some time now, various mechanisms of accountability have been introduced into the education system – e.g. indicator-based monitoring systems, school inspections, rankings, and comparison tests. These symbolic forms of control can be labeled as the "institutionalisation of distrust" (Luhmann, 2000). There is a good case to argue that recent institutionalization of such mechanisms stands in direct contradiction to trust or, at any rate, does not represent an expression of trust towards either the education system or teachers' performance (Adamczyk & Bormann, 2016; Ball, 2015; Carless, 2009; Maritzen, 2011; Miller, 1994; O'Neill, 2013; Power, 1994). Nonetheless, the implementation of monitoring and control systems can be considered rational because trust in the effectiveness of complex systems also includes trust in the effectiveness and efficiency of their internal control systems (Luhmann 2000, p. 77). This is the subject of Möllering's (2005) deliberations concerning the relationship between control and duality. In contrast to many other authors—and inspired by Giddens' theory of structuration—Möllering conceptualizes trust and control not as a dualism but as a duality. That is to say, trust and control are not independent variables but rather "assume the existence of each other, refer to each other and create each other, but remain irreducible to each other" (p. 284). From this duality perspective, accountability practices in the broadest sense—such as school

inspections, parent–teacher conferences, and talks about children's development—simultaneously require and generate trust (Busco, Riccaboni, & Scapens, 2006). On the one hand, the mechanisms of controlling uncertainty related to educational practices and outcomes need to be trusted. In other words, in order to be legitimate these mechanisms need to be viewed as, for example, creating transparency, being used honestly, and being available when needed. On the other hand, the existence of these mechanisms itself generates trust because they provide a means for parents to gain, systematically and formally, an impression of their children's teachers and school.

In sum, trust is a crucial factor in social interactions. Frequently, we do not know about the intentions of those with whom we interact. In order to manage such situations involving limited knowledge in social interactions, different means have to be considered: such as seeking information and avoiding large risks. However, such means could discourage instant action. Conversely, trust as a dynamic disposition and attitude is considered to be an aspect which maintains the ability to take action. Therefore, it is referred to as a functional social resource. Although lack of knowledge can also be overcome by mechanisms of control, trust and control are not mutually exclusive but operate in correlation with each other. Finally, people do not necessarily consciously place their trust in other individuals, organizations, or complex systems. Trust is revealed when familiarity is interrupted or tacit expectations fall short. In other words, trust is an attitude that manifests itself in two ways: (a) pre-reflexively, i.e. tacitly and without being recognized, and (b) reflexively, i.e. consciously and justifiably (Endreß, 2010). In order to consider these modes of trust appropriately, it is necessary to break new methodological grounds in research on trust.

Methodology in trust research – Shortcomings and alternatives

Trust is, as already mentioned, a multidimensional construct. However, surveys normally capture the reflexive dimension of trust with attitude measurement responses such as "most people can be trusted" (World Value Survey). However, objections have been raised to such dichotomous and ordinal attitude scales and measurements, with only a few items referring to reflexive trust. Critics point out that the pre-reflexive dimension of trust and the behavioral component of trust as an attitude are neglected, which consequently brings the validity and reliability of such surveys into question (Berry & Rogers, 2003; Beugelsdijk, 2006; Emisch, Gambetta, Laurie, Siedler, & Uhrig, 2007; Hartmann, 2011, p. 98; Jagodzinski & Manabe, 2004; Naef & Schupp, 2009; Petermann, 2013, p. 21; Schupp & Wagner, 2004). With regard to the tacit dimension of trust, and according to Hartmann

(2011), trust is a "practical attitude" (Hartmann, p. 94; Lewis & Weigert, 2012). That is to say, trust can be deduced from certain practices – or at least certain reported practices. This would require qualitative or context-sensitive measures, but studies using such measures are rare (but Bertelsmann, 2010; Goodall, 2012; Linggi, 2011; Lyon, 2012). In a few studies, hermeneutic approaches have been used (Beerman, 2012; Dalferth & Peng-Keller, 2012). These studies cannot and do not, of course, claim to provide representative findings; instead, such approaches contribute to exploring trust as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon with reflexive and pre-reflexive dimensions and which includes the assessment of features of trustworthiness.

Based on the arguments presented in the previous section, it is our belief that the study of parental trust towards schools would also benefit from this line of research. In what follows, we therefore present three studies from Germany using context-sensitive approaches and explore their contributions to overcoming the shortcomings of traditional attitude measurements in trust research.

Study 1: Early childhood education – A reconstructive study

The first study focused on relationships between parents and educators in childcare centers. In Germany, as in most other European countries, there is a broad consensus that these relationships should be partnerships (Eurydice Network, 2014, p. 16). By 2004, all 16 federal states of Germany had published early childhood education programs, all of which emphasize the significance of education partnerships. The concept of education partnerships has become a strong normative guiding principle that urges educators to create appreciative, respectful, and trusting relationships with all parents in their childcare centers, while keeping aspects of control mainly hidden or implicit. This strong imperative can make research on the complex phenomenon of trust in early childhood education especially challenging. One might assume that educators are aware of the current discourse about education partnerships and refer to it when asked about collaboration with parents in their childcare centers. This could lead to an overemphasis on trust at the explicit level of communication. Nevertheless, it cannot be taken for granted that this influence has gone beyond this reflexive dimension and has also changed these educators' implicit orientations, pedagogical habitus, and practices. An English study of 18 early education settings provides support for these doubts (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). Consequently, research in this field must not only focus on what theoretical concepts professionals explicitly express, but also examine how they understand and enact these concepts.

Aim of the study: Therefore, the idea of this study was not to evaluate what theoretical knowledge educators can present about education partnerships – as would be the case if they were asked directly about the topic in a standardized interview or through a questionnaire. This study aimed at investigating educators' implicit orientations and habitus and asked: How do educators understand and enact education partnerships with parents?

Methodology and methods: To meet the aforementioned challenges, the study used the documentary method, a reconstructive methodological approach. It originated in Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge and the ethnomethodological tradition of research and was developed as a technique of qualitative, educational, and social research by Ralf Bohnsack in the 1980s (Bohnsack, 2014; Bohnsack, Pfaff, & Weller, 2010), drawing on knowledge and findings from grounded theory, Niklas Luhmann, and Pierre Bourdieu. The documentary method, in particular, offers a response to two significant shortcomings of present research on the subject of trust.

First, it addresses the problem of the relevance of trust—or certain dimensions of trust—usually being determined a priori by researchers. In most standardized quantitative (but also deductive, qualitative) methodological approaches, participants are confronted with the research topic and asked to respond to it. Whether they see the topic as described in relevant terms—or as relevant at all—remains unclear. Such an approach therefore carries the risk of missing what is truly relevant for participants and is limited in its ability to open up completely new and different perspectives on the phenomenon. In order to give the participants the opportunity to bring up topics they considered relevant themselves and present these topics in their own way, the study included open group discussions with educators as well as video-recorded parent–educator meetings. The group discussions were initiated with a demonstrative, vague question (*"How is cooperation with parents in your childcare center going?"*) and then not guided or controlled by the researcher. During video recording, interaction between researcher and participants was reduced to a minimum so that the meetings could take place mainly as usual. This enabled insight into the actual social practices at these childcare centers.

Second, the documentary method offers a way of gaining insight into the implicit or tacit knowledge of practitioners and the behavioral dimension of trust. By analyzing the data with the documentary method, a clear distinction was made—both theoretically and (in the research) practically—between two sorts of knowledge: reflexive or theoretical knowledge on the one hand and implicit, practical knowledge on the other. This research method goes beyond the literal meaning of what participants explicitly express and investigates how participants produce or accomplish reality in everyday practices. This is why the participants' statements were analyzed with regard

to two kinds of dialogue. While theoretical or argumentative dialogues primarily give insight into explicit, theoretical knowledge, narrative or descriptive dialogues lead to the participants' implicit knowledge or habitus which guides their practical actions (Bohnsack, 2014, p. 225). In accordance with this, the interpretation of texts was carried out in two steps: a formulating interpretation and a reflecting interpretation. While the formulating interpretation focused on the thematic structure of the text and on what the actors literally said, the reflecting interpretation focused on how they presented their knowledge. One important aspect of the reflecting interpretation was the mode of discourse organization established by the participants. The way participants talked and interacted with one another not only revealed which topics were of specific relevance for them, but also whether or not they shared collective orientations.

Sampling: The empirical data was generated during 2014–17 over the course of the author's doctoral dissertation on collaboration between educators and parents in five different childcare centers. The following interpretations are based mainly on a comparative analysis of two group discussions with three educators working in two different childcare centers in Berlin. Additionally, the analysis includes some outlooks on more extensive examinations of videographic data from two parent–educator meetings that took place in the same organizations.

Even though the sample is not representative, the selection of participants took the specificities of the field into account. Similarly to the majority of childcare centers in Berlin, the selected centers were publicly funded and either under public ownership or run by independent governing bodies ("freie Trägerschaften"). They were located in areas with unfavorable sociostructural factors, since collaboration with disadvantaged parents is regarded as both especially difficult and important. The educators participating in the group discussions were all female, had three years of professional education and training on the post-secondary non-tertiary level, and (with one exception) were between 40 and 54 years old. With these characteristics, they represent the largest group of staff in German childcare centers by far.

Results and Discussion: A comparative analysis of data from two different childcare centers showed that issues of trust and control were relevant for all educators, but the understanding of education partnerships varied widely between the organizations. According to their implicit orientations or habitus, different "facets of trust" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999) in their relationships with parents were considered relevant. Further analyses, which also included the video-recorded parent–educator meetings, clearly showed that these implicit orientations went hand-in-hand with different social and pedagogical practices in collaboration with parents.

In one childcare center, for example, educators referred to the parents explicitly as "*partners*." However, the narrative and descriptive passages about a parent–educator conference they had held the previous week revealed that what they had in mind could better be characterized as a "*partnership-like atmosphere*." They presented themselves as experienced organizers and described concrete measures taken to ensure they did not appear as "*teachers*" and everyone was relaxed. The narrative indicated that there was a clear hierarchy between the professionals and the parents. The educators stressed their own competence and positioned the parents as people who could learn from them. In conjunction with this, the analyses of the educator–parent meetings in this childcare center showed that these meetings were mainly understood as pedagogical interventions aimed at advising parents and improving their parenting. The idea to learn more about, or from, the parents was not expressed (in contrast to what was said in the second childcare center). Discrepancies in the parents' and educators' convictions or assessments of the child under discussion were not understood as an opportunity for a mutual exchange of views, but as a pedagogical task (to control and guide the parents' views and actions). The matter of trust was only discussed unilaterally: the educators were not very interested in parents' trust in the educators as individuals, nor in the way the parents viewed the educator's pedagogical work or competence. Instead, the most important issue was to find out whether they could trust the parents' competence or whether they had to control the parenting.

In contrast, the educators from the second childcare center addressed the topic in a completely different way. For example, they expressed critical views of the structural conditions of their childcare center and their own pedagogical work. In their narrations, educators focused in particular on their own attitudes toward the parents. Even if parents obviously ignored concrete agreements (e.g., did not bring diapers or money for breakfast), the educators questioned their own negative reactions (and labeled it "*bitching*"). The educators expressed their intent to focus more on the positive aspects in their relationships with parents and to "*give the positive back*." This indicated a strong awareness of different viewing habits, different possibilities of interpretation, and different ways of behaving and communicating.

The analysis regarding the educator–parent meeting indicated that the educators considered a personal and trusting relationship with parents to be highly important. They were convinced that for there to be a good relationship parents had to be taken seriously and that this would help solve problems and conflicts. The educators considered the relationship to be mutual: when they trusted the parents, "*it comes more from them*." In accordance with this expressed conviction, the educator–parent meetings were used in order to learn more about the parents' personal histories. Knowledge about the

parents' backgrounds and biographies was considered helpful to "*get a new perspective on problems with the child*" and understand "*why parents react in the way they react*."

These findings enhance our knowledge of how different educators not only perceive, but also enact their professional relationships with parents in childcare centers that are supposed to be appreciative and trusting. The close link between implicit orientations and actual pedagogical practices points to the importance of research methods that are able to go beyond the literal and explicit level of communication.

Study 2: Parental trust in schools – A vignette study

As mentioned above, one of the shortcomings of existing trust research lies in its use of overly simplistic measures of trust. While such measures have the advantage of being easily communicable and facilitating comparison across studies, they fail to capture the different facets of trust and the role of context in the formation of trust. This also applies to Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999; 2000) more differentiated conceptualization of the five facets of trust, which provides a general, overall assessment of parental trust in schools in regard to those five facets, but fails to deal with how trust is shaped differently in various settings of interactions between parents and schools. One instrument that could provide a more context-sensitive analysis is a vignette study. In the following, we present the aims and design of such a study which is currently being conducted.

Aim: The study aims to analyze the relationship between the five facets of trust proposed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy and different forms of parent–school interactions. Drawing on literature on parent collaboration (Epstein, 1986; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005; Sacher, 2006), we included eight different categories of parent–school interaction: (1) parent–teacher conferences, (2) individual parent–teacher feedback situations, (3) school websites, (4) classroom visits by parents, (5) parental assistance in class, (6) parental assistance in non-pedagogical activities, (7) comparative student assessments, and (8) school inspections. The study's objective is to provide information about which facets of trust are triggered" by different forms of interaction. Thus, our aim is to show not so much the level of trust parents have in their children's schools, but rather which facets are affected by certain interactions (irrespective of whether expectations are met).

Methods: The study uses a survey with a vignette design. A common objective of vignette studies is "to analyze judgment behavior under concrete conditions that are much closer to real-life judgment-making situations than

relatively abstract questions that are more typical for opinion surveys" (Dülmer, 2007, p. 382). To this end, vignette studies contain descriptions of situations which are judged by respondents in terms of a particular aspect (p. 383). In the present survey, each of the eight forms of parent–school interaction is described in a vignette. Each vignette is followed by a number of questions corresponding to one of the five facets of trust. Respondents are asked to rate the extent to which each question is likely to come to mind in the situation described in the vignette using a six-point scale. In the pilot study, three questions for each facet are included for each interaction (a total of 15 questions per vignette). Based on the results of the pilot study, the most appropriate questions will be selected (using confirmatory factor analysis), resulting in one question corresponding to each facet of trust for each vignette (a total of five questions).

Sampling: Currently, a pilot study is being conducted with a sample of 200 parents of school children.

Results and Discussion: As the study is still in progress, no findings can be reported at this stage. However, it is possible to note some potential paths which could be followed in the analysis with regard to the relationship between trust and control. Firstly, all five facets of trust can be expected to play an important role in parental trust in schools, even though not all five will always be of equal importance (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 558). It will be interesting to see how much weight is carried by the five facets in the different forms of parent–school interaction. In this context, it is worth noting that the eight interaction settings involve different actors at different levels of the school system. For example, parent–teacher conferences and feedback situations involve teachers, whereas in other interactions (e.g., school websites, school inspections) school managers or even the school administration system are the primary actors vis-à-vis the parents. This is relevant because the "importance of each of the facets depends on the referent of trust (*who* is being trusted) and the nature of the interdependence between the parties" (p. 558).

By relating the five facets of trust to specific characteristics of the different forms of interaction, it will also become possible to shed more light on the relationship between trust and control. For example, it could be hypothesized that some of the interactions, such as classroom visits and school inspections, address issues of control rather directly, as parents are offered an opportunity to gain insight into the school's work and its effects. This might be reflected in respondents placing great importance on the facet of competence, i.e. a high rating indicating that classroom visits or school inspections raise questions about the school's effectiveness. Such a result would point to trust and control being seen as a dualism, with the use of control instruments potentially calling trust into question. Conversely, a low rating indicating that

competence does *not* become a concern would support the view of trust and control as a duality, with control and trust going hand-in-hand. In contrast, other interactions, such as parent–teacher feedback situations, at first view seem to imply greater emphasis on cooperation and support than on control. However, aspects of control could also become an issue in this form of interaction. For example, parents might question the teachers' practices or abilities. But the roles could also be reversed, for example if parents worried about teachers interfering in their children's upbringing (and thus controlling the parents). In such cases, the relationship between control and trust would be reflected in the facet of benevolence. Yet another scenario would focus on honesty and openness in schools dealing with school inspections or comparative student assessments. As yet, these examples have no foundation in empirical data; they merely serve to highlight some interesting avenues for the forthcoming analysis.

Study 3: Parental trust in schools – An interview study

From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between parents and schools can be addressed on different levels. Trust can exist between parents and teachers as an interpersonal trust relationship; parents can trust their child's school on an organizational level; and parents can trust the education system in general (general trust). All of these relationships between parents and education institutions have been explored insufficiently in trust research to date, although it is well known that relational trust in schools not only facilitates processes of institutional change but also affects children's school performance (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). In German trust research, the perspective of parents as specific trustors or recipients of trust has been particularly neglected. Furthermore, most standardized surveys only capture a simple, mostly one-dimensional understanding of trust. In order to obtain deeper insights, an exploratory interview study was conducted focusing on parental trust in schools and the education system in general.

Aim. The aim of the study was to analyze parental trust in schools as a social attitude (consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements) and shed light on the trust of parents in schools. In the analysis, families' sociodemographic characteristics were taken into account, as these have been empirically linked to trust. For example, research shows that greater interpersonal trust is linked to higher social status or level of education (Borgonovi, 2012). At the same time, people with higher education degree have less trust in (public, i.e. state) schools (Guppy & Davis, 1999).

Sampling. The study was an empirical, qualitative interview study with parents of 9- to 12-year-old children who were in transition from primary school to secondary school. This transition is of particular interest from a theoretical perspective because it is assumed that the parents' trust in their children's school becomes reflexive at this stage, while it otherwise remains at a tacit level (Bormann & Adamczyk, 2016).

Method. An interview guide was developed focusing on the core elements of trust from a theoretical perspective: these comprised expectations towards the school, positive and negative experiences as a basis for trust, and the possibilities of action to back up or justify trust. In the interviews, parents were also presented with two standardized questions. First, they were asked to mark their subjective understanding of trust in a diagram. Second, parents' trust in the school system was captured on an ordinal scale based on standardized attitudes. Finally, interpersonal trust (e.g., towards teachers) was not the focus of the study, but the open nature of the qualitative study allowed parents to touch upon this aspect as well if they so wished.

Data analysis was based on a modified version of qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2010). Following the concept of Kuckartz (2012), scope was given to develop and modify categories during the coding process if necessary. Categories were developed according to the differential theory of trust (Schweer, 1997; Schweer & Thies, 2003); these included the categories "individual tendency to trust" (e.g., explanations of trust in the education system) and "implicit theory of trust" (e.g., expectations concerning trustworthiness). These two categories represent elements of the personal factor of trust, which is central to the perception and evaluation of a situation. Finally, abductively raised categories were used in order to compare parents' concepts of trust; these categories referred to, e.g., "beliefs concerning their own role and the school's role" and "sources of trust."

Results and Discussion. The study provides a deeper understanding of trust relationships between parents and schools from the perspective of parents as the interviews captured parents' knowledge about schools, perceptions of their children's schools, and evaluation of the schools in light of their own experiences with and expectations of schools and the school system. Using a triangulation approach, the complex nature of trust was taken into account. It was therefore possible to access, analyze, and compare different levels of trust and trustworthiness (parents–teachers, parents–school, parents–school system). Overall, the results showed that parents' trust relationships with schools seemed to be influenced by their socioeconomic status (Bormann & Adamczyk, 2016). This observation led to the identification of two types of parental trust towards schools.

Table 1
Two types of trusting parents

Type	Description
Reflexive trusting partner	Parents of this type are well-informed and have a lot of knowledge about their child's school and the school system in general. This knowledge has been acquired actively through a high level of parent–school interaction. Therefore, the relationship can be described as a rationally based trust relationship. Parents of this type usually possess a high level of education.
Needs-oriented trusting customer	Parents of this type can be characterized by a comparatively strong focus on the emotional side of trust and a lack of knowledge about the school and the school system. These parents report that they seldom interact with their child's school, some because they do not feel proficient and some because they lack knowledge on how to do so. Responsibility for (or control of) their child's education is transferred to the school, especially to teachers as education experts. These parents typically possess a low level of education.

Source: Bormann and Adamczyk, 2016.

Although interpersonal trust between parents and teachers was not an explicitly mentioned focus of the study, it became clear during the interviews that this dimension was relevant for parents, e.g. some parents referred to trust of their own accord. It can therefore be concluded that for parents teachers play an important role as institutional representatives of school. While the five facets of trust according to Hoy and Tschannen-Moran were not analyzed systematically in this study, the interviews still showed that parents judged teachers' competence as particularly important. Parents with both high and low educational levels attached great importance to competent and professional teachers.

Finally, the interview study offers some interesting insights into the relationship between trust and control. As previously mentioned, the study results hint that the parents' own educational backgrounds play an important role in this context. As the two types of parental trust demonstrate, parents exercise more control if their own knowledge is extensive (e.g., due to their own behavioral participation in school events). This is typically true for parents with higher educational backgrounds who show greater eagerness to personally ensure their children's educational success. Conversely, parents with lower educational levels exercise less control, as they usually place trust in teachers. As an example of this transfer of control, during the transitional phase from primary to secondary school the decision about the appropriate type of school for their child is entrusted to the teacher.

Summary and Discussion

At the beginning of our article, we set out to claim that both trust *and* control are crucial factors in education. We further argued that trust and control mutually depend on each other in such ways that control might promote trust and, conversely, mechanisms of control require trust. Additionally, we emphasized that trust and control should be considered as tacit dynamic processes, i.e. that they take place unconsciously and affect behavior. The relationships between parents and education organizations or educationists depend on such different aspects as parents' general attitudes to trust, experiences, and education; the educationists' behavior and perceived professionalism; the organization's values and processes; and, last but not least, the individual child concerned. These aspects require the application of context-sensitive approaches which also enable evaluation of the pre-reflexive dimension of trust in relationships between parents and educators.

Subsequently, we introduced three studies using three different context-sensitive methodologies to analyze trust. Specifically, these were: i) a reconstructive study using the documentary method to investigate trust in interactions between parents and pre-primary educators, ii) a vignette study addressing different situations of parent–school and parent–teacher interactions, and iii) an interview study focusing on parents' perceptions and evaluations of their children's schools and teachers. All of these methods are able in specific ways to overcome some of the aforementioned shortcomings in trust research, namely: a) the tacit dimension of trust, b) the issue of trust-based behavior, c) the mutuality of trust (and control), and d) the problem of vagueness concerning the question of who the "other persons" referred to by those polled in traditional standardized surveys are. In particular, all studies relate to the tacit dimension of trust because all of them investigate perceptions of trustworthiness without directly mentioning "trust." The reconstructive study enables analysis of mutual trust between parents and educators in a specific, undistorted interaction. The vignette study assesses, in particular, the activation of dimensions of trustworthiness with regard to specific situations parents can experience when dealing with their children's schools and teachers. Finally, the interview study provides information about the relationship between parents' personal beliefs in trust, expectations of trustworthiness, and experiences with regard to schools and education and the implications of these aspects for these parents' assessment of school performance.

All in all, these context-sensitive methodological approaches contribute to the expansion of empirical knowledge on the hidden premises and consequences of trust. The results obtained with the aforementioned

methodologies were partly verified using mixed-method designs. For example, standardized trust-attitude features were integrated into the vignette study and parents were explicitly asked to rate the magnitude of their trust towards schools in the interview study. The reconstructive study combined video documentation of parent–educator interactions with interviews of groups of educators. For future research, this could be complemented by conducting interviews (subsequent to the interactions) with parents regarding the trust they experienced while interacting with the educator.

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