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## Collective Patterns of Teachers' Action: A Documentary Interpretation of the Construction of Habitual Knowledge

**Abstract** This article presents a research project carried out by academic researchers and practicing teachers who made an attempt to reconstruct the complexity of school reality and understand the cultural activity of the teams of teachers and students. We gained entirely different pictures of schools, filled with a unique language and symbols, specific organizational culture, exceptional sensitivity, methods of expressing understanding or disapproval of particular ways of perceiving in the school reality. A particular asset of our method of cultural studies is sensitivity to varieties of local determinants, focusing attention on conjunctive action patterns and cooperation with social actors.

**Keywords** Cultural Practices; Conjunctive/Habitual Knowledge; Patterns of Orientation; Teachers; School; Documentary Interpretation

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School reality covers a complex whole determined by the course of events, space dynamics, and complexity of social relations. A school in its activity creates a unique organizational culture, informal action patterns which differentiates it from other schools despite formal and organizational similarities (Deal and Peterson 2009; Clandinin et al. 2010). In the language of the documentary method applied by us, we refer to *conjunctive* action patterns, as opposed to *communicative* action patterns. The communicative patterns are closely related to formal goals and they are relatively easy to describe. Whereas the conjunctive patterns are the result of everyday life and thus they are inscribed and included in the uniqueness of local context, history, and hands-on experience of a particular school, its location, size, and architecture, as well as in the work of teachers and other numerous elements, which make every single school one of a kind.

Conjunctive patterns can be described as the culture of a society, habitus, tacit knowledge, mentality of a team, cognitive habits, and *obviousness* in perception and evaluation of the reality shared by a particular team. Individual, as well as collective statements of the teachers enabled us to compare their personal strategies of the school reality trouble-shooting with collective orientation patterns, which are activated during conversation and the common search for solutions. We observed that individual strategies are not directly translated to group action patterns and there are various ways of combining individual and group practices. At the end, we gained two entirely different pictures of schools, filled with a unique language and symbols, specific organizational culture, exceptional sensitivity, methods of expressing

understanding or disapproval for particular ways of perceiving the school reality. At the same time, we noticed some individual discrepancies, different acting strategies, and unique individual motives. We were interested in relations between collective commitments of a group of teachers and remaining individual action. We also observed to what extent the collective patterns of orientations and actions are hard-and-fast.

### Conjunctive Patterns in Teachers' Actions

Since the teachers work for one particular school, they tend to share common experiences and work out similar patterns of orientation, which are characteristic for a given school. A category of orientation *pattern* is both theoretically and empirically rooted in the documentary method of social research (Bohn-sack 2003; Krzychała 2004). This method specifies relatively stable, cognitive, and emotional perspectives, which on the one hand stem from the interpretation of everyday activity, and on the other is the basis for interpreting new experience. The category of orientation pattern assumes mutual reference of reality and system of meanings: the experience of being a teacher affects the orientation pattern and also acquired sources of conjunctive knowledge that determine style and fluency of a teacher's work.

In the simple way, orientation pattern can be defined as pragmatic knowledge of acting and knowledge in acting. Those two levels of knowledge "of" and knowledge "in" acting are analytically described as *communicative* knowledge and *conjunctive* knowledge. Describing and reconstructing this knowledge is not, however, that obvious. When we ask pupils

and teachers “What is going on at school?” or “What do you do at school?” we receive quite similar and schematic responses referring directly to commonly recognized functions of a school. From those responses we can draw the conclusion that teachers at school do whatever should be done at schools. They basically do similar things. This level of knowledge of acting is defined as *communicative* knowledge. “Communicative” rules are closely combined with formal objectives and they are relatively easy to *describe* and *express* (hence the term “communicative”). Nevertheless, we carry out similar tasks in a different style, in a different atmosphere, with different fluency and efficiency—in our own specific way, which is defined by conjunctive knowledge “in” acting. It stems from everyday practice, experience, direct relations, and numerous hours spent together. It is *inscribed* and *included* in the character of local and hands-on experiences of a given school, particular team of the teachers and pupils’ community (hence the term “conjunctive”). We can say that conjunctive code of practice comes down to a question “How do you do whatever you do at school?” or “How do you handle this, whatever happens at school?” These questions will not help us too much since conjunctive orientation patterns fall outside direct descriptions, they cannot be asked just like that. They are rather characteristic for intuition, non-verbal communication, feeling, a sense that something works for us, that something goes well, smoothly, or that something simply appeals to us. They can also be defined as the “culture” of a community, “mentality” of a group, cognitive “habit,” and “obviousness” in perception and assessment of the reality shared by a given group. These patterns decide, if someone who does not share our everyday experience, may

know what is the formal role of school and what happens at school, but they fail to understand the essence of work in “our” school, joy and fears connected with “these” struggles, and challenges undertaken by teachers and pupils.

*Conjunctive knowledge*—let us refer to the sociology of knowledge by Karl Mannheim (1992)—means atheoretical knowledge inscribed in acting, based on practice, internalized also at the level of feelings and sensation of the body. Referring, on the other hand, to the theory of Pierre Bourdieu (2004), we can identify it with *habitus* of acting individuality, with a pragmatic outline of perception, with a physical and mental predisposition to specific, symbolic behavior, with *practical mastery*. “Practical mastery is built by the sense of place, the sense of case, the sense of borders which make an individual find their unique place” (Kopciewicz 2007:73). Conjunctive knowledge expressed by practical mastery is perceived as cognitive obviousness and even illusion. *Illusio*, as a practical belief of teachers, is the result of including “me in the world” and “the world in me” (Bourdieu 1988). Pierre Bourdieu wanted to express the gist of this practical faith and therefore he opened the theory of acting on the notion of game. *Illusio* would be responsible for such ways of being in the world, or rather “being busy” by the world, which means that an acting individual cannot act against something (s)he was conditioned to be the stakes of social game. *Illusio* combining individuals giving and taking in socializing game is what makes the thoughts and actions of both sides of this relation conditioned and modified without assistance of this what is privileged in scientific theory, for instance, without agency of re-

flection, understanding and awareness (we would call it communicative knowledge). *Illusio* may be called well-grounded illusion with reference to necessity, rightness, and importance of the undertaken actions by individuals participating in that game (Kopciewicz 2007:74).

And here comes the key question: Does conjunctive knowledge have only an individual character? Is it also a collectively shared resource of obviousness? We have no doubts whatsoever when it comes to communicative knowledge. Reference to the formally specified tasks of school “concerns” everyone. The roles are determined and focused on the major goal which is efficient functioning of the institution of education. Communicative patterns of functioning in school allow teachers to communicate and cooperate. But, are habitual patterns of teachers’ actions mostly of an individual nature? Is it true that they stem from individual discrepancies related to sex, professional experience, personality, and/or the biography of particular teachers? Do teachers carry out their tasks in their own specific way even though the tasks seem the same?

In our opinion, the answer is negative and confirmative at the same time. The teachers act in their own individual way and it is impossible to find uniform, conjunctive codes of practice. Nevertheless, the world of teachers is *social* to a greater extent than just through coexistence of all formal rules and standards at school. Acting at a given school becomes social experience *per se*, so it requires inter-subjective agreement, not only with the reference to formal objectives but also with the reference to informal rules of cooperation and rivalry.

Conjunctive patterns of orientation and activity are also of an inter-subjective nature: they are created in the course of social history and allow participation in a commonly shared world: “most of our thinking is rooted in collective activity” (Mannheim 1992:25) and even “intention of perception and possibility of comprehension on various positions depend on living space in which they are created and exist” (Mannheim 1992:232). Bourdieu shares this view when he emphasizes that *habitus* is formed by “objective social structure” (2004:45), determined by its place in social space, constantly improved by “commitment in social games” (Bourdieu 2004:62), confirmed by relations with other people. School is no exception—it is also such a space of experience. In this space, local rules, which “apply to” everyone, are crystallized. Due to similarity of experience of work in a certain school, actions are determined not only by the logic of the educational system but also by social logic of work in a certain team of teachers. Conjunctive patterns of action, even though they are not usually subject to reflection and they are not written down, shape the relations and ways of dealing with the problems. There is even more to that: they very often decide what is perceived as a problem, how such a problem is presented, and what we define as its solution. Conjunctive patterns of action are “local” wisdom and efficiency, and at the same time “local” habit, routine, and sometimes “local” limitation and a barrier to progress.

The task of understanding the school reality undertaken by our research team can be defined as an attempt to reconstruct conjunctive activity patterns of teachers, which are the outcome of the *experience of being a teacher* at this very school and not the other,

patterns dependent on personality and individual style of work, the nature of the pupils' community, certain significant tasks and the school's history, its location, size, building architecture, and many other elements which make each school unique. These patterns, although to some extent they include a fraction of general routine of "teacher's work" and "work at school" as such, basically have unique and individual character. This task becomes a challenging one as their reconstruction must exceed the level of overall and universal theoretical categories which we could generally adopt as a key to analyze any school.

Conjunctive action patterns at school are of rather constant character; they do not come from situation but from communication and direct impacts of teachers and pupils. Young people come to school and leave (on an everyday basis: from classroom to classroom, from a school of a lower level to a school of a higher level), and the specific climate and culture of the last school depends on expectations towards students (rights and duties: communicative patterns). On the one hand, students bring in the values and rules characteristic for the district in which a school is located (environmental conditions), and on the other—they are expressed without words by school facilities, as well as attitudes and the teachers' styles of work.

### Documentary Interpretation of the Action Patterns

In order to understand conjunctive (habitual) action patterns, we cannot settle for declarations, simple descriptions, and rational grounds. The majority of

conjunctive rules "in" acting stays beyond conscious motives. This perception marks key rules of empirical reconstruction of action patterns. In the field research, we do not expect ready-made explanations and direct justification from acting persons. We register various social practices and we analyze what action patterns are *documented* in these practices.

In interpretation, we use experience from work with the documentary method. This method directly refers to sociology of knowledge of Karl Mannheim (1992). We also drew from the achievements of the Chicago School (cf. Glaser and Straus 1967; Mead 1968; Blumer 1969; Goffman 1974), referring to its ethnomethodology and analysis of conversation (Sacks 1964; Garfinkel 1967). The documentary method is now being developed by Ralf Bohnsack and the team of co-working researchers (2003; 2004a; 2013; Krzychała 2004).

In practice, we carry out the task of documentary interpretation by observing free actions, in our case, actions of teachers at school. We have the greatest experience in analyzing group discussions when teachers freely talk about their school and its everyday problems (this method is different from the *focus group*). We also use one-to-one interviews, observations, and, more and more often, video records and photo documentary, as well as different types of documentation of the school reality (students' essays, teachers' notes, posts put on the boards, etc.). The common feature of all these methods is the fact that they allow us to register common actions of teachers in which they activate spontaneously the same conjunctive rules of communication as in everyday situations. It is not

an assumption taken *a priori*, but we interpret the same type of action that is registered, and we define meticulously if it is a self-propelled action or if it is a reaction to the presence of a researcher. Habitual action patterns are especially vivid when the group acts spontaneously.

Through comparative interpretation, we register communicative processes of the group, specifying from what positions they take actions, in what mental structures they perceive problems and solve them, how they see one another, how they interpret reactions of other people, and how they understand different social situations they participate in. In an analytical manner, we can differentiate here instrumental actions taken in order to produce certain effects and situational actions which stem from an intuitive reaction to a given situation. So, the question is what do teachers talk about and what do they do.

In all those cases, we ask parallel questions: can we notice repeatable patterns, which are independent on instrumental and situational conditions, in different actions. If a group communicates freely and its members understand one another, this communication is based on common resources of conjunctive knowledge. We are asking not *what* the participants are talking about, but *how* they run a discussion. We are asking not *what* the social actors are doing, but *how* they carry out particular tasks. We are interested in *modus operandi* of social activity, style, fluency, specific ways and frames in which problems are addressed, practical rules and obviousness accepted in action. After we identify and describe *habitus* of work of a given team of teachers,

we ask one more question: in what social experience a given action pattern was created, in what context it was practiced, improved, and consolidated. A key task of documentary interpretation is a reconstruction of **social experience** which lies at the grounds of analyzed resources of atheoretical knowledge. "Genetic analysis defined generally as documentary interpretation aims at the processual reconstruction of structure of the course of social experience, at the reconstruction of habitus and modus operandi, recognized as both habitual and incorporated forms of action, and as a basis and condition of action practice as such" (Bohnsack 2004b:21). The process of gaining conjunctive knowledge in the course of experience explains at the same time the logic of defined social practice unexhausted in subjectively declared *motives to*. In that way, we exceed duality of dispute over objectivity and subjectivity of individual (or group/collective) social orientations. Experience lying at the ground of a certain type of atheoretical knowledge is objective, independent on will and communicative intention of our respondents. The space of experience does not depend on the respondents' intention.

We would like to mention one more feature of documentary interpretation. Reconstruction of given social spaces of experience does not come down to static description of a "field" and calculating "properties." It is most of all a reconstruction of process, history, origin, mode, and way of acquiring given orientation patterns in the stream of experience. Documentary interpretation does not concentrate on isolated, abstract, one-dimensional aspects of socialization. It is a multidimensional interpretation if we take into account simultaneous overlapping and modifying

numerous action patterns related to experience of gender, biographical experience, experience of common work in a given institution, experience of living in a given city, ethnicity, school socialization, family, and professional experience. In this way, in a multidimensional manner, we reconstruct experience of the teachers (cf. Krzychała 2007; Krzychała and Zamorska 2008; Zamorska 2008). In this interpretation, we make use of combining various methods of observation and registration of experience.

The examples we are going to present are drawn from two research projects carried out by the University of Lower Silesia together with teachers in 2007 and 2008 in various primary and grammar schools of the southern region of Poland (Krzychała 2007). We are going to refer to selected topics broached in group discussions and photo documentaries registered in three schools (to date, nine schools took part in two stages of the project). In each school, we first conducted a two-week observation among all students. We accompanied them during all formal and informal classes and activities. Then, we asked students to prepare photo documentation presenting "our" school. Each group was also involved in group discussions. Simultaneously, we observed teachers' interactions with this class; we had brief, impromptu talks with the teachers and more in-depth interviews. Comparison of individual statements and observations of groups of teachers were of special importance to us.

We also conducted two discussions of each group of teachers. We prepared them according to our own convention of evaluation workshops. Material registered at school was subjected to discussion of teach-

ers during their first meeting. We invited them to analyze the photo documentation prepared by "their" students and excerpts of group discussions which were held in "their" school. At that stage, teachers discussed the topic of the school reality, and proposed different ways of solving problems. These discussions were registered as well. Prior to evaluation workshops, we handed the teachers transcripts of their discussion, and during the next meeting, we analyzed action patterns of the group of teachers. At this level of evaluation, we did not focus our attention on the question "what is our school like," but on the process of constructing meanings as a group, so "how we interpret our school." In the middle of the workshops, the interviewer "withdrew," and the teachers continued to analyze the functioning of their team. They brought new contexts, asked new questions, and completed previous topics.

#### Example I: School as Training of "Puppies"

We will start the presentation of the first exemplary orientation patterns of teachers from reconstruction of social and cultural examples of teachers from a big-city school (this school has a working nickname "the school of rules"). During the first meeting, one of the teachers introducing us to the atmosphere of the school, said: "we are the school which has some standards." In the course of getting to know the character of this group of teachers and their way of addressing the school reality, we decided that the quoted sentence can be treated as a key to understand what is going on in that school.

In the teachers' opinions we found only two types of students. The first of them are kind of grammar

school students who can get involved in work, have knowledge, work well, are organized. The other group (minority) infringes the established borders and questions the established order.

**K11:** ((K: female teacher, M: male teacher)) We can see here clearly that at this stage of two years ago, so fun, laughs.

**K3:** Like puppies.

(...)

**K3:**                   └ There are three people, listen.

**K2:** No, but I rather generalize. Such terms as loose, trips, student pranks, lack of consequence.<sup>1</sup>

Grammar school students who meet the school requirements and those who failed to do so are subject to the same pattern of perceiving students who, at that age, cannot be partners in the everyday decision-making process.

The teachers work out the standards of their school. They create an order of the school reality introducing clear norms and rules for students, defining in this way the frames of roles taken by them. In the excerpt quoted above, K3 justifies the rightness of the style of collective action. Students are like *puppies* who would preferably spend their time playing and do not know yet what matters in life. Therefore, the adults' task, or even duty, is to make decisions for them and make sure that they fulfill tasks given to them.

Created collective order, focusing on fulfilling the principles of the curriculum referring to teaching and bringing up, requires commitment from

<sup>1</sup> For signs used in the transcript of group discussion, see: Appendix.

all teachers. In everyday meetings, during the exchange of remarks on current events, stories about school experience, traded gestures, the participants express understandable approaches and actions shared by them. An example of exchanging sort of instructions on how to deal efficiently with everyday situations could be the registered excerpt of the discussion between female teachers:

**K3:** I kicked up a big stink after a Polish lesson. It was in December. In December, they did something like this to me, they did something like this. I will tell how it was. It was about entering the classroom. They were somewhere else, taking pictures for some calendar, I mean boys. It was 2 days before holiday. And entered as a herd (whack). And I tell them, no boys, please leave the room, come back and knock. So you can imagine how they knocked (wham wham wham wham). Come in. And listen, they didn't come in. They didn't come inside, they sat on the stairs and I said OK. Now sit here, I call the headmaster, it happened to me for the first time, but I said I won't let go, I won't let them behave like this because of me and because of them, because it is all about them, they must know how to behave properly.

**K2:** No, listen, we have to be strict, because they really. I have a feeling they wait for such signals. And this is not.

**K5:**                   └ Yes, yes.

**K4:** Generally, each of them is like that, but when one shows them something

**K3:**                   └ Yes. Exactly.

**K2:**                   └ So we support it, and it is how it starts.

Presenting the incidents with students being late for the lesson, K3 is interpreting this event in line

with a collective orientation pattern, which in the case of this group of teachers is connected with the order described above based on rules determined by teachers and students' duty to respect them. Attitude towards law and consequences stemming from obeying or breaking the rules determines the whole group of teachers to such extent that they are not able to interpret that situation in any other way. The solution applied by K3, involving the use of force and domination, is the only way of acting available in the space of common orientation patterns. Each time when the topic of improper, that is, different than the standards of students' behavior specified by school, was raised in discussion, the teachers reminded each other about the necessity to execute commonly set requirements. We can say that they impose this collective order on one another.

We had an opportunity to participate in everyday life of this grammar school. We looked at this institution from different perspectives and through numerous questions we had. One of the ways of an insight into the school reality we employed was to ask students to prepare a photo documentary. We have seen great coherence and coexistence of the world of teachers and the world of students. Even the teachers have seen it: "The class has a number of problems, and they focused only on one of them." The students know very well what is important for the teachers and they are well aware of the work of teachers' strategies. During conversations and in the course of preparation of the photo documentary, they had exactly the same categories which are vital for the teachers, and they show their contrast. The teachers believe in the significance of acting together in line with the fixed rules. In the photo

documentaries, the students focused on showing the shortcomings of this persistence or its pointlessness. The teachers stress the importance of the distance which helps to retain authority: teacher chief, authority, leader, whose opinion students do not have courage to challenge, whereas students show the "leaders" in ridiculous situations and tell anecdotes connected with funny behaviors of the teachers who religiously obey the fixed order.

The teachers' opinion of *puppy-like*, immature behavior of the student "who has to be kept in reins" is reflected in the students' documentary. Next to the pictures that register a teachers' struggle to maintain discipline, there are also the pictures of places and situations in which students feel grown up to some extent. On the premises of the school, the following is the meeting with a person from building maintenance, who acts friendly and takes them seriously. There are also pictures with siblings and peers. Comments on the picture showing a couple hugging and smiling, they "say yes, yes, this is the biggest. They are dating and this is the only case so far in our class." The next pictures are of their football team, the boys drew each other moustaches.

Teachers, on the other hand, perceive adulthood of their students as another game that grown-ups should control. The ideas of children are taken with a pinch of salt, and to discipline children, or even set the boundaries to the game, is deeply ingrained in teachers' *habitus*.

We have registered many situations in which teachers give students ready-made methods to improve their behavior, and they want them to be applied im-

mediately. Personal commitment of the teachers and their readiness for sacrifice (as it was in case of the head teacher above) in solving difficult, conflict situations are the result of the fact that the teachers as the group aim at persistent observance of school standards. This collective orientation pattern is automatically activated in various situations different than set requirements of educational institutions. With their prompt and efficient reactions to failures in meeting the requirements or expectations of the school, the teachers aim at restoring the order and bringing the situation to the point "as it is supposed to be." In the course of group discussions and during individual interviews, the descriptions of students' problems are on the periphery, they occur only to prove the efficiency of teachers' reactions (e.g., X truants, but he doesn't any longer, Y was isolated by the peers and (s)he is sitting with his/her classmates taking part in group work). The teachers do not shy away from talking about hardships, they do not underestimate them nor hide them, but they respond to all attempts to question the school rules or disregard the duties. As a team, they have built a common, *possible world*, which they reckon the most appropriate in the context of their own school and problems they have to face every day. This orientation on common educational goals (school's standards), the experience of working out (in small groups, during conversations with a headmaster, during the school's staff meetings) different issues enable them to act and react to the appearing difficulties.

#### Example II: School as a Country Community

In our research, we have registered such discussions of the teachers for whom the awareness of

social marginality of student's social environment becomes one of the central elements of collective orientation. We are giving the example of a team of teachers from one of the schools in a village (dubbed as "village school"). The teacher answered the question of the interviewer: "What is the school you work at like?"

**K1:** It's a village school (hmm) and when it comes to a number of students, it gives a great opportunity of work for us and the children, I think so, and for sure (hmm) it allows to (hmm) know each student not only by his or her first and last name, but also their family situation. Therefore, no one is anonymous, we know about everything, and it surely makes our work easier.

Teacher K1 does not describe the school in the category of organizational structure; she gave no details concerning building's equipment or activities taken at the school. The central element here is the environmental identification ("village school"). The teachers work with a relatively small group of students. There is no anonymity, each student is well-known to teachers ("by his or her first and last name"). The teachers are familiar with the family situation of the students ("we also know their family situation"). Clarity and privacy of school society is valued as one of the basic assets of the village school ("very good working conditions for us and the students").

The further course of discussion allows us to add that the knowledge of students' situations does not only stem from a small number of students at school. The teachers have been familiar with the problems of the village community for some time

(even from “previous generations”), and those problems are the hardest to deal with while working with students (“it influences their opportunities for development”).

On the one hand, the teachers emphasize cultural diversities among students (“the environment is very diversified”), nevertheless, in their discourse, the opinion prevails that the environment of the students is homogenous (“village school fosters social uniformity”), marked with collective economic and cultural marginality and serious problems (“children from run-down territories—these are most of those children; there are plenty of children whose parents became alcoholic”). Decline is nothing new, it is a frequent mark of an environment reproduced from generation to generation (“parents live at such a low level, life standard, and the same situation is with children”). The decline also determines barriers which hinder full development of children and take advantage of education (“the children are neglected, not properly looked after, they have also limited access to some books”). This picture cannot be changed by the presence of other children (“from such families [uhh] intelligent people”) since those children who inherit this decline prevail. Exceptions to the “standards” are perceived as something unorthodox. The teachers feel sorry for the children as they know that their childhood is complicated and they have a more difficult educational start.

Struggling with the effects of financial and cultural poverty determines elementary frames of orientation for the team of teachers. Later in the discussion, the teachers describe meticulously the problems they are facing at their school. All those problems

stem from low economic and social status, as well as the lack of educational support from the parents. Below we are quoting two statements which followed the question: “What problems do you deal with at school?”

**K2:** Should it concern teaching or

**P:** [ both teaching and raising.

**M1:** I worry most about disproportions between the students, sometimes huge.

I teach language so it seems to me that in this area it is easiest to see the differences. Take, for example, the sixth grade. If someone is at the elementary level, right, he or she is about to finish this level. Somehow he or she moves to the next level more smoothly. Whereas some have only really basic knowledge and very poor vocabulary, and they know nothing (uhh). I've noticed those disproportions in all grades except for the youngest ones. Among those children, the level is rather balanced. And, for example, in fourth grade (uhh) or in fifth grade, and especially sixth grade

**K1:** [ big disproportions

**M1:** the most important.

And in the consequence, this is the biggest problem because it is work which is too diverse, for some, it is very easy, and some cannot master it at all, and learning tenses or intonation is far more complicated.

((voices from the hall))

**K1:** As far as I'm concerned (uhh), the big problem I'm dealing with is that it is so hard to arrange a trip. It is the question of money, of course. At this moment we have plenty of such projects which are subsidized, but before that a trip to a cinema or to a theatre was very rare because when organizing such a trip, we faced so many problems that some children could afford to go and

some couldn't. We wanted those kids to see something apart from ((the name of the village)) and the surroundings. It was also a shock for me. Another problem is of organizational nature. For example, when the children are supposed to bring something to handicrafts classes or arts, they are not able to bring or prepare everything. So, we cannot do everything that we planned during the lesson. When it comes to the problem with bringing up the children (mmm), the problems are quite typical (.) °anything comes to your mind°?

We have decided to quote here quite a big excerpt because it contains detailed descriptions of problems observed by the teachers. We can also see here important features of the collective orientation patterns. Sharing one orientation pattern does not mean that the teachers describe the school reality in the same way. Habitual structures of experience may be similar in spite of differences in topics the teachers talk about. We can observe “various” problems, but their “core” will be similar. The foreign language teacher sees the problems related to language learning. The other educator, teaching handicrafts and arts, draws attention to financial problems connected with organizing trips and taking part in her lessons. Those problems, however, have one thing in common: they focus on inequality and disproportions between possibilities of different students. Here, we can see the essential heuristic nature of documentary interpretation according to which it is not enough to answer the question, what our respondents talked about, but we are looking for the answer on how they present their views and how they respond to the statements of the fellow teachers. In the quoted statement, teacher K1 is confirming the observations teacher M1 gave, she is

sharing the same opinion on significant differences between the students. What is also characteristic for both statements is that they refer to the lowest end of the economic and cultural scale. Other teachers do not exist in their statements.

It is also worth stressing one more feature of collective *habitus*. The common pattern of orientation does not need to be experienced as the identification with collective standards. The collective patterns of orientation account for not only individual variations and shades (connected with, e.g., teaching different subjects), they do not even require direct contact (interaction) and common group action. The decisive part refers to the fact of sharing a structurally similar experience. The common pattern of orientation can be worked out by the teachers through a literally common commitment in creating one strategy of school activity as it was in the case of the “school of rules.” The teachers can also work separately in different schools or in their own classrooms; nevertheless, they will share a common experience. In our case, it is first the community at work in similar organizational conditions of the same or similar school (a lesson as a basic form of working with students, structuring schools into forms, small number of forms at school), but also the community of living in the same city or village. Both quoted statements show the individual experience of the teachers (“I worry about it most; as far as I'm concerned; it was a shock for me”) which involves them emotionally (worries, shocks) and influences their own professional identification. Common *habitus* can be experienced individually. Sharing a common pattern of orientation does not have to lead to taking common actions.

The statement of K1 ends with the question aimed at other teachers: "When it comes to the problem with bringing up the children (mmm), the problems are quite typical (.) °anything comes to your mind?" The statement begins with an indicative sentence ("when it comes to...") which is to present the problems with upbringing ("the problems are quite typical"). After describing the problems categorized as *teaching* problems, the teacher is trying to talk about problems with *bringing up the children*. Nothing, however, comes to her mind. In that case, she addresses the question to her fellow teachers (with a quiet voice), but there are no new proposals to discuss concerning that area of school. This is an empty topic for the teachers. Nevertheless, they are willing to talk again about the family situations of their students.

The teachers see the "village school" as a place which "creates very good conditions of work for us and children." Why is not this chance and knowledge of the family situation of each child ("by first and last name: are well-known to us") used? Exactly for the same reason: because it is a *village* school. And we are not talking here about the location of the building, but about where the teachers belong. In this structural way, the teachers also describe functioning within the environment of the students and their own actions. They do not see this paradox. We can talk here about "the blind spot," about getting entangled in their own cognitive perspective, if we quote Mannheim (1992:232) again "the intention of seeing and the possibility of understanding in various positions depends on a life space in which they were created and applied." Not only did those teachers grow up in the same

environment, they also accept local *habitus* as their own and group pattern of orientation, even though they have worked in the sector of education. One of the crucial elements of that orientation is (sub-conscious) transfer of rules which prevail in the village community of their school. The teacher has no requirements towards the students apart from those posed by the ethos of local environment. In their educational work, the teachers base on the capital which was taken from the socializing of primary groups (family and informal ties). The collective memory of social hierarchy of inhabitants is revealed here. The relations are regulated mostly by personal contacts and relatives (friends and foes). The teachers, as "friends," respond in the same way to their students' behavior.

The same refers to the rule of not interfering in other peoples' business, or even pretending that we do not see those problems (probably the same rule applies to making domestic violence and alcoholism taboo topics). The perceived problems can be easily explained ("there is some natural information that someone kicks another person"); if people can, they just walk by ("I try to be neutral and do not interfere because I think it is a better solution") and avoid direct confrontation ("so I have to be careful and don't provoke certain situations which...can cause such situations). So a paradoxical connection: the same social experience which allows teachers to "understand" children and create a small, non-anonymous community also stops the potential of critical social change. A school with educational requirements is alien to students and teachers, and students who have some educational aspirations have to count on themselves. Mini-

malist thinking in respect to education applies to students and teachers alike. Everyone must fulfill his/her own duties, the school works without any reservations and mainly because nobody (neither parents nor teachers) demands a lot when it comes to learning.

These observations also confirm findings from our other research in which students prepared photo documentation of their school. In the village schools with a similar social structure as described above, in the perspective of teachers, there are no borders between school and local environment. The school is not taken formally. The students do not identify themselves with their forms, but rather with social categories other than school environment. The teachers keep close relations depending on the fact whether they are relatives and close friends. For them, the experience of school is rather associated with commuting (rather long distances), and breaks and free time spent with their friends in the afternoon. In the big-city schools, students clearly draw the line between free time shared with their friends and their commitment to their form during the lessons. The school has its own rights which are restricted to its premises and regulate school life in the period of *being-at-school*. Students habitually feel that difference (just like students with whom they work methodically). They emphasize their commitment to a group as educational, yet formal, function of school (lessons, quizzes, portraits of teachers). This part of the documentary of the students of the "village school" did not appear at all. Educational logic is beyond comprehension and the school's requirements are invalid.

### Collective Concern (Taking Care of) About the Orientation Patterns

We would like to broach one more topic showing the process of shaping the collective orientation pattern. Apart from descriptions of group patterns of orientation, equally important is to find out how strong and valid these patterns are. Is it possible to move around different types of orientation? Can different patterns of educational actions coexist within one school? Do individual teachers have to adjust to the existing patterns? "Forces dominating in different aspects of the school reality affect professional *habitus* of teachers, and dispositions rooted in them open and close certain possibilities for teachers to act" (Kopciewicz 2007:109). Is critical questioning of the existing reality and opening new opportunities possible?

We are in a position here to give a clear answer to those extreme dilemmas. The material we gathered allows us to assume that the power binding habitual forces of orientation makes teachers stand up for the agreed order. Below we are giving two examples when certain teachers try to introduce a new concept to an existing discourse. This new notion is alien to the dominating pattern of orientation. In both cases, the registered discussion took place when commenting on the photo documentaries prepared by the students. In both cases, the students criticized the teachers' conduct, and they tried to tell the teachers about the experience of "alienation" at school (it was also confirmed by the author of the said documentaries). The excerpt quoted below comes from the meeting of teachers from the "school of rules," and it presents the reaction of the students to a disclosure of the official discourse of the school.

**K1:** Of course. When looking at it from a distance, I see it wasn't a big deal.

**K2:** No?

**K1:** It wasn't tasteless after all. This is a Horse—Chief, this is Miluś, nicely written, with care.

**K3:** | But it is at school and, I don't know, I guess at this age one shouldn't do such things.

**K2:** | But notice that they, as the girls said, that it was that moment when they could do it, and they were aware of that it is just

**K4:** | But they should know if a person wants to be involved in it, it can't be like that.

((voices overlap, impossible to understand))

**K3:** They are just not good students, they learn in such way that I should concentrate on each of them.

He must feel the situation. It can't be like that. No one is making it public.

**K1:** For me, personally, it is funny, they showed what they can do. There are teachers, there are people from maintenance who they can be friends with. In the meaning of this word, there is no distance and everything is made for fun, it is funny. We shouldn't take it so seriously. Psychological aspects of this picture, because it is not shown here. For me, personally, it is a joke. Let's laugh at it. We laugh at different situations, you should smile as well.

**K2:** Cool K1, but we don't know if Mr. X wants to be treated this way, to be called Miluś.

((voices overlap, impossible to understand))

**K3:** For me, it is not funny at all: "He is always angry and mean (uh), Heniu."

Isn't it? There is nothing to laugh about, I'm sorry?

**K5:** Exactly.

A category of joke and laughter introduced by K1 does not agree with other teachers. The idea that the said documentary does not have to be an illustration of breaking the rules, making fun of the teachers, and registering it was immediately criticized by other teachers. No one, even for a moment, makes an attempt to give up their own beliefs and accept the proposal offered by K1 to look at the school from students' perspective, as a joke. Categories of laughter and friendly relations with school staff and the students are not acceptable in the collective reality. They are immediately questioned and excluded from the course of conversation. From this piece of conversation we can see how committed some people are to retaining the existing order. In the following statements, they refer to the hierarchical division of roles, respectively connected with age and even loyalty towards the school ("making public things that we should keep to ourselves"). The aim is not entirely present in one's own arguments and talk with K1, but rather confirms unanimously how good the existing order is. The group does not start a discussion, does not consider alternative interpretation because they know how everything should look, and guard the sanctity of the existing rules. The rules agreed by the school's staff are the basis of teachers' consolidation, who referring to those agreements, give themselves and one another explanations connected with the behavior of certain members of the community. After K1 is "taken to task," she remains quiet and she does not speak for the rest of the meeting. During an individual interview, she explains to us her strategy:

Children know me from school not only as a teacher who teaches something, but also as a human being.

At that moment, children are more open and honest. Building relations is the basis of this job, if there are no relations, there is no way to do this job...If there is a problem, then we solve it with each of them individually, I say I finish the lessons at this time, come over and we can talk. And come over, there are no conversations in a group with 15 listeners, our conversations are face-to-face. And each of them is interesting and is an individual. Each child is a human being. They act differently in different situations. Their behavior is different in family home, in a group, or during individual conversation. Now, we have to either take everything together into account or be able to separate it.

We can clearly see here what students at that school want: they want friendly relations, kindness, and trust. They also want to be treated seriously and individually. Moreover, different ways of solving problems appear. Instead of generally binding principles, such as: rules, their observance, consequences, there are: honesty/credibility, explanations from a students' side, and some solutions agreed by a student and a teacher of this particular situation. The teacher is the only one to abandon the collective mode of thinking. Looking at her position among other teachers, we have noticed that she is allowed a lot of leeway. The uniqueness that she brings to the collective mode of thinking is associated with the way of interpreting situations taking place at school. However, the frames of common vision of school remain intact—it is an institution which efficiently fulfills educational requirements. K1 has a different set of reactions to everyday problems, but she meets the expectations. Quickly and efficiently she gets rid of obstacles in the process of teaching, and she takes care to meet the high standards of the school.

We have noticed that in the group mode of thinking it is possible to work out *illusio*. From this angle, we are going to take a look at another discussion registered in the "school of rules." The topic of the conversation was a previous discussion on the photo documentary. The teachers analyzed the stories they had told before in the perspective of new questions. We wanted to find out how the teachers would deal with confrontational questions. Is persistence in obeying the established rules the only way to regulate school life? What are they missing when they concentrate only on disciplining students?

In the discussion, we could observe stages of reflection over collectively established patterns of orientation. Reluctance to undermine or even question the established order was so strong that the teachers became defensive when we only made an attempt to negate them: "we meet the standards of upbringing, they know what is expected from them, it must be like that. This is what upbringing is about." In the course of discussion, however, they started to notice other ways of interpretation of the situations at school. They gave the example of a school trip to one school in Italy. Reminiscing about different events (disco, stay at the hotel), they emphasized many surprising differences in conduct of Polish and Italian teachers. The clash of freedom and friendliness of the Italians where teachers and students had a good time together and rested with strictness versus the constant need for control of Polish teachers made them analyze spontaneously the effects of different styles of upbringing.

And here we can see a paradox. The teachers are aware that the relations with students can be built in

a different way. What is more, they see flaws of their collective action pattern. They also give the example of numerous everyday situations that contradict the rationale of *illusio*. Such an example could be the repeated statement that kids must be looked after all the time because they are not able to make smart choices for themselves, but at the same time they talk about situations in which students surprised them with their mature and reasonable behavior. We expected that at this point they would start to change the orientation. Nevertheless, it was a premature expectation. Although they were aware of shortcomings of their strategies and discrepancies between reality and the argumentation of their own beliefs, they retained the established order which regulates their roles related to their tasks. Why? It was purely a communicative discussion; conjunctive fluency remained intact. The teachers did not test this new strategy and they did not experience it in the spontaneous context. At the end of the second discussion, they tried to collect their findings and reflections on themselves. They raised issues that go beyond their tendency to concentrate on the rules and consequences of obeying those rules.

And I will concentrate more on individuality, and I'll try to get to each student and not just look at do's and don'ts. Besides, we, as teachers, often...we rarely talk about even those chairs or papers. It works very well, but we have to remind ourselves all the time, repeat, and enforce it. If I repeat it, it will work.

In this excerpt, there are two orientation patterns. First is connected with looking at the school reality, with taking a single student into account. In the course of discussion, the teachers several times got

back to the topic of relations with students, and tried to get an insight into a students' world. It helped them form new observations: "As a teacher, I have such reflection. I really look from the perspective of school standards rather than the individual needs of a student, and it is a mistake." The interlocutors see the new perspective in thinking about the school reality. But, the attempt to translate those theoretical statements to everyday life triggers the existing pattern of orientation and well-established solutions (repeating, reprimanding, demanding). Using new alternative solutions is more complex and must be worked out at the level of predisposition and practical fluency.

### Conclusion

In the examples from our research, presented in an abridged version, one can see the complexity of everything that creates the school culture and gives it a unique and a one-of-a-kind character. In the analysis of empirical material, we focused on reconstruction of the orientation patterns of the teachers, process of their creation, and possible change. Reconstruction of the conjunctive knowledge which teachers use allows us to understand what is going on in a given school, character of applied practices, and relations between various everyday incidents. Uniqueness of the methods of work and atmosphere of a particular school are not the only outcomes of teacher and student meetings and tasks given to educational institutions.

Both individual and community need a commonly created, possible world with established social order within which beliefs, orientations, and actions

of particular persons are understood. At the same time, the collective mode of thinking about the world and ourselves is crucial for creating the identity of a given social group. Jerome Bruner coined the term "folk psychology" (or *folk social sense, common sense*) which includes some predictable models of life, normative descriptions of the world, and some common practices shared by the members of a given community. We comprehend ourselves and the world within the borders of *folk psychology* of a given community we perceive as "us" (Bruner 1997:33-36). Reconstruction of conjunctive patterns of orientation and action is impossible without understanding the *folk psychology* of the community in which the school works. The experience of being an inhabitant of a village ("village school") brings in other knowledge, beliefs, and the sense of obviousness in understanding the school and one's role in that school. This knowledge is different from experience of life in a big city ("school of rules"). Local context of community work permeated also with the personal story of each teacher. In the everyday work of each team, we could observe some

kind of mediations between common *illusio* and individual ways of interpreting events and strategies of actions. We saw the power and rigidity of collective patterns of orientation, determining understanding of education and the schedule of work accepted by the group. Each team worked according to its own order, which became a censor of perceiving the school's reality by given people.

The method of double discussion gave the teachers a space for discussion over a collective and so far unquestionable obviousness. In a spontaneous way appeared very important questions about the meaning of the recognized strategy of actions and the need to refer them to, or even confront them with, personal experiences. The research we conducted in each school lasted two months. It is not enough to observe all the changes taking place in the collective patterns of orientation. However, the process of reflection and working out obviousness shared by a group has led us to new questions about conditions of possible changes (working out) with the collective patterns of orientation.

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## Appendix: Signs used in the transcript of group discussion.

It can't be said	
└ so exactly	The beginning of overlapping sequence uttered simultaneously
<u>emphasize</u>	The text presented with raised voice, stressed
°Maybe°	The text presented with quiet voice
(5)	5-second pause
(to you)	The text is not clear, probably this word was used
((yawning))	Comments, remarks on non-verbal gestures
P	Interviewer
K1, K2...	Female teachers
M1, M2...	Male teachers