



Exploring family-school partnership during emergency remote teaching in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic – parents’ perspective. A case study from a Polish elementary school

Marta Wiatr 

CONTACT: Marta Wiatr, PhD, The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Warsaw, Poland, E-mail: mwiatr@aps.edu.pl

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Abstract:

The study aimed to explore parents’ experiences of engaging with their children’s remote education during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the issues of the family-school partnership. The question posed here asks how the family-school relationship was negotiated as well as the role of parents and the role of schools. This line of inquiry is unexplored but vital to understand better the tacit underpinnings of remote education practices and the unobvious

potential of parents in the schools in times of crisis. Understanding these relationships provides insights into the processes that occur when schools hastily change their way of teaching while impacting the family environment. This participatory, qualitative case study used data from open-ended questions in an electronic survey, with responses from 104 parents affiliated with a public elementary school in a metropolitan area. In addition, data from the school’s electronic registry were included. The qualitative analyses applied constructivist grounded theory strategies. During qualitative analyses of parental narratives, categories were identified that described parents’ actions as negotiations conducted with the school. These negotiations pertained to the definition of the situation (characterizing the practices implemented by the school), the comprehension of teaching, including remote teaching, the level and nature of the parents’ involvement in pandemic education, and the extent of their (desired) influence on the shape of implemented solutions. The research uncovered the taken-for-granted vision of the school under the study as an expert entity capable and entitled to independently address even extraordinary challenges without consulting the stakeholders themselves. This vision was challenged by parents. Their initiation of negotiations was considered a manifestation of empowerment and emancipation. Further research on empowering practices of parents as partners, especially concerning changes in educational practices in extraordinary situations.

1st wave of the Covid-19 pandemic – emergency remote teaching

The worldwide implementation of the principle of physical distancing in early spring 2020 had profound implications (e.g. Di Pietro et al., 2020). Traditional institutions, once firmly rooted in specific, physical locations, suddenly found themselves physically disconnected from this foundation, requiring a rapid restructuring of their operations. These hastily established new practices seemed to persistently evade conventional familiar meanings and classifications. In the context of pedagogical and educational tasks, this challenge became apparent in the struggle to accurately label new teaching practices that utilized distance learning tools and techniques during the pandemic. In the fall 2020, the authors Hodges and Bozkurt and Sharma, independent of each other, suggested calling these practices ‘emergency remote teaching’ (ERT) (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020).

According to the researchers, ERT constitutes crisis-driven education since it underwent a rapid reorganization of existing practices while adhering to pre-pandemic objectives and duties. The rapid pace of this



change (occurring in Poland over a single weekend¹) coupled with the inherent shortage of time to procure sufficient resources for implementation, left various entities, individuals, and groups vulnerable to haphazard, unregulated, and unsustainable resource utilization. As evidenced by global research, emergency education worldwide predominantly relied upon and drew from the often unequal resources available within family environments (Di Pietro et al., 2020; Wiatr, 2022).

Parents' experiences of supporting their children at home during the ERT

Reports that appeared in the early months of the pandemic pointed out, and over time emphasized, not only the critical role of parents in pandemic education but also the extremely high costs that parents faced in implementing education through distance learning techniques (Bubb & Jones, 2020; Conto et al., 2020; Dunatchik et al., 2021; Fisher et al., 2020; Fontanesi et al., 2020; Goudeau et al., 2021; Laxton et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Mußél & Kondratjuk, 2020; Parczewska, 2021; Perry et al., 2021; Schwartzman, 2020; Spinelli et al., 2020; Trzcińska-Król, 2020). The additional responsibilities of organizing, conducting, monitoring, and educating children at home within the framework of ERT resulted in physical, mental, social, emotional, and economic burdens for parents, predominantly women (Brossard et al., 2020; Daniela et al., 2021; Di Pietro et al., 2020; Dunatchik et al., 2021; Krents et al., 2020; Librus, 2020a, 2020b; Parczewska, 2021; Ptaszek et al., 2020; Wiatr, 2022). The defeat of the educational institutions hastily introducing new ad hoc educational practices took their toll on individuals – parents and children².

Conclusions drawn from the above-mentioned research provided the impetus for recommendations to better support students and parents in their new educational roles. Among various suggestions, the recommendations (ironically) emphasized the need to create better guidelines for parents to effectively assume the role of educators at home in place of the physically absent teacher (eg. Doucet et al., 2020; Vuorikari et al., 2020). This entails managing parental mental and emotional well-being while coping with the accumulation of responsibilities. It is hard to overlook the clear presence of the phenomenon of “responsibilization” – a notion coined by Rose and rooted in the cultivation of a citizen who is responsible and accountable for individual choices, decisions, actions, and omissions – in their isolation from structural constraints such as an economic-political and socio-cultural context³. Such recommendations only superficially addressed the fundamental issue, offering mere semblances of concern for parents. Enhanced guidelines for parents fail to furnish sufficient support for every student in their learning “journey” and do not adequately safeguard the already diverse family resources from excessive and unregulated depletion. Given these findings, there is a pressing need to acknowledge the foundational underpinnings of the process, particularly the socially established meanings that configure school practices in a specific manner becomes evident. These shared

¹ In Poland, the decision adopted by the Minister of National Education (MEN) acting under the special law of March 2, 2020, teaching and educational activities of educational establishments was suspended, beginning from March 12.

² Teachers, who were the first to face the challenges of carrying out their duties due to school closures, also individually carried the enormous burden of shifting their work to remote mode (see, (e.g. Buchner, Majchrzak, & Wierzbicka, 2020). However, it should not be forgotten that many teachers are/were also parents, and in addition to their work with students, they were also involved, like other parents, in supporting their children's learning at home.

³ Nikolas Rose's concept of “responsibilization” refers to the shifting of responsibility for certain aspects of life from the state or institutions to individuals. In this context, individuals are encouraged or required to take on more responsibility for managing their own well-being, behavior, and choices. This shift often involves the application of expert knowledge and techniques, as well as the use of technologies of governance, to influence individuals to govern themselves according to certain norms and expectations. Responsibilization is a key aspect of the modern governance of conduct, where individuals are expected to be active and responsible participants in shaping their own lives (Rose, 1999, 2000) paedophiles, persistent violent offenders—to the development of dispersed, designed in-control regimes for the continual, silent and largely invisible work of the assessment, management, communication and control of risk. Political programmes of crime control appear to have little stability, cycling rapidly through all the alternatives from ‘prison works’, ‘short, sharp shocks’ and ‘boot camps’, through ‘community corrections’ and ‘reintegrative shaming’ via ‘therapeutic rehabilitation’ to ‘nothing works’ and ‘three strikes and you're out’. Of course, programmes of crime control have always had less to do with control of crime than they have to do with more general concerns with the government of the moral order. And concerns about illegality and crime have been articulated as much, if not more, by institutions and practices which are not part of the criminal justice system than by those that are conventionally considered to be part of such a ‘system’. Nonetheless, even at this more general level, things seem confusing. Despite claims that we live in a post-disciplinary society (Simon).



and unquestioned meanings regarding students, teachers, knowledge, schools, and learning played a pivotal role in shaping distance education practices, which ultimately have relied on parents' capacity to engage with school tasks.

The events witnessed during the ERT have revealed much more than the extent and magnitude of the challenges associated with this engagement. It disclosed the prevailing rationale for organizing the education of children and adolescents globally. This rationale underscores the necessity of an adult's physical presence in a young individual's learning (Wiatr, 2023). The physical presence seemed to guarantee a stable, direct interaction with students. Ideally, a qualified teacher fulfills this role, but in cases where direct access to a teacher is uncertain, any physically present adult, primarily a parent (the unexpected hero of pandemic education), can step into this role (eg. Briggs, 2020; Daniela et al., 2021; Doucet et al., 2020; Porsch & Porsch, 2020; Wiatr, 2023). In this arrangement, the student remains an "object to be processed" – dependent on others, lacking autonomy to learn and develop. The student requires the physical presence of a "designer" and "implementer", as well as an "enforcer" of the process who plans, orders, receives, checks, accounts for, and evaluates (eg. Helm et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Wiatr, 2023).

During the pandemic education, the teachers' physical presence became impossible, and the prospect of maintaining meaningful interaction with teachers seemed uncertain, as pointed out by Wiatr in her study (2023). The researcher presented a case study of a Polish public elementary school, enlightening the impact of suboptimal decisions undertaken by school administrators concerning remote educational methods (specifically, anchored in the behavioral and transmissive models of teaching) and the utilization of technological tools (primarily in the form of email). Her findings underscore how these decisions have adversely affected the capacity of teachers to meaningfully participate in interactive engagements with students. Constrained by the limitations of email-based educational interaction, teachers mainly focused on assigning tasks and giving grades, neglecting the intricacies of the teaching process, as evidenced in existing literature (eg. Bhamani et al., 2020; Trzcińska-Król, 2020; Wiatr, 2023). The restricted role of teachers in pandemic education-by-mail led to parents assuming a set of responsibilities traditionally attributed to schools. To fulfill the "inherited" educational tasks after the teacher, parents had to mobilize their uneven resources (skills, knowledge, funds, time, energy, etc.) and varying levels of enthusiasm (Wiatr, 2023). Simultaneously, they challenged the scope and way of assigning additional educational tasks.

Although parents' involvement seemed critical to school goals and tasks, their position didn't resemble that of partners. The poignant complaints and demands of the parents testified that transitioning students from teachers' guidance to parents' educational oversight was not seamless or smooth. The process of mobilizing parents for educational goals involves ambiguous and not yet explored assumptions about the parental role in their children's education and the potential inherent in the parent-school relationship, particularly in times of crisis.

The subsequent sections of this article will elucidate the negotiation processes undertaken by parents of students attending a public elementary school in a metropolitan area of Poland in the light of the family-school partnership concept. These findings will be expounded upon within broader insights derived from domestic and international research. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between parents and school as well as the very role of the parents in this relationship in times of crisis.

Family and school partnership

The evocation of the partnership thread here is, naturally, not coincidental. The recognition of the necessity for parental substitution in home-based education evokes ideas of a close and harmonious collaboration between parents and teachers, united by a common and significant goal. However, the already rich literature on the parental experience of pandemic education and the analyses presented here prompt us to take a closer look at this phenomenon, recognizing its full complexity.

Partnership is understood here as a processual relationship based on mutual recognition of the competencies of all parties involved in the action. It implies shared responsibility and power (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7; Weiss et al., 2009). It entails openness and acceptance of the other party as different and thus endowed with unique knowledge, skills, visions, and experiences that are valuable to the causes around which the partners unite or organize joint action. Such a relationship requires mutual recognition, listening



to and hearing each other. It is based on trust and mutual motivation to achieve something that requires the agreed and combined resources of the partners. Partnership, therefore, presupposes the equivalence of the partners' roles, which is necessary to negotiate the various aspects of the joint enterprise without domination by either party.

Reports from national and international studies indicate that the very decision to sustain the implementation of education through distance learning techniques was an arbitrary decision by the governments of various countries. This was also the case in Poland. Subsequently, the schools themselves were entrusted with selecting their own tools and techniques for remote teaching (Wiatr, 2022). As per Schleicher's argument (Schleicher, 2020, p. 16), although schools were given the freedom to choose the tools for conducting distance education, their choices were effectively limited due to the varying levels of familiarity among school management and teaching staff with the range of technological solutions available to support educational tasks during pandemic teaching. In many places, limited knowledge of ICT tools and teachers' scant experience with them resulted in the choice of email as a medium for educational content between teachers and students (Wiatr, 2022, 2023). As it soon became evident, the technical handling of this tool, coupled with a misguided pedagogical approach to education, led to the significant involvement of parents (Wiatr, 2022, 2023). It is worth noting that numerous studies conducted in Poland and around the world have documented that this enormous involvement of parents in the pandemic education was induced by force, rather than in a partner-like way.

Research methods

The research was conducted among parents of students at a metropolitan public elementary school in Poland. The study used a case study method, both intrinsic – in the form of identifying the expectations, needs, opinions, and experiences of parents of students at this school; and instrumental (Stake, 2003), serving as an explanation schema of the processes taking place also in other schools employing the practices described here. In this sense, parents' experiences may transcend the walls of this school and resonate with the experiences of parents from other institutions in the country and internationally.

From the outset, the research was conducted in a participatory manner, stemming from the active role parents assumed within the process that – what is worth standing – is a rarity. Not only did parents initiate this study, but they also actively contributed as co-researchers⁴. The intention with which parents entered the study – namely, the desire to gain and/or strengthen their voice and argumentative power in discussions with school authorities – gave the research an emancipatory profile. The parents' expressed curiosity and desire to understand the various parental experiences, opinions, and beliefs about distance education provided by a particular school determined the diagnostic-exploratory nature of the research and located it within the constructivist paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1983). The paradigm grows out of the assumption that the world is socially produced – constructed by people interacting with one another. In the course of these interactions, they negotiate their interpretations of reality arising out of their so-called situated and individual knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goodman, 1988; Haraway, 1988). This is because different social “localities”, varied situatedness, and diverse contexts generate distinct individual knowledge. Therefore, the adopted theoretical framework enables us to consider every experience narrated by a parent as a story that is ‘true’ and legitimate in its context, as it pertains to the situated knowledge of the speaker (Haraway, 1988). The great value of the parents' statements lay precisely in the polyphony (not always aligned).

The data collection tool was an electronic survey with closed and open-ended questions. The analyses used responses from the open-ended questions section, selected extracts from the Librus⁵ schedule of various classes, and data obtained from casual conversations with parent council representatives. The survey was made available to the parents of all students at the school under study via electronic register (Librus)

⁴ Parents, primarily from the Parents Council, actively participated at every stage of the research. They formulated its initial goal and their research question, collaborated on crafting the survey questions and structure. Finally, they participated in discussions regarding the results of the analysis.

⁵ Librus – a popular school management software in Poland, an electronic register. Data from Librus – in the form of class schedules and print screens of e-mail boxes – served to recreate the way the school conducted remote teaching.



and email, from June 25 – July 5, 2020. Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary. A total of 104 responses were collected, accounting for over 25% of the intended participant target group⁶ (Table 1). The responses were categorized into four ‘levels’, each corresponding to the educational stage of the students⁷.

Table 1. Response rate per student level

Student's level	Number of responses for each level	Percentage of responses for each level
I	17	16%
II-III	31	30%
IV-VI	34	33%
VII-VIII	22	21%
Total	104	100%

Source: Author's own analysis

There was a high level of willingness among parents to include longer descriptions about their experiences in their answers to the open-ended questions. Ninety-eight participants answered the prompts beginning with “What I liked most about remote education was...” and “It’s too bad that...” Likewise, 97 parents completed the sentence “The greatest difficulty for me was...”, 90 completed the sentence beginning with “My child’s greatest difficulty was...”, and 98 answered the question “What and how can remote education be improved?” The question “Do you have knowledge, skills, or other resources that could help improve the comfort and quality of remote education at our school?” received 74 responses, 34 of which included specific suggestions. The responses exhibited variations in length and detail, offering rich data that enhanced the comprehension of the phenomenon. The analysis of these statements focused not on the frequency of repeated words or indications but on the multiplicity and diversity of parental interpretations.

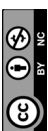
The qualitative data analysis employed some strategies of constructionist grounded theory (GT) as outlined by Charmaz (Charmaz, 2006)⁸. The analysis began with open coding followed by selective coding. These processes involved constant comparison and code transformation techniques. Memos were written alongside coding. The open and selective coding phases led to the extraction of larger theoretical categories. This text will introduce categories related to the diverse negotiations that parents engaged in, covering (1) their own position, (2) the definition of remote education, (3) the definition of teaching, (4) their own participation in school-led remote education, and (5) the definition of partnership.

Given the variety of situated representations of the world generated by the participants in the study and by the researcher herself, the initial development of the analytical categories was discussed with members of the parent council, school management, and other researchers. The resulting comments and insights were incorporated into this study.

⁶ Since many parents had more than one child studying at the elementary school surveyed, they were asked to respond to the remote education experience for one selected child.

⁷ Year 1 (Level I) was treated separately due to the low literacy skills of first-graders. Years 2 and 3 comprised Level II–III, which included students from a more advanced stage of early childhood education. Years 4–6 formed Level IV–VI, where students are introduced to a subject-specific teaching style. Years 7 and 8 were combined into Level VII–VIII, where the range of subjects is expanded to include chemistry, physics, and social studies, and the work of teachers and students seems to be geared toward preparing for the 8th-grade final examination (to complete Polish elementary school education).

⁸ Given that this study does not involve an exhaustive application of grounded theory as a comprehensive methodology, I specifically discuss constructivist grounded theory (GT) strategies. When referring to constructivist GT strategies, I am specifically addressing the approach employed in data analysis, characterized by active open coding. This aligns with Charmaz’s recommendation for open coding, which involves asking questions such as: “what do people do?”. According to Charmaz, this approach enables the researcher to probe individuals’ actions, aligning with constructivist assumptions.



Implementing remote education – the school's response to the challenges of school closure

In March 2020, the elementary school under survey introduced remote education in an asynchronous, partially interactive format. Teachers used email and Librus to send students assignments for independent work, including exercises, videos or other educational materials posted on online portals. Parents were provided with copies of this information. The sent material was segmented into smaller batches, structured based on 45-minute units, aligning with the daily lesson plan.

Initially, teachers anticipated students to submit pictures of completed notebooks or finished assignments. Within two weeks, they adjusted this approach so that students sent only selected assignments, or designated students sent specific assignments. Despite the adjustments, this practice proved to be exceedingly time-consuming for both the teachers and the parents assisting the children. As a result, teachers lost the opportunity to remain in meaningful interaction with students, as evidenced by statements such as this one:

During the first week, I took pictures of several of my child's notebooks every day, and then attached these pictures to emails addressed to different teachers and sent messages from my own account. I tried to describe them in a logical and intuitive way. After the first week, teachers started writing to tell me not to send them pictures of children's notebooks and homework until they asked for it. Some asked once, others twice, still others not at all during those three months. Thus, the teachers' ongoing monitoring of children's work and providing feedback ended. It's a shame. I was left alone with the job of teaching [IV-VI].

At the end of March 2020, several teachers began using online tools to automatically check students' work, to conduct lessons in synchronous mode (Zoom and Webex), and to share documents (Padlet). In April 2020, the school assigned Microsoft accounts to students and launched the MS Teams platform. Subsequently, several teachers conducted online sessions with students on an irregular basis. All these solutions – alternatives to daily, intensive email correspondence – were welcomed by parents, who assessed them as a step in the right direction:

Online geography and biology lessons from Mr. Y, who took a responsible approach to remote teaching. The material was covered, the children did the exercises one by one, and after the lesson they sent photos of the exercises. It was also possible to test knowledge by organizing an online [IV-VI].

It soon became apparent that not all lessons were taught in this way, and online meetings were held anywhere between once to several times a week (depending on the stage of education) and lasted approximately 15 minutes. Hence, the distance education offered by this school remained predominantly asynchronous and correspondence-oriented, centering on email and e-register us age. It was these practices that generated additional burdens for parents and led them to seek a way to convey their dissatisfaction with the implemented solutions to the school authorities. Consequently, parents initiated the development of their negotiating stance within the so-called arena.

Entering the arena – parents negotiating their positions

The arena is a space where different symbolic orders intersect. It is constituted by the polyphony of voices of various actors occupying it (Clarke, 2005, p. 38). It is a space where diverse discourses, positions, and structures converge and collide. It also represents a terrain where prevailing power dynamics can be disrupted, paving the way for the introduction of new power relations and the narratives that underpin them.

Entering this sphere and articulating personal assertions, viewpoints, or interpretations of the world is construed in this article as an empowering undertaking. This empowerment emanates from the preliminary establishment of one's position, from which an individual communicates their perspective and experiences. In this iterative process, the individual reinforces their empowerment by affirming that their voice is being acknowledged. This established position carries the potential to be equal with other participants, thereby affording the prospect of forming a collaborative partnership (in accordance with the conceptualization of partnership adopted in this study).

One of the manifestations of organizing the arena was the willingness of parents to negotiate practices of remote education with the school. This willingness was first expressed in the form of the aforementioned



globally articulated dissatisfaction of parents (Dong et al., 2020; Hamaidi et al., 2021; Lau et al., 2021; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021) and many (84.6%). In the school under study, this manifested itself in various ways, including complaints addressed to the school management and the Parents' Council, objections, and requests for changes in teaching methods articulated in an open letter to the school management by representatives of two classes. As a result, the Parents' Council decided to launch a study aimed at discovering and understanding the diversity of parental perspectives and experiences related to "pandemic" education. Initiating and participating in the survey is already an act of establishing one's status within the arena, equivalent to that of a teacher. By doing so, the parents have acted in the spirit of Rancière's assumptions of equality as a point of departure (Rancière, 1991). They have acted as equals, inherently entitled to such actions, thereby indeed establishing a state of equality in position and expression. In Rancière's emancipatory thought, empowered action is possible when its starting point is thinking and practice free from the assumption of inequality or hierarchical coercion and dependence.

Negotiating the definition of the situation

The questionnaire elaborated and distributed among the parents provided further opportunities to articulate needs, interests, and points of view, thus strengthening the parents' position in the negotiation arena. They conveyed anger and frustration regarding the level of involvement required in the school's ERT practices. This frustration was expressed through their vehement opposition to the school's approach, specifically their practice of labeling it as distance education, which involved assigning students to work independently⁹:

*Remote education was basically non-existent, ... [VII-VIII];
...there was no remote education only educating by the parent [I];
It was not remote education it was only homework and accountability [II-III].*

Parents perceived that *teaching was shifted to the shoulders of parents in some cases 100%*. [IV-IV]. They felt obligated and burdened by this responsibility and held accountable for it:

I found it difficult to remember what work for what day, and emails from teachers: 'no homework,' I took very personally, as if I had failed and as if I should have done more [IV-VI].

The parents' rejection of the school's label of the new practices as remote education marks the initiation of a negotiation process, posing both a challenge and an invitation to collectively redefine the situation—clearly perceived differently by the parents. It also questions the assumed consensus of teacher-parent collaboration or even taken-for-granted harmony of their complementary tasks, where the teacher assigns tasks to the student, and the parent oversees their completion. Significantly, by articulating their perspective, parents simultaneously asserted their position as the empowered ones, legitimizing their authority to make such judgments.

In crafting their narrative of the school's remote education, parents positioned themselves as equal participants, partners empowered to articulate viewpoints and interpretations divergent from those presented by the school staff. They did so under the assumption that the other party genuinely valued their perspective.

Negotiating the definition of teaching

Parents' refusal to accept that the school was implementing remote education led to a progressive exploration of the category of education itself and led to the discovery of the pillars of the teaching process.

The analysis of parents' statements enabled the identification of tasks and activities crucial to the educational process as specified by parents¹⁰. These include explaining, clarifying, motivating, monitoring, checking,

⁹ The mentioned above category of negation or refusal, has been thoroughly discussed in another article by the author (Wiatr, 2023). In this article, given its distinct focus, I concentrate on activities that empower parents, involving negotiation and questioning the definition presented by the school.

¹⁰ The findings are presented more extensively in another publication by the author (Wiatr, 2023). In this article, due to its specific focus and space limitations for a more detailed presentation of the process of identifying by parents the core practices that constitute teaching, reference is made to the condensed findings. They serve as a backdrop for parents' arguments in negotiating the situation. These negotiations primarily involve interpreting those elements related to teaching and instruction.



correcting, and directing. These activities were discerned through various responses where parents: (1) delineated tasks they undertook instead of the teacher and challenges encountered (such as explaining unfamiliar topics, motivating children without grades, and monitoring their work); (2) highlighted tasks they perceived the teacher neglected (such as engaging with students, checking for understanding, explaining, discussing results, and providing feedback); (3) pointed out instances where the teacher's actions were perceived as incorrect (e.g., limited to the grading or textbook-based assignments); and (4) expressed their ideals of effective teaching (such as stimulating curiosity, making knowledge accessible, fostering motivation to learn, and providing guidance and support throughout the learning process).

Furthermore, within the educational process aligned with the school's proposed framework, additional tasks emerged that parents had to perform alongside their children. These tasks involved cumbersome and frustrating email management: opening, attaching, downloading, printing, searching, addressing, describing, titling messages, etc.

Parents' statements revealed the 'flickering' functioning of the teacher in relation to the students. The teacher appeared 'at the input' of the process, assigning tasks through electronic register messages, and 'at the output', evaluating students typically through class assignments or topic-based tests (entering grades into the electronic register). The most important part of the teaching process, expressed by activities presented above disappeared in the thicket of emails with assignments and amid endless problems of their management (Wiatr, 2022, 2023). All of the aforementioned activities associated with the "proper" pursuit of instruction rely on interaction, and the low-response format of e-mail proved inadequate to sustain interaction at the expected level, thereby disrupting the school's didactics. This structural absence of teachers in the instructional process left parents as the last bastion for fulfilling the educational responsibilities conventionally assigned to the school by default.

"In reality, it was the parents who performed almost the entire role of the teacher, as they had to explain all the topics" [II-III].

This shift was not well received by parents. The Polish school study discussed in this article elucidates how parents endeavored to negotiate their level of involvement.

Negotiating parental participation in the implementation of remote education

Parents expressed reservations about the burdensome nature of instructional practices and demanded a return to complete teaching by the teachers. Parents underscored their limitations, stating they couldn't undertake new, unfamiliar tasks without the necessary tools, methods time, and expertise:

Not enough computer gear for all the kids at home. [VII-VIII]

Not enough time to go over the lessons and work with the child after coming home from work [I].

...I'm not a teacher, and I can't impart knowledge like a teacher [II-III].

Personally, I was tired of keeping track of everything, conducting lessons, explaining, and finding materials to help understand the subject [VII-VIII].

Motivating my son to study and teaching him new topics independently, like reading from... to... and solving problems 1-5 on page... In school, children learn differently by listening to the teacher in interaction with other students, and differently when the task is explained at home by a parent [IV-VI].

Parents' primary focus was on the imperative to reintegrate the teacher into the complex instructional process by fostering sustained, meaningful interaction between the teacher and the student. Parents expressed an expectation for "more contact" and "more empathy", "more interest" emphasizing the need for teachers to engage in teaching itself rather than delegating tasks.

The teacher should teach and impart knowledge. Ignite curiosity. Show the student that even in such conditions, it's worth learning. Be with the student. Support the student. [VII-VIII].

For some parents, meaningful interaction was only possible in the form of synchronous online lessons. During the online lesson, the teacher's 'presence' resembled the familiar classroom dynamic where the teacher



acted as the guardian or owner of the process. As a result, some parents wanted synchronous online instruction to occur regularly and on schedule:

I believe that lessons should be conducted in an online format, by a teacher who is visible to the children and conducts the lesson live. They don't have to be all lessons – exactly according to the lesson plan, just in a smaller size: 2-3 hours, during which the teacher discusses, explains, shows examples, and answers questions. Just as it normally takes place in school, at the blackboard [II-III].

However, there was a divergence among parents regarding the necessity of the teacher's online synchronical instruction. Some recognized the potential to restore and sustain educationally meaningful interaction through an alternative approach to organizing students' tasks, suggesting, for instance, weekly assignments instead of daily ones e.g.:

Only a couple of times a month should an assignment of some kind have been submitted for grading (which would be heavily marked) [I].

Some parents saw the possibility of restoring meaningful interaction between teachers and students simply by changing the tools used for pandemic distance education. They pointed to off-the-shelf solutions with which they were familiar:

On google-drive create folders for each child to submit everyone's homework assignments, rather than sending them by email. The assignments will be in one place; Google Excel with a list of homework sentences and teacher comments (done, not done, correct) [IV-VI];

...That's what classroom management software is for, to get around these kinds of 'reefs' – Schoology, Edmodo, Google Classroom, and many others. I have offered assistance in this regard...[IV-VI].

As the analysis shows, parents did not participate in the survey solely as customers (criticizing, blaming, or telling teachers what to do). They were looking for solutions, drawing on their past experiences. They were proposing collaboration. In a deeply partnering way, they said with great concern: "I will help", "teach", "train", "direct", "demonstrate", "set up". The parents did not ask for approval, but stepped forward as if their commitment to remote education was as legitimate and valid as that of the teachers. This shows that they saw themselves as individuals with the capacity to face the challenges together with the teachers. They saw themselves, however, as partners, not as assistants or implementers, and certainly not as clients or customers.

The parents who participated in this study were a diverse group and thus offered different, often non-obvious solutions. Among them were people working in IT who were willing to provide technical support to teachers:

As an IT professional, I can provide technical assistance.

There were also experts in various remote working tools offering their help:

I have been in the IT world for 16 years and have been working remotely for 16 years. I can explain how to use Zoom, Teams, etc. [IV-VI].

In my company I introduced tools based on office 365, if teachers would be interested, I can conduct workshops for them [II-III].

Another parent wrote as follows:

I teach online classes, I am active in a foundation that deals with digital education, I have people in my team who provide training for teachers. I am very happy to help [IV-VI].

There were parents who knew the environment of remote work in education and they, too, offered their help:

I teach how to teach adults with activity-based methods. During the pandemic, I conducted about 100 hours of online training and classes for students and university lecturers, which were very positively evaluated (although this was my first experience with online work) [II-III],

or parents who knew classroom management tools:

I have been doing blended learning in my work for many years. I am familiar with knowledge control tools, I am thoroughly familiar with TEAMS, I am familiar with Flippgrid, Slido, Mentimeter, Edmodo, Schoology, etc. [IV-VI].

In addition to the specialists in remote tools, there were those who offered to help as brand stylists, *how to make cool PPT templates, and so on*. Others wanted to contribute researching the needs and abilities of parents and create *quick online surveys* or training on *optimizing work and about emotions, stress, planning, etc.* – *I could customize them* [the workshops – MW] :). There was also this offer:

If there is a need, I can donate my old but working laptop to the school free of charge, which could be useful after 'refreshing'. I also have a projector/projector, a drop-down screen, and a flipchart that I could lend to the school [VII-VIII].

Parents went beyond mere complaints and critical assessments of top-down implemented practices by the school. By doing so, they positioned themselves as stakeholders with valuable contributions. Thus, they challenged the assumption that the school like an expert had exclusive authority to implement extraordinary measures in exceptional situations without consulting stakeholders.

The interpretation of the parents' perspective, which reveals their position as empowered to actively seek equitable and safe solutions, and to offer their diverse resources, can lead to a partnership-like understanding of the parent-school relationship in terms of the definition of partnership given in this paper. This form of partnership unfolds when teachers, school administration, and parents engage in collaborative discussions, consider all potential solutions collectively as partners, and leverage available and agreed resources.

Negotiating the partnership definition with the school

The parents who offered their resources positioned themselves as partners—empowered, valid, and legitimate participants of an extraordinary situation, wielding a voice. However, this wide range of parental resources and offers was not met with a school response:

I offered to exchange ideas – no response [IV-VI]

I offered to help in this regard. I sent an email to several people, including the secretariat. No one responded [IV-VI].

Ideas and suggestions for improving remote teaching and the willingness of parents to support this process were not used [IV-VI].

Many parents came to bitter conclusions:

I'm afraid that most of the parents' ideas for improving the quality of teaching are torpedoed in our school based on 'it can't be done' [I].

Some received the assurance that the school would reach out for assistance if required, yet they never did. It is possible the school did not require help, while parents, conversely, did. One of them directed his grievance straight to the teachers:

It's a pity that you stopped at the barriers you encountered and didn't try to overcome them with us. I learned that teachers didn't have equipment to work with, or that they had to share it with other family members – but there was equipment in the school. You were able to tell how much of this equipment was needed and for whom. There are a lot of us parents, and we would have found a way [IV-VI];

it's a pity that there was such a weak search for solutions, and we weren't included in that search. I think we were more motivated [IV-VI];

Such situations undermined fragile trust and violated this early, nascent potential to care for each other in this crisis.

Parents felt their voices of help were silenced, and they themselves were excluded from conversations about the sustainable use of the family resources in their children's learning.

We felt left with the problem [VII-VIII].



It is a pity that not a single meeting with parents was called. That the teachers did not take care of us parents. They didn't ask how we were doing [IV-VI].

It's a pity that we weren't informed about the steps that are being taken to improve remote learning and that we weren't included in this [IV-VI].

As a result, they felt forced into the position of 'home educators', forced to perform tasks over which they had no control, limited understanding, and neither the time nor the circumstances to manage effectively.

Discussion

The sudden closure of schools and the hasty, ad hoc attempts to transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to distance learning have revealed a series of underlying assumptions that influenced educational practices in many schools worldwide (Wiatr, 2022, 2023). These assumptions and practices also extended to the family-school relationship.

The study cited in the article uncovered that in the face of abrupt school closures, some schools implemented solutions over the heads of those directly affected, thereby affirming a particular vision of the school. This vision portrays the school as an entity that independently decides on the type of solutions to be implemented, regardless of encountered problems and available resources. Even when these solutions rely on resources beyond the school's immediate reach. This represents the concept of the "expert" school—an institution that is theoretically isolated from the social, neighborhood fabric that, in fact, both shapes and sustains it (Mendel, 2018; Radziewicz, 1989; Uryga, 2015; Wiatr, 2018).

Such a vision of the school – as an expert institution – simultaneously constructs a complementary vision of parents as assistants, executors, providers of necessary resources, and, if necessary, substitute teachers, as was the case during the pandemic education not only in the school studied. Parents seem to be cast in such a role in national and international research reports on remote education during the COVID-19 pandemic (eg. Briggs, 2020; Daniela et al., 2021; Doucet et al., 2020; Porsch & Porsch, 2020). These reports, however, seem to overlook the obviousness with which this kind of parental involvement in tasks traditionally associated with the school is treated during the pandemics.

Accompanying the advanced analyses of the parental narratives, the perspective of the family-school partnership, understood simply as the sharing of power and responsibility for the children's education, has allowed the capturing of the fundamental principle that organized or even defined this relationship during the first wave of Covid-19. Namely, although the burden of educational task implementation was shifted onto the shoulders of parents, making them responsible for tasks that were previously assigned to the school, this multiplied responsibility and the expectation that parents would "rise to the occasion" were not balanced by a sharing of power in terms of considering parental perspectives, needs, capabilities, and ideas in the practices implemented by the school. Parents were treated as an obvious, available, and necessary resource that the school could freely utilize without the necessity of consultation with them as stakeholders themselves.

The analyses presented in the article challenge the presumed and unquestioned proposal of the expert school's vision and the subsequent expected role of parents as natural and mere providers of resources required for implementing school tasks. The study, initiated by parents and aimed at discerning diverse parental perspectives, demonstrates a process of empowerment and emancipation. It positions parents as authorized partners and participants, inherently entitled to engage in discussions and contribute to the broader process of implementing new practices in remote education, echoing Rancière's notions of equality, democracy, and emancipation. The equal position (partner position) assumed and practiced by parents allowed for the creation of the "arena" where different visions of the school role, parents' role, and the family-school relationship started to collide. By introducing into the arena their interpretations of the situation regarding remote education provision—interpretations different from those of the school, the parents suspended the taken-for-granted definitions of the school as an expert and the parent as a school helper. They have acted in the spirit of Rancière's assumptions of equality as a point of departure. They have acted as equals, inherently entitled to such actions, thereby indeed establishing a state of equality in position and expression.

Qualitative analyses of parental narratives presenting their perspective(s) have led to the identification of categories reflecting various negotiations in which parents engaged to construct their legitimate,

partnership-oriented position. These negotiations manifested in (1) criticizing the school's attempt to implement remote education and demonstrating that the actions taken did not meet fundamental teaching criteria; (2) drawing attention to the non-partnered treatment of parents by the school, reflected in the way parents were "harnessed" to carry out tasks traditionally assigned to the school; (3) pointing out deficiencies in parental own resources required for carrying out school tasks "inherited" after the "disappearing" teachers; (4) demanding greater teacher involvement in the comprehensive teaching process; (5) suggesting new solutions; and most importantly, (6) indicating valuable resources they possessed and were willing to share in the collaborative planning of distance education practices with the school. Thereby, parents did not present themselves as mere providers or helpers, nor as demanding clients, but as equal partners deeply engaged in seeking solutions that would benefit teachers, children, and themselves.

The negotiations where parents presented their experiences of pandemic education from equal, partner positions reveal clashing visions of the school-family relationship. These visions may be aligned with the discourses of involvement and engagement (Ferlazzo, 2011; Weiss et al., 2018). The first one called involvement, led by the school, can be understood as mobilizing parents to carry out tasks identified and formulated by the school. Here, the school is an omnipotent, expert entity managing different problems. That approach differs significantly from the engagement discourse, which involves working with parents and assisting them on issues significant to them. It underscores the ability to listen to parents' voices, recognize, and effectively utilize the resources parents themselves offer. This rare form of relationship presents a genuine opportunity to enhance collaboration between parents and teachers in the pursuit of the best solutions amid crises. It effectively allows for consideration of the capabilities and needs of all participants in emergencies.

That approach differs significantly from the engagement discourse, which involves working with parents and assisting them on issues significant to them. It underscores the ability to listen to parents' voices, recognize, and effectively utilize the resources parents themselves offer. This approach rare in practice presents a genuine opportunity to enhance collaboration between parents and teachers in the pursuit of the best solutions amid crises. It effectively allows for consideration of the capabilities and needs of all participants in emergencies. It requires however acknowledgement by the school of the assumed and presented equal position of parents as valuable and competent partners.

While this study focuses on a single primary school, the insights provided here, along with the exploration of empowerment and subordination in parental narratives during pandemic education, shed light on the conditions and the very potential within the parental community. Therefore, this research could be of significance and offer inspiration in other contexts where similar school practices occurred or where parents aimed to strengthen their role in shaping distance learning practices collaboratively with schools. It is advisable to delve into exploring the concept of the expert school's visions and manifestations of parents trespassing on these visions as they present themselves as Rancièrian equal partners.

Limitations

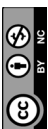
This study has limitations, primarily due to its small scale and the specific location of the school. While other quantitative studies, both domestic and international, provide results that reveal similarities in parenting experiences, there is a need for further research and in-depth analysis of qualitative data beyond thematic analysis. The study, conducted in an elementary school, is not exempt from a common weakness found in all studies utilizing electronic surveys. This sampling technique is prone to absentees who, due to various reasons including technical or competency limitations, may have faced challenges accessing the survey, potentially excluding valuable parental voices. The Parent Council aimed for a broad response to the survey, yet this aspiration introduces another limitation to the conclusions presented here. At the request of Parent Council members, socio-demographic questions that might have been perceived as potentially discouraging were omitted, preventing insights into the composition of the survey participants.

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