

**THE
COLLABORATIVE ROLE
OF
PARENTAL PARTICIPATION
IN
SCHOOL POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

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**THE COLLABORATIVE ROLE
OF
PARENTAL PARTICIPATION
IN
SCHOOL POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

A CASE STUDY

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION
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ABSTRACT

This case study is centred on the examination of the role of parental involvement in school policy development. It documents the collaborative process of school policy development in the field of Computer and Technology Education. Examination of the process of school policy formation was undertaken in a qualitative manner, by the recording of a journal, interviews with committee members, and comparative questionnaires conducted with staff and parents eliciting attitudinal data with a view to refining this process for subsequent school policy development opportunities.

The following research questions were generated on an apriori basis.

- * Do parents wish to be involved in the collaborative development of school policy design and in what capacity?
- * What are the factors and conditions that need to be present to promote parental involvement?
- * What are the barriers and obstacles that impede the involvement of parents in policy development?
- * What are the benefits to the school community of parental involvement in school policy making?

Whilst the particular task of this study was to develop a school Computer and Technology policy the process undertaken by staff, parents and administration personnel was within the scope and design of an action research project. This project commenced with the formation of a committee comprised of staff, parent and administration representatives. The committee developed a strategy that was collaborative in nature within the relationships of the working party, yet consultative with the wider respective communities namely the school parent body and the teaching staff.

The findings of the case study revealed that parents generally sought to be involved in school policy development particularly in the non-academic domain. The factors that promoted this parental involvement in policy development were the existence of a conducive atmosphere, role of the Principal, open channels of communication, a consultative process, the existence of a suitable incentive for parents, and external factors such as government and /or systemic policies.

There were some identified barriers to this collaborative policy formation. These included available parental time, parental feelings of inadequacy, expressions of apathy, the use of technical language or jargon by teachers, and the presence of some negative parental energies that hindered the process.

Finally the case study identified the benefits of the collaborative involvement of parents in school policy development as the establishment of a constructive partnership between parents and teachers, comprehensive policy development, and the increased level of ownership and commitment exhibited by staff and parents.

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During this time I have become acutely aware of the sacrifices that my family have made over the last two years. This thesis would not have been possible without the patience, encouragement, support and understanding of my wife Eleanor and children, Nicholas and Lauren.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

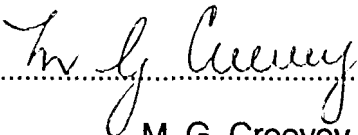

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M. G. Creevey

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CHAPTER ONE

THE RESEARCH DEFINED

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The participation of parents in the education of their children has evolved over many centuries. In the Australian context the link between parents and education has been present for many thousands of years especially in the aboriginal tradition (Holder, 1985, p.19). In recent history (1800-1994), since the arrival of the white settlers, the involvement of parents in the functioning of schools has not always been recognised as being beneficial to the student. This relationship between parents and school is currently changing particularly with the impact of research findings and the prevailing community expectations of education being expressed through consultative reviews being conducted at both the State and Federal levels of government in Australia.

Educational research by Epstein (1988), Mortimore, Sammons, Ecob, Stoll & Lewis, (1988) has confirmed the belief that, there is consistent evidence that parents' encouragement, activities, interest at home and their participation at school affect their children's achievement. This recognition in educational research that parental involvement in education has positive benefits in the scholastic progress of children is not a recent development, yet few genuine models of parental involvement in schools have been successful to date. Politicians, as well as educational researchers, are now promoting the closer development of relationships between teachers and parents.

The focus of this particular research is an examination of the increased role of parents in the functioning of a school community. Parental involvement in education has many possible functions, roles and responsibilities within the school environment, however the aspect of involvement that is central to this study is policy development. This case study then seeks to examine the role of parents in the collaborative development of school policy.

1.2 CONTEXT

This study of the role of parental involvement in collaborative policy making is conducted in a Brisbane Catholic primary school. The culture and ethos of the school are such that parental involvement in the school is encouraged. It is necessary to place this study in the relevant environment as the local conditions and philosophy of the school, its administrative structure, Parents and Friends Association, and community will contribute meaning and relevance to the research. These structures mentioned will add uniqueness to the research.

This research project was formulated late in 1993, when politicians, educational researchers and community groups, particularly employers and parents, were calling for a greater say in the curriculum that was offered in Australian schools. The potential benefits of parental involvement in policy making, such as increased ownership of policy changes and utilisation of parent knowledge and skills was seen to be advantageous to both the school environment and the student.

The research project undertaken was to explore the collaborative participation of teachers and parents in the development of a specific school policy. The area of

the school curriculum that warranted review was the formulation of a Computer and Technology policy. Due to the rapid expansion of technology and the recent availability of computer hardware to the school community, the need for direction in this curriculum area was a high priority.

1.2.1 THE SCHOOL

The Catholic Primary School was established by the parish community in 1978 initially with two year levels of students in Grades One and Two. When the school year commenced there was an enrolment of 27 students and by the end of that year the enrolments had increased to 35 students. In its first year of operation the school staff consisted of two teachers.

In subsequent years the school population has grown to the present enrolment of 402 students from Grades One to Seven. Currently there are 26 staff members employed in the operation of this educational facility catering for boys and girls. This has necessitated a progressive modern building programme to accommodate the demand of steadily increasing enrolments. These essential building programmes have meant that the parish and the parent community have had to service a large capital debt since its opening year. The growth years of the school have been characterised by a very active and hard working parent body. (St. Adrian's School Handbook, 1988, p. 12)

The school is parish owned and administered by Brisbane Catholic Education. In the sixteen year history of the school there have been only three School Principals. The school teaching staff has a blend of youthfulness and experience with an

average age of 32 years. The parish structure is such that it encompasses two neighbouring suburbs. It is located in a growth area as five new home building estates surround the school.

1.2.2 THE COMMUNITY

The social structure of the school community has four interwoven groups of people supporting the life of the school. The first cluster of people are the parishioners, many of whom currently have students attending the school or have had students enrolled in the school during its short history. The second group, although not distinct from the parishioners, is that of the current parent body which consists of 269 families. The school staff comprises the third cluster. The fourth group relates to the 400 students enrolled in the school. The social fabric of these four relational groups are intertwined and are mutually supportive of each other.

The school community consists of a diverse range of socio-economic conditions and backgrounds. The suburbs are predominantly middle class with 10% of families located in the last three categories of occupations designated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Code (1993). These categories include parents who are classified as Labourers, Receiving Income Support (eg. pensions), and the Unemployed. There are currently 269 families who have 402 children enrolled in the school and 11% of these children have English as a second language.

Within the school community structure, parents are involved in the Parents and Friends Association (P. & F.), Mothers Club, Rosters (Library, Tuckshop, Grounds,

Maintenance), Learning Assistance Program (L.A.P.), Tutoring and various academic (eg. Computer And Technology Committee) and non-academic (eg. Uniform) committees.

1.2.3 PARENTS AND FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

The membership of this association is open to those who are parents or legal guardians of the students enrolled in the school and those parishioners and friends who are supportive of the objectives of the association.

Briefly the aims of this association are ;

1. To foster community interest in educational matters, in particular to co-operate with the headteacher and staff, in the best interests of the children at the school.
2. To do all things possible for the betterment of general conditions and amenities at the school.
3. To establish a fund for the general conduct of the association and to expend monies in accordance with the stated objects of the association. (School Handbook, 1988, p.6)

The Parents and Friends Association (P&F) has been a special part of the school culture for the last sixteen years. It meets on a monthly basis for ten months of the year. The school and parish fete is the only form of fundraising conducted by the P&F in the school as this has been policy for some years. Other P&F funds are gathered by a monthly levy. Parents are encouraged to become active members of the association and communication with the wider parent community is regular via the weekly school newsletter.

1.2.4 ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The school has a leadership team consisting of Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal and Parish Priest. The leadership team is responsible for all aspects of school life. The concept of co-leadership is evidenced in the structure of the school executive with each member having a clearly defined role and responsibilities. Leadership team meetings are conducted on a weekly basis. As well as the leadership team the school is served by two Administrative Assistants.

Staff meetings with full-time and part-time teachers, along with school officers are conducted each fortnight and minutes of proceedings are recorded. These meetings are for administrative and professional development purposes. Agenda for these meetings are formulated by the entire staff.

Communication with the parent body is via a weekly school newsletter, and a weekly bulletin is maintained in the parish newsletter. Other means of formal and informal communication include meetings, assemblies, notices and the use of the school bulletin board.

1.2.5 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The parent community has had little or no contribution to policy direction since the formative years when uniforms and school procedures were developed by the small foundation community. It was ironic that some fifteen years later, in 1993, it was the need to change the school uniform to meet the Sun Safety Guidelines developed by the Queensland Education Department and the Queensland Cancer

Foundation that would provide an opportunity for staff and parents to collaboratively design the most appropriate school uniform, given factors such as the environment, protection, maintaining school colours and traditions, costs, availability and supply of materials.

This parental involvement in non-academic policy formation saw the establishment of a uniform committee which, along with staff representation and school administration, coordinated the process of review. The process was consultative in structure. Surveys were utilised as a means of engaging the opinions and wisdom of the whole school community. Every family was encouraged to contribute to the discussion of aspects of the new school uniforms. The outcome of this process was that all families had many opportunities to express their opinions and an attractive and functional uniform was duly accepted by the school administration. A phase-in period of twelve months was viewed as necessary so that families would be able to obtain appropriate use out of their current garments. There was acceptance of the new school uniform from the outset because of the regular communication and consultation that had proceeded the decision. This initial step of policy design in a non-academic environment was considered a beneficial experience prior to more extensive parental involvement in academic policy formation.

Later in 1993 the need to develop a school policy relating to the use of computers and technology was highlighted by the principal. The role for computers in education, particularly as it relates to the primary school environment, had surfaced on many occasions, often with staffs' and parents' opinions differing. A clear and appropriate direction relating to computer education and technology was necessary so that the best educational opportunities could be offered to the students. All that remained was the process to harness the energies and talents of the staff and the parent community.

A computer and technology policy committee was formed with a membership consisting of two parents, two teachers and the principal. It was the brief of this committee to research the topic and to formulate a policy statement. The process needed to be consultative by design and involve the whole staff and wider parent body.

1.2.6 CONTEXT OVERVIEW

This study of examining the collaborative role of parental involvement in policy making was located in a Brisbane Catholic primary school. The ethos of this Catholic School has a strong tradition of parental participation and as such its cultural characteristics influenced this research. Historically this parental involvement in the development of school policy, has not been extensive. The school, its administrative structures, the community, and the school's Parents and Friends Association, the setting, and participants impacted upon this case study. The case study research encompassed the whole school community as they struggled with collaborative policy development and sought to evaluate the process.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

This study was considered important as the outcomes of this study would impact upon future endeavours in policy development within this school community. The significance of the problem then was the need to develop collaboratively a policy that led to informed teaching practice in the computer and technology curriculum area. The present situation was that no policy for computer and technology development existed in the school.

This lack of policy direction was compounded by the limited availability of computers, most of which were largely obsolete, within the school. This reality highlighted the need to review the facilities at the disposal of the school community and plan for the future.

When the topic involved in this study, computer and technology education, was raised within the school community on previous formal and informal occasions, evidence of many unresolved discussions surfaced. These discussions revolved around two major issues. Firstly there was the concern of how a computer program would be implemented in the school. Essentially this concern was centred on whether computers were to be located in classrooms or in a specially designed room that was accessible to all students on a roster basis. Secondly there was a concern as to which hardware was the most appropriate for this particular school environment. Staff ideas differed from the thoughts of the Parents and Friends and as a result some conflict was evident as to the direction and extent of any innovation.

Computer education was highly valued by the parent community and a financial commitment was given by the Parents and Friends Association to assist in the funding of a computer program to the extent of their budget allocation. A survey of local schools, conducted by staff, revealed that very few schools have a formal policy in this area with sequential development of skills from year 1 to 7.

More comprehensive research and investigation was needed on policy development at a school-based level to answer many of the concerns that surfaced regarding teaching methodologies, hardware, software, and the necessary student skills to be acquired.

An invitation was extended by the staff to the parent community to become involved in the formation of a policy that clearly articulated the future directions of computer education within the school environment. As a result a committee consisting of parents, teachers and administration personnel was formed. This concept of participation by parents in policy development was viewed in a positive manner by the school community.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of parents in the collaborative development of school policy. This examination had four major emphasises. Firstly there existed the need to question whether parents in general wanted to be involved in policy development. The second task was to reveal the factors that supported and fostered this level of parental involvement in policy formation so that future endeavours would build upon initial experiences. The next aspect of the research sought to recognise the barriers that impeded this participation by parents. Finally, as a result of the experiences of this study, it was aimed to identify and evaluate the perceived benefits of this collaborative level of parental involvement in policy development.

This study reported on the process of the development of a computer and technology policy that harnessed the collaborative energies and talents of parents and teachers at a local level. In the area of policy development many cooperative processes have been initiated particularly in the pre-school. Ebbeck (1982, p.13) believes that, "many parents and committees now are seeking greater involvement in employing staff and in curriculum decisions, two areas in which they hitherto had little involvement". This has led to the empowerment of parents in this role. However the vast majority of policy development has been conducted at a governmental or a departmental level often involving funded publicists to facilitate the process and provide communication between curriculum advisors and the relevant parent body.

Parental involvement in policy making at the school level that leads to action, and ultimately informed educational directions, creates an excellent learning environment that has the mutual support of teachers, parents and students. Edwards and Redfern (1988, p.163) state that,

The best decisions about a child are arrived at not by the teacher alone, but by the teacher in consultation with parents. By offering parents a share in the decision making process, a great deal of misunderstanding and anxiety is avoided, and the end result will be far more satisfactory for teachers, parents and students.

The intention of this case study was to examine and document the role of parents in the collaborative development of school policy. Within the parameters of this topic four pertinent research questions are raised.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE.

Do parents wish to be involved in the collaborative development of school policy design and in what capacity?

Current political opinion strongly supports the participation of parents in school policy development but is it appropriate for this particular school community at this time?

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO.

What are the factors and conditions that need to be present to promote parental involvement?

The factors and conditions are those attributes such as the atmosphere, school climate and surroundings, which influenced the level of parental involvement permitted or encouraged within a particular school community. The study sought to collate the data from teachers, parents and the members of the committee established to formulate the computer and technology policy. The identification of these factors that promoted parental involvement in policy making was deemed necessary so that future endeavours would be enhanced by these initial experiences.

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE.

What are the barriers and obstacles that impede the involvement of parents in policy development?

The concept of barriers and obstacles to parental involvement is the revelation of those conditions that restrict the capacity of parents to contribute more fully to the development of school policy. These barriers and obstacles would vary from individual to individual depending upon the situation and family responsibilities.

As a result of the activities of the computer and technology policy committee and the process of consultation initiated with the wider school community, the identification of any of these barriers or obstacles encountered needed to be documented so that future ventures would proceed in a very positive mode.

RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR.

What are the benefits to the school community of parental involvement in school policy making?

The benefits identified by the school community would be those conditions that contributed to the improvement of the educational environment of the school.

1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This case study was designed to evaluate the collaborative involvement of parents and teachers in the development of school policy within a particular community. As a result it has limitations for extensive application. The outcomes of the study would be of interest to other primary schools of a similar size who had a commitment to viewing parents as partners in the educative process. The committee was engaged to operate within a particular timeframe (4 months) and limited budgetary constraints.

1.6 OUTLINE OF THESIS

This case study intends to examine in detail the role of parents in the collaborative development of school policy. The answering of research questions posed is central to the study and will illuminate aspects of this participation.

This thesis is structured around five chapters. They include,

CHAPTER ONE	INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER TWO	LITERATURE REVIEW
CHAPTER THREE	DESIGN OF THE STUDY
CHAPTER FOUR	PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS
CHAPTER FIVE	CONCLUSION

The introduction has highlighted the purpose the study, the significance of the problem and the limitations the study has by its design and application. It also illuminates the particular context in which the study was located. It seeks to reveal

the local history and conditions that influenced the outcomes of this study.

The literature review examines the current philosophy of parental involvement in education. It embraces considerations such as the historical perspectives of parental involvement, the barriers, various levels and the benefits of parental participation in policy development.

The third chapter is dedicated to defining the design of the study. Within this area it reveals the reasons and the suitability of the case study design for this paper. The description of the study discloses the instruments used to gather the data, the participants involved, role of the researcher, the time factor, and aspects of reliability and validity. This chapter highlights the process adopted by the committee in completing the assignment entrusted to them.

The presentation and analysis of the findings of the study of parental involvement in policy making does provide much insight into the answering of the four pertinent research questions. These questions need to be answered to ascertain the potential benefits and the effectiveness of the involvement of parents in school level policy making.

The results of the study, contrasted with the literature accumulated from the review, will provide a basis of reflection, discussion and a foundation for future directions in policy development in this specific school environment. This concluding chapter synthesises the outcomes of the case study relating to the collaborative development of school policy at the local level. The realities of parental involvement in policy development will add to this known research data and its application to this particular setting in a Queensland Catholic primary school.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Australia with the arrival of the first fleet (1788) and the subsequent colonisation of the continent came the need to educate the children of the free settlers. Schools were modelled on those that had developed in Europe. Provision of education was predominately the responsibility of the colony. Religious denominations also began to cater for the early educational needs of the colony and later of all Australian states.

Pettit (1980, p. 8) states that,

When the Australian states first provided free compulsory and secular education they followed the English precedent of downgrading the importance of communal life in schooling especially the role of parents. In the 1873 debate in the Queensland parliament, Lilley declared that most parents did not appreciate the advantages of education; consequently he would take the right from the parent and make it the business of the state to educate the child.

The education scene in Victoria and other states was similar to that outlined in Queensland. Mr. J. W. Stephens (cited in Selleck 1973, p.11) who introduced the 1872 Education Act in Victoria, reportedly stated that, "The less parents, and especially uneducated parents, had to do with schools the better". This movement led to less parental involvement in schools in Australia during this era and gradually isolated the school scene from the community. The responsibility for the

education of children rested firmly with the state. Parents were mainly excluded from the functioning of the school and the involvement with the local community was largely non-existent.

Pettit (1980) believed that schooling in Australia was originally established to provide sufficient sound, cheap and elementary education to oil the wheels of industry and commerce, and generally to be a servant of the national will. This was the case, but education was destined to evolve. Steadily the needs of the state were no longer recognized as the most important goal of education. Rather the school was expected to provide facilities and opportunities that would develop the physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological dimensions of the child. Even after the provision of educational facilities and professional training of teaching staff, many responsibilities for the success of schooling still relied on parental support. Moore (1983, p.22) concluded that,

It is the parents who can accept or reject aims projected into the home from the surrounding social environment; it is the parents who evolve the family system of values about education; and it is parents who reject or accept school values. Schools are staffed by professionals who have qualified for teaching after lengthy academic and practical preparation and schools are equipped with an ever increasing variety of modern technology for facilitating and promoting learning. Despite all this planning, all this expenditure of effort and resources, it is a most curious paradox that the whole enterprise appears to stand or fall according to the support or opposition of parents - most of whom rarely, if ever, make an appearance on school premises or show any concern or interest in school happenings and affairs.

Pettit (1980, p.16) recalls "for generations the Australian community has been actively discouraged from participation in the formal educative process". However, during the 1960s schools experienced a period of industrial turmoil and changes in attitudes and expectations of parents.

The involvement of parents began to increase and some instability in Australian education began to appear. The education being offered was not fully meeting the needs of the community. Some reasons offered for this development were new theories of education, more migrant students, militancy within teachers' organisations and the growing involvement of parents and citizens. Education was changing and parents were beginning to demand a greater role in an era of progressive education.

The 1970s were characterised by government reports into education. In 1973 for example there was the Karmel Report on Australian Schools, the Fry Committee Report on the education of young children, and the Hughes Committee Report on education in the Australian Capital Territory. Other government reports to be conducted during the 1970s included Kangan Committee Report (1974) on technical and further education, and the Williams Committee Report (1979) on education and training. This period that was characterised by investigations into education, culminated in 1980 with the establishment of the Commonwealth Schools Commission.

During the 1970s however, the report that had the most impact was the Karmel Committee report. The Karmel report recommended programmes concerning a) recurrent resources, b) buildings, c) libraries, d) disadvantaged schools, e) special education, f) teacher development, g) innovation. The programme emphasised such goals as

1. Equality
 2. Diversity
 3. Devolution of authority
 4. Community participation
 5. Responsiveness to change
- (Karmel , 1973, p.3)

The goal of community participation was in many respects formally encouraging parents and citizens to once more contribute actively to the educative process in Australia. Pettit (1980, p.15) succinctly describes the reasons for this development of community participation within the structure of Australian schools as,

a reflection of local pressures and overseas influences. Community involvement in educational programmes was seen as a way of lessening the school's isolation, extending its educational influence, reinforcing pupil motivation and increasing direct accountability to the community.

Schleicher (1984, p.2) also noted the increase of parental participation which largely gained momentum in the United States of America during the 70's when he states that,

although mutual collaboration had even been favoured by educational reformers of earlier centuries and has repeatedly been in vogue in periods of social change, there has never been such a unanimous swing in different countries towards parental involvement as in the 70's.

In the following section, I will examine this developing role of parent participation in schools to the present time and the levels of involvement that are available to parents.

2.2 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The question of parental involvement in schools has been the subject of much discussion for the last three decades in particular. Many books and articles have been written on this subject (Morrison, 1978; Wolfendale, 1984; Dwyer 1989) and out of the findings and recommendations is the belief as Michael Fullan (1991, p.227) states ,“the closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational environment”.

Studies conducted in Europe and North America, (e.g. Epstein 1988; Mortimore, Sammons, Ecob, Stoll & Lewis,1988) confirm that when parents are involved in the life of a school community there is usually a positive influence on the academic achievements of students. Epstein (1988, p.1) further elaborates that ,

there is consistent evidence that parents' encouragement, activities, interest at home and their participation at school affect their children's achievement even after the students' ability and family socio-economic status are taken into account. Students gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasise schooling, let their children know they do, and do so continually over the years.

Mortimore et al.(1988, p.57), commenting on parental involvement, also confirmed that it was their finding that ,

schools with an informal open door policy which encouraged parents to get involved in reading at home, helping in the classroom and on educational visits tended to be more effective.

The Queensland Parents and Friends Association in their Parent Manual (1992, p.55) which is distributed to all Catholic Schools in the state cited the Haringey and Bellfield Project that concluded that,

Children who receive parental help are significantly better in reading attainment than comparable children who do not . The collaboration between teachers and parents was effective for children of all initial levels of performance, including those who, at the beginning of the study, were failing to learn.

Pettit (1980, p. 17) believes that there are two basic rationales that support closer interaction between the school and its community. These are educationally and politically related.

The educational rationale asserts that schools should open up to and involve parents and members of the local community as a way of making education more relevant and effective. The other, the political, sees schools as places where people are prepared for and participate in making decisions as part of the democratic process.

Schleicher (1984, p.2) builds upon this explanation of the reasons for this closer relationship when he states that there are three overlapping factors. These include

Participatory democracy, an educational rationale and an upgrading of the value of the educative function of the family because of the disappointment with educational bureaucracy and planning.

The involvement of parents in the life of the school depends on many factors. These include the school policies, the enthusiasm of the parents concerned, the openness of the staff, the role that is assigned to parents, the availability of parents to be involved and many other reasons that will become evident.

The participation of parents in education is generally a very desirable quality (Edwards & Redfern, 1988). Schleicher (1984, p.2) expresses these sentiments even more emphatically when he states that, "at the primary school level, close co-operation between the home and the school is regarded as indisputably necessary today". The active involvement of parents has been respected and sought in many different ways often dependent on the prevailing circumstances within the school. Berger (1980, p.116) reports that "parent-school co-operation brings the strengths of the home and the expertise of the school into a working partnership". It is the right of parents to be actively involved in the direct education of their children. This right is internationally respected, as stated in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1988, p.368). "The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his/her education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with the parents".

The concept of the family, and in particular the parents, as the first educators of their children is more widely recognized today along with the on-going responsibility for the child's individual education. For many years school communities have recognized the value of parental involvement which has culminated in many changes to various school policies and practices. Gay Ochiltree (1984, p.1) reinforces the concept of the rights of parents when she states that,

The family's role as the primary educator of the child is at last receiving greater recognition and there is a growing awareness that parents, who have the ultimate responsibility for their children, should have more influence in the way in which their children are educated.

The role of the family and in particular that of parents in the education of their children gained further momentum with one of the findings of the Carrick Report (1989, p.158) of the committee of Review of New South Wales which stressed that,

children's academic performance improved directly as a result of the collaboration between teachers and parents. The committee recommended that the Department of Education undertakes a program of development of School Councils with an associated education program in order to familiarise parents with their appropriate responsibilities and roles in curriculum matters at a school level.

Schleicher (1984, p.3) contends that although parental collaboration has been favoured by educational reformers in the United States he believes that "conceptual improvements in co-operation strategies are indisputably necessary". One of the identified areas of concern that Schleicher highlights from the overseas experience is that there needs to be a legal framework developed, "not only to guarantee information to parents and promote participation at all administrative

levels, but also to provide for the establishment of parent organisations and their participation in the educational policy making". This area of parental participation in educational policy making is central to this research study. It is an identified area of concern in the United States of America but it is still in its developmental stages in Australia.

The concept of increased parental involvement in policy development in Queensland schools has gained greater momentum, due to the heightened awareness created by the Education Minister, Mr. Pat Comben. Statements reported in the Courier Mail (Sat. March 27 1993, p.3) and later enunciated in department policy to be trialled over a three year period include;

Parents will have more say in how schools are run under a programme to be tested in Queensland. Councils of parents and community representatives will be asked to advise schools on matters such as the curriculum, school policies, facilities and safety. For too many years, parents have been excluded from playing any major role in the school other than staffing tuckshops or fete stalls.

Mr. Comben continued that, "research is strongly suggesting that parental involvement improves students' results". These comments were highlighting the philosophy of the Queensland Department of Education which was expressed in documents such as *Your School Image* (1992, p.26). It was stated that,

The introduction of school advisory councils has even more potential for supporting more effective community relations. School advisory councils are an effective way of formalising parent and community decision making in schools, and of recognising the important role that parents, community members and students can have in decision making.

Encouragement to enhance the involvement of parents and community members in the operations of the school has support from researchers, politicians and the business community.

This involvement in school activities will fluctuate as the family factors dictate the level of participation desired. Two key words which keep appearing with reference to the roles of parents are *Involvement* and *Participation*.

2.3 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT / PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

Parental involvement in schools is illustrated by co-operation with the school Principal and staff in fund raising activities, parent evenings, working bees and the like. Parental involvement is less formal in structure but often more commitment and energy is evident. Involvement is the joint co-operation of parents and teachers with the mutual best interests of the students uppermost. Builder (1986, p.19) defines parental involvement as,

any school related activities which acknowledge the importance of the role of parents in children's education. These activities must respond to the needs of the school to improve the quality of education and to the needs of parents to understand the school curriculum, policy, or practices for the direct benefit of their own children's learning.

Parental involvement is less concerned with power and rights and more concerned with the betterment of facilities and educational opportunities. Parental involvement may fluctuate as school staff members change for it relies on the willingness of teachers to encourage parents to assume this role.

Headley Beare (1974, p.5) distinguishes between parental involvement and participation in the following manner.

Involvement refers to minor activities such as clerical and volunteer aides, while participation assumes that the community has a right to be part of the education process and that education cannot proceed effectively without this participation.

Parental participation infers a greater degree of co-operation and collaboration and not just at a superficial level. Colin Marsh (1988, p.82) supports this assumption when he states that,

Participation refers to a partnership between parents and school staff in various domains of decision making, including curriculum. Participation reflects a much stronger role for parents, as it connotes initiatives sometimes coming from parents and the joint planning, sharing and control of important school level decisions.

Parental participation is the more formal of the two distinctions. This can refer to joint committees of teachers and parents in the formation of school policy, the functioning of school boards or advisory councils. There can be little debate as to the rights of parents to be actively involved in the educative process of their children. Just how this involvement is to take place is another complex issue. Schools by their nature offer a variety of roles for parents to assume and these are dependent on talents, time and opportunities.

2.4 LEVELS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

As the definitions confirm, there are several roles, levels or stages of parental involvement that permit a variety of interactions within the school structure. Pettit (1980, p.78) suggests that there are three broad levels of parental involvement. These include;

Level 1.	Monitoring	(Letters, Informal talks, class meetings)
Level 2.	Informing	(Information about school policies, organisation procedures, aims, expectations)
Level 3.	Participation	(Involvement in the activities of classroom or school, inservice for parents)

Pettit's model stops short of the more active involvement that is possible particularly in the area of involvement in the decision making process of the school community.

Fullan (1991, p.228) takes up this position when he asserts that there are generally four main forms of parental involvement. These include;

1. Parent involvement at school. (eg. volunteers, assistants)
2. Parent involvement in learning activities at home. (eg. assisting children at home, home tutors)
3. Home / School relations (eg. communication)
4. Governance (eg. Advisory councils)

Other authors also delineate between the various perceived stages or levels of involvement. These include Havelock and Huberman (1978) and Bettington and Groundwater-Smith (1983). Each saw the involvement of parents as being a progression through the various levels. The levels of parental involvement according to Havelock and Huberman (1978, p.203) consist of;

Level 1.	Exchanging Information	(This level involves the sharing of information in a variety of situations such as school newsletters, reports, assemblies.)
Level 2.	Opening up the School	(This level involves the sharing how or why a decision was made, parent social interaction activities, tutors, classroom assistant)

- Level 3. Sharing the School (This level involves the sharing of the school facilities with community organisations and parish bodies.)

The following two levels relate to parental Participation where the parent can have an active contribution to the decision making process.

- Level 4. Consulting and Advising (This level encourages parents to express an opinion or preferred option through a variety of avenues eg. P. & C., surveys.)
- Level 5. Participative Governance (This level allows parents to be responsible in the decision making process in the area of policy formation and shared executive powers eg. school boards, joint committees.)

There are many facets of parental involvement in schools as each parent is an individual with a variety of talents to offer and a finite amount of family time to contribute to the school scene. Hence there needs to be a variety of roles available to parents.

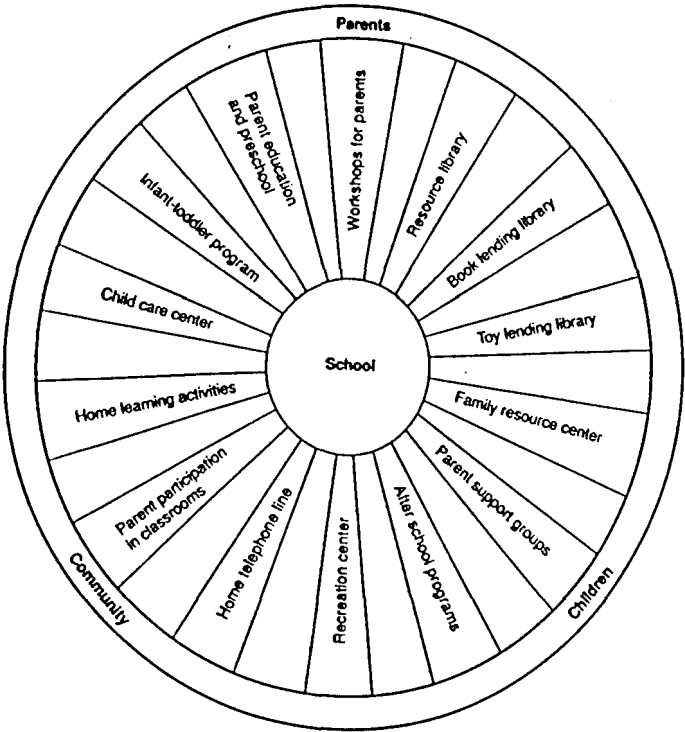


FIGURE 2.1 Opportunities for Involvement of Parents, Children, and Community. (Berger, 1991, p.236)

Within the school environment Berger (1991) contends that there are six possible roles for parents. These roles are however not hierarchical as reported above but exemplifies the continuous force of parents in the education of their children. The various roles include,

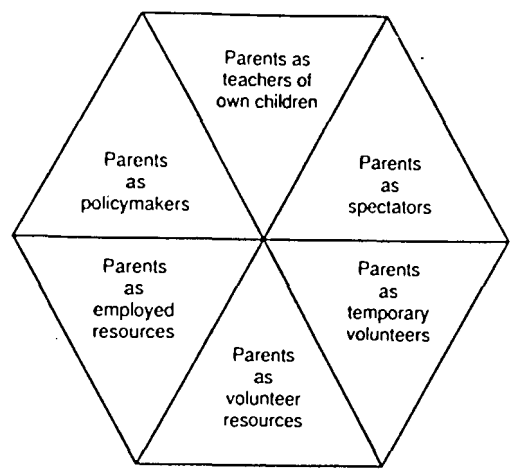


FIGURE 2.2 Parental Roles Berger (1991, p.122)

Clearly parents have a most significant role to play in the education of their children, whether it is incidental and informal education or the more structured formal schooling.

Finally, Marsh (1988), expounds a more diverse stratification of the roles of parental involvement ranging from the passive to the active. Marsh also believes that parental participation should not be viewed as a hierarchical model but more positively as a continuum model. The positive contribution to this discussion by Marsh's Parental Participation Continuum is that parents do not necessarily have to proceed through each level before becoming involved with higher levels such as decision making and policy formation. His participation continuum includes,

- Reporting children's progress to parents.
- Special events for parents.
- Parents as fund-raisers.
- Parent education activities.
- Parents assisting in non-instruction activities.
- Parents assisting teachers in instruction.
- Parents as decision-makers.

Common themes prevalent in education today are the two concepts of parental involvement as a client or as a partner. The economic times in which schools have to function seem to encourage a client / customer relationship while the historical times of a partnership between school and parents has many scholastic and social benefits. As a client relationship is developed between school and family less involvement and personal association is expected and often received.

Warnock (1988, p.22) offers a cautionary note on the issue of parental participation particularly from the point of view of parents as clients or customers. She explains,

There is a danger that parents may become the new problem arising between the local and the national,...They are spoken of as the consumers or the customers, those who in the end have to approve the product. There is a false analogy contained in such expressions. Customers or consumers can be expected to judge a product by their own taste. They know what they want, and, if they pay, they are entitled to have it. They are in practical terms the experts. Parents on the contrary, are not experts on educational matters, or most of them are not. But most of them have no means of knowing how this happy outcome should be brought about.

The concept of a partnership between school and the family encourages close formal and informal communication. This concept of parents as partners will be further treated in the next section.

There are many similarities with the interpretations of the levels of parental involvement expounded by Pettit, Fullan, Havelock and Huberman, Berger and Marsh. The overview of the research indicates that there is a variety of roles parents can assume in the operation of any school. These are dependent on the prevailing circumstances within the school and the time and talents that parents are able to offer a school community. The research has indicated that there is a range

of levels of parental involvement in schools which culminates in the active parental participation in governance . Regardless of the level of involvement all are reliant upon frequent, open and effective communication between the stakeholders who are parents, students and teachers. The inclusion of parents as partners, collaboratively working with teachers in this educative process, encourages open communication, reduces the barriers, and supports the student in the learning environment.

2.5 PARENTS AS PARTNERS

The thought of parents as partners is not a new idea rather an extension of the historical perspective where parents have been involved in the continuous relationship and tradition of the education of their children. Parents as partners infers a relationship with teachers that is on-going and developmental in nature. It would be more appropriate to talk, as Bastiani (1993, p.104) does as “ working towards partnership as being a worthwhile direction”. A partnership implies many personal qualities and a valuable relationship that benefits all stakeholders, parents, teachers and most importantly the students.

There are many differing interpretations of this partnership. Pugh (1989, p.5) defined partnership as having specific characteristics which encompassed, “a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate”. Bastiani (1993, p.105) builds on this definition to include,

- a) Sharing of power, responsibility and ownership - though not necessarily equally,
- b) A degree of mutuality, which begins with the process of listening to each other and incorporates responsive dialogue and "give and take" on both sides,
- c) Shared aims and goals, based on common ground, but which also acknowledge individual differences,
- d) A commitment to joint action, in which parents, pupils and professionals work together to get things done.

Stonehouse (1989, p.45) similarly describes the characteristics of a relationship based on partnership and collaboration as being those of,

- Mutual respect,
- Trust,
- Open both ways communication,
- Common goals, which both parties are clear about,
- Equality, a fairly equal distribution of power, recognition of the unique contribution and strength the other brings to the relationship,
- Shared decision making,
- Sensitivity to the perspective of the other,
- Teamwork, an absence of rivalry or competition,
- Relaying of much helpful information about the child.

This approach to education can mobilise the very significant resources of the school and the home in a very positive manner that will lead to increased student performance. With parents, teachers and student attuned to meeting the individual educational needs, the potential for significant growth in the development of the pupil is considerable.

Gary Bridge (1978, p.103) believes that,

The family does makes a significant difference in a child's performance and eventual life chances, and any school innovation aimed at increasing individual performance should build on or redirect the resources of the family.

The family unit has an immense potential to enhance the development of the student. There are many avenues that the family can use to promote this positive

attitude and support for the education process. One such approach is in increased parental participation in the school environment. The benefits to this increased parental participation are many. Marsh (1988, p.84) has identified the benefits of parental participation as these,

1. Parental participation increases richness and variety of the school learning environment because of the wide range of skills that can be provided by parents.
2. It increases the sense of identity for the local school community.
3. It enables parents to understand education processes more fully and to support the goals of schooling.
4. It can lead to parent support for political parties that give education a high priority.
5. It enables the development of common purposes between teachers, parents and students.
6. By increasing the number of interest groups involved in education there is greater likelihood that the interests of all students will be taken into account.
7. Parent participation will generally lead to improved student learning, intellectually, socially and emotionally.
8. Parents and other citizens have the right in democratic countries to participate in school decision - making.
9. Shared decision - making will reduce the number of legal actions taken out by parents or teachers against the school.

There are many possible benefits of parental involvement in policy development and the extent of these will vary from community to community depending on the local conditions and available resources.

Dwyer (1993, p.106) contends that parents need to be drawn into real partnership and that their rights and responsibilities need to be recognised.

Parents, as the partners of those who teach their children at school, need to have access to structures that will make participation possible, and procedures for use when they wish to give and receive information, correct misgivings and, even at times, seek to have grievances redressed in a constructive and fair manner.

The challenge for educational administrators is to develop appropriate structures and policy development procedures that encourage parent participation, yet at the same time encourage teachers to contribute their professional knowledge of curriculum for the benefit of the whole school community. Once this collaborative community has been developed a genuine partnership evolves.

Collaborative parental involvement in policy making draws upon the immense talent and skills available in a school community. It is most desirable that leadership teams utilise the full potential of the community. Edwards and Redfern (1988, p.163) convey it in similar words when they express that, "the fact of the matter is that parents offer a considerable pool of expertise across the curriculum which it would be foolhardy to overlook".

There are a number of strategies and practices which promote parent - teacher partnerships. Arthur (1994, p.7) highlights four of these as being,

- a) Parental involvement in planning for participation in schools;
- b) Feedback sessions to enable parents to evaluate involvement or programmes provided;
- c) Regular conferences or other communication modes to provide updates on what is occurring in the educational setting;
- d) Staff development experiences to broaden professional perspectives and strengthen skills for working with parents.

The benefits of genuine partnership are many and vary from situation to situation. True collaboration between parents, teachers and children in school policy development involves deliberations among parties with different contextual experiences to offer the process.

Andrews, Bryant and Pankhurst (1981, p.52) contend that there are six propositions that impact upon the collaborative planning process of school policy development. These include,

- 1) Individual school policy planning will be more congruent with community desires if discussed widely by participant groups and then communicated to the decision making body.
- 2) A one way flow of objectives from a central decision making body to a school community planning group will tend to under-represent the interests of some communities.
- 3) The more public consultation techniques are used, the more the planning programme of exploring policy issues, programme development and procedures will receive public support.
- 4) The more the planning process facilitates parent participation the more the community will be aware of the planning function as a democratic and community force.
- 5) That when participative planning is open to radical proposals the more likely it is to pursue innovative solutions to school community problems.
- 6) The wider the scope of the policy and the longer the time horizon, the less useful and possible collaborative planning will be.

These generalised propositions put forward by Andrews et al. are not an exhaustive list but do provide guidance for various management strategies involving collaborative policy formation.

2.6 A CATHOLIC SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE

The relationship between the school and the family has been a strong feature of Catholic Schools in general for many decades. The importance of this relationship between parents and education is highlighted in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1963, p.728) when it states that,

As it is the parents who have given life to their children, on them relies the gravest obligation of educating their family. They must therefore be recognized as being primarily and principally responsible for their education. The role of parents is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.

The Second Vatican Council recognised that the task of imparting education belongs primarily with the family, but it requires the assistance and on-going support of the community. This position is continued in the *Catholic School* document (1977) which accentuates the important role of parents in the school community and again later (1982, p.22) in *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*

Everything that the Catholic educator does in a school takes place within a structure of an educational community, made up of the contacts and collaboration of the various groups- students, parents, teachers, directors, non-teaching staff- that together are responsible for making the school an instrument for integral formation .

This responsibility for the total education of the student rests firmly in the first instance with the parent and secondly with the relevant teachers and instructors. This position is verified by a quotation from *The Code of Cannon Law* which concisely describes this responsibility.

There must be the closest co-operation between parents and teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated. In fulfilling their task, teachers are to collaborate with parents and willingly listen to them; associations and meetings of parents are to be set up and held in high esteem (Canon 796).

The role of parents in the education process was further highlighted by the Archbishop of Brisbane (cited in *Education in Faith-Parent Book*, 1988, p.3) when he reiterated the thoughts of the Vatican Council II (1975, p.728), "Parents are the first educators of children; the home is the first school". The place of parents in a child's education continues during the years of formal education. The right of parents to be involved in an intimate manner with the education of their children is a strongly held belief that has been promoted in Catholic Schools over many years.

Treston (1983, p.35) also confirms the significance of the role of parents in a Catholic school when he states that,

Parents have a priority within the (Catholic) school. They make a commitment to the school with the entrustment of their children to the school as well as the financial support for the school. Teacher and parent need to have mutual respect for each other. Both are committed to the education of the children and such a process requires the co-operation and a sense of partnership.

The development of this sense of partnership is reinforced in the Catholic school. A partnership exists between teachers, parents and the child. The building of a community that is Christ - centred and is based on the Gospel values is central to the philosophy of a Catholic school. The involvement of the parent community in the functioning of a Catholic school is paramount .

Parents are currently involved in many levels of endeavour within Catholic schools. Parents may choose to work in varying capacities from teacher aides, coaches, tutors, financial advisers, to teachers of special classes. The role of the parent can also be assumed in the area of governance of the school. School boards currently exist in some Brisbane Archdiocese Catholic schools.

Dwyer (1993, p.108) believes that the ongoing development of a Catholic school is really the empowering and development of an educating community.

The community that gives life to a Catholic school should have certain distinguishing qualities. It should be characterised by a genuine sense of welcome and belonging. The members should feel as if they are truly partners, sharing common values and hopes that centre on the person of Jesus.

One of the distinguishing qualities that Dwyer refers to, that characterises the culture of a Catholic school is parental participation.

The policy of Self Renewing Catholic Schools has been permeating the Brisbane Archdiocesan Catholic Schools since 1986. Spry and Sultmann (1983, p.3) define the Self Renewing Catholic Schools Program as,

A deliberate intervention in the life of the school through formal processes and procedures which enable the members of the school community to act according to Christian principles.

This formal policy stressed the need for Catholic schools to be committed to the process of renewal and the inevitable associated changes that it heralds. This policy identifies the six cultural characteristics of Catholic schools. It is significant to note that Parental Involvement is recognised as one of these central characteristics of a Catholic School. The Self Renewing Catholic School process provides a structured method for reviewing and developing the culture of the school.

It is clear then, that the culture of a Catholic school essentially involves parents' assuming an active role in the functioning of that institution. This is further emphasised by Brisbane Archdiocesan Systemic Schooling goals which highlight six major thrusts until 1999. The fourth goal of this draft statement stresses the need to "work with parents in collaborative partnership for the betterment of the Catholic education of their children".

The school community is all the richer for the collected wisdom and the very real contributions that parents make to the learning environment, its school structures and the policy directions that keep it attuned to the needs of the students.

Dwyer (1986, p.75) concurs in saying that,

The observations and skills of individual parents can enhance the quality of decision-making in the school. This wisdom can be tapped through advisory committees, through parent forums and by means of such evaluative tools as surveys.

The degree to which a school can tap parental wisdom in building its community is a measure of its corporate maturity. Such collaboration will be a feature of the authentic Catholic school of the next generation.

2.7 POLICYMAKING

One of the roles that Marsh (1988) and Berger (1991) discussed was the role of parents as policy makers. Twomey and Hughes (1994, p.3) describe policy as, “a guide for discretionary action and a broad and general direction given to someone to implement. Policy states what is to be done, sometimes, who is to do it , but never how or when”. The how or when aspects, they contend, are best left to teachers who are specialists in their field to impart the specific processes, attitudes and content knowledge when and where suitable to enhance the learning of the student.

Andrews et al. (p.7) describe school policy as basically a statement which outlines three central questions:

What are we supposed to be doing?
How do we plan to achieve it?
How can we tell how well we are going?

If a school policy is well designed it will incorporate the purpose of the document and its relevance for the school community. It will provide consistency and meaning to the functioning of the school. Andrews et al. (p.7) contend that a well written school policy will,

not only state the aspirations that the school holds for its students, and its relationship with the school community, but it will also form a plan of action that can direct the efforts of everyone involved in the school towards attaining those aspirations through a variety of intermediate steps or objectives.

Caldwell and Spinks (1988, p.93) believe that there are many benefits of well written and continuously updated policies. These benefits include,

- a) Policies demonstrate that the school is being operated in an efficient and businesslike manner.
- b) Policies ensure to a considerable extent that there will be uniformity and consistency in decisions and in operational procedures.
- c) Policies must be consistent with those for the system as a whole and with the various statutes which constitute school law.
- d) Policies ensure that meetings are orderly.
- e) Policies foster stability and continuity; administrators and teachers may come and go but well written and constantly updated policies remain.
- f) Policies provide the framework for planning in the school.
- g) Policies assist the school in the assessment of the instructional programme.
- h) Policies clarify functions and responsibilities of the policy group, headteacher and staff.

Policy formation assists in the efficient and effective leadership and management of a school. It benefits all who function within the structures of the enterprise. Well written and constantly revised policies give clarity, consistency, accountability and direction to a school community.

Andrews et al., (p.7) reiterated that there is no one best method of policy development and no set formulas to follow. However the salient features of a good school policy should include an introduction describing the purpose and relevance for the school community, clearly articulated aims and objectives of the policy, desired learning experiences, school organisation and a component of evaluation that permits the monitoring of the effectiveness and relevance of the document.

When school policies are not well written and researched they can often be a source of some disruption to teachers, parents and students. Some of the

weaknesses that appear in policies occur because they were not thoroughly researched in the first instance. Other possible faults arise because the issues were not clearly understood, insufficient alternative strategies were considered, or that the prevailing conditions when the initial policy was documented are no longer relevant . The responsibility to update policies in the interests of providing a smooth functioning and effective learning environment rests with the school administration.

What then are the criteria or characteristics that identify an effective school policy?

There are many possible characteristics. Caldwell and Spinks (1988, p.106) and Shaw (1993, p.34) accentuate the following as being integral to effective policy making.

A good school policy,

- a) will respond to or anticipate an educational need.
- b) is based on a clear statement of belief or purpose and arises from goals which have been adopted for the school.
- c) takes account of government, system and legal requirements.
- d) is based on the best available information and appropriate consultation. It is fair, accurate and based on fact.
- e) tells why certain things are wanted of the units or individuals in the school.
- f) contains guidelines which provide a framework for achieving clearly stated purposes on a substantive issue.
- g) provides positive direction for teachers and administrators, but does not, and should not, prescribe methods for arriving at an end result.
- h) permits administrators and teachers to make interpretations in such a way as to adjust for changing conditions without making any basic changes in policy.
- i) is free of jargon, written in an accessible style, is communicated to those responsible for implementation and readily available to all stakeholders.
- j) provides outcomes which serve as a standard for evaluating performance.
- i) is evaluated regularly or as required.

The formation of good policy writing is a valuable process which may be developed and refined with experience and practice. Being able to unite the professional expertise of teachers and the wealth of lived experience of parents in the process of good policy formation is a most desirable quality. It brings together the partners in the educative process, for the benefit of the student and the created learning environment. Twomey and Hughes (1994, p.6) suggest that there are a number of sequential steps that assist in good school policy writing. These include,

- a) Identification of what the policy is really about.
- b) Forming a committee or working party.
- c) Research and Information gathering.
- d) Disseminating information.
- e) Obtaining a variety of views.
- f) Writing policy draft.
- g) Distinguish between policy and regulation.
- h) Evaluation.
- i) Creating a timeline (action plan).

The benefits of parent and teacher collaboration in the process of school policy making are significant, yet not highlighted in what is a good policy. Andrews et al. (p.22) strongly believe that, "it is only through school community partnership can a school find the best and most effective solutions to its problems and challenges".

The richness of the partnership of teachers and parents in the education process provides many benefits for the school and the student. There are also many possible barriers that impede the involvement of parents in a collaborative dimension.

2.8 MYTHS AND BARRIERS THAT IMPEDE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

As it was discussed earlier the role of parents in education has always been present but due to some factors the amount of parental involvement has not always been encouraged either by the school or the expectation of society.

Cairney and Munsie (1992, p.5) believe that there are six misconceptions that hinder parental involvement. These include,

1. Parents are not interested in their children's education,
2. Only some parents are interested in their children,
3. Middle class parents are better parents,
4. It is difficult to get parents involved,
5. You only get the parents you don't need to see,
6. Parents are not capable of helping their children to learn.

These myths highlighted by Cairney and Munsie are not insurmountable particularly when the possible benefits of positive parental involvement are expressed and communicated in an atmosphere of care, concern and mutual trust.

One of the most common problems encountered, is dealing with the negative histories of the parents' own education. It is a recognized barrier to parental involvement and participation but one that can be overcome. Cairney and Munsie (1992, p.9) believe that rather than being intimidated by the past histories of some parents in their educational experiences, teachers do need to take it into account when setting up parent initiatives. "Parents will need to be convinced that the involvement will be an enjoyable experience, not a threatening and patronising one."

Berger (1991, p.90) also believes that the educational history of the parent has a significant influence on them when approached to become more involved in a partnership with school personnel.

Parents who have not had educational opportunities are often very supportive of the schools and desire an education for their children, but some tend to feel uncomfortable with teachers and principals. Parents who have had an unpleasant experience in their own schooling may fear the schools and find it difficult to become a partner with a professional.

This fear of school can be a very real concern, which can be transferred to the student. The negative feeling can be rather intimidating and needs to be broken down with every positive experience of school life.

A barrier that has been created by the current economic times is the need for both parents or for the sole parent to be employed. Some parents find it necessary to have a second income to meet the needs of the family. Economic factors have been identified by Pettit (1980, p.123) as impacting upon the level of participation possible for some parents.

For many wage earners in poorer families work is insecure and poorly paid. If there is an opportunity for a second income it is usually taken. Whenever a chance of part-time work for single parents comes up it is grabbed. When this happens their services to the school are curtailed.

Berger (1991, p.91) also lists economic reasons as an obstacle to parent participation. This is a very real concern which doesn't leave much time available to foster a relationship between home and school. Teachers need to be mindful of

these demands and support parents in their endeavours by flexible timetabling of consultations and regular open communication via a variety of media.

Pettit (1980, p.89) confirms this concern and elaborates when he says that,

the potential for all parents to accept a more extensive role in their children's schooling is not unlimited. Situations of both parents working, ill health, single parent families, physical or mental handicap, distance, existence of younger siblings, family separation, and language are all barriers to interaction.

Possibly the largest obstacle to overcome is that teachers often see parents as a threat. They can see parents as intruding on their domain. Ebbeck (1979, p.1) draws upon the work of Morgan (1974), who claims that, "teachers are likely to admit parental involvement to the extent that it does not overrule or undermine the habitual right of teachers to define and decide matters of curriculum and pedagogy".

The perceived intrusion of parents into the area of the "habitual right" of teachers to design and decide the curriculum is for some staff an area of concern. Pettit (1980, p.87) reveals that teachers' attitudes towards interacting with parents have become "notionally less hostile". Parents need to be encouraged in their endeavours to participate more fully in the education of their children . Often parents suffer from some anxiety, apprehension and uncertainty as they endeavour to operate in an environment that could be intimidatory, and where in the recent tradition their influence has been limited. Spry (1990. p125) confirms that, apprehension along with insufficient time and the use of jargon are factors that hindered parental participation.

Another area that can limit the development of an effective partnership between school and parents is if an atmosphere of trust does not exist. Trust is a crucial element in any relationship, whether it is personal or professional in nature. Without trust many opportunities for advancement will be lost.

Even though there are many possible obstacles to parental involvement Cairney and Munsie (1992, p.25) believe that many of them can be solved. They believe the solutions can be sought in the following manner;

1. If parents are to become more active participants in their children's education then teachers must take the initiative in the first instance. If schools do not try to do anything then clearly the barriers will remain.
2. When gauging the response of parents to any school initiatives, don't be despondent if only a few turn up, for some parents there is a history of negative feelings towards schools that needs to be broken down.
3. When planning any initiatives consider basic cultural factors. For example, for many parents formal meetings are not part of their culture.
4. In the light of the above , don't expect parent involvement to take off overnight. Sustained effort is required.

The answer to parental involvement in schools lies in establishing a home / school partnership based on mutual respect, trust, co-operation and open communication. To achieve such a relationship will indeed be a journey with one step taken at a time.

Michael Fullan (1982) cited in Parent Manual of P. & F. Associations (1992, p.56) concluded that,

Given their interest, given its potential impact on student learning, and given the fact that this vast resource is largely untapped for educational purposes, it is a crying shame that there are so many barriers to parental involvement.

With the realisation that the extent of parental involvement in education is not extensive an atmosphere of change is necessary to pervade many institutions. This manner of change often brings with it new challenges.

2.9 CHANGE

Parental involvement in education has been recognised as a positive and desirable outcome for many years. The level of involvement will differ from parent to parent depending on the prevailing circumstances. The trend towards greater involvement of parents in schools and in the educative process has necessitated changes to many structures and beliefs. Educative change will always be present where there is a relevant and effective curriculum that responds to the needs of its students and the challenges of society. In recent years the rate of change experienced by school communities has increased as schools endeavour to meet the ever increasing demands of society. Treston (1992,p.19) elaborates when he states that ,

The rate of change is increasing as schools become more immersed in a complex web of social, economic and historical currents. The shifts of cultural consciousness and revolutions in technology ensure that change will always be happening in some part of school life.

In the 1980s the changes promoted by educational institutions and research were internally generated. This criteria for change was engendered so that educationalists at the coal face would be the most apt to deal with change. Reynolds and Packer (1992, p.182) verify this position when they state that,

Put simply, the 1980s were times when school improvement attempts sought to produce internally generated school change. Indeed the whole ownership paradigm was based upon the need for school teaching staffs to own the improvement attempt so that it would be able to pass from the implementation phases to the institutionalisation phases without hindrance. Yet in the 1990s in many countries, like the United Kingdom, it is clear that educational change is now externally generated, and the internal organisations of schools are forced to adjust.

This fact is not only the case in the United Kingdom, but also the case in Australia. Many educational changes are externally motivated particularly from the political arena. To highlight one such change heralded through the media on the topic of parental involvement in schools was the The Courier Mail headlines "Radical Schools Plan". Reporters Morley, Fagan and Ketchell (Mar.27 1993) elaborated that parents will have more say in how schools are run under a scheme to be trialled in Queensland. This scheme involved the establishment of Councils to advise schools in the areas of policy , safety and curriculum. Many of the current changes are externally motivated whether they are political , societal , economic or cultural.

Change, in general, is a multi-faceted phenomenon that challenges our established beliefs and practices. It often cannot occur without an element of risk being involved. Smith and Lovat (1990, p.166) believe that ,

Change is a feature of all natural and human systems. Change concerns the processes whereby phenomena, including people, objects, institutions and places are transformed and their characteristics altered. We can talk about the

- * speed or rate of change;
- * the scale or size of change;
- * impact or degree of change;
- * continuity or longlastingness of change;
- * and the direction of change.

Each of these dimensions of change is important and the readiness of any school community for change will be different. When considering educational change these and other criteria need to be considered if the innovation under consideration is to be beneficial for the whole school community. Doll (1982, p.242) further expands on the elements that are characteristic of change and encourages administrators and parents to take a positive approach towards change. These include,

1. Accept the fact that change will always be with us.
2. Regard change positively as a chance to do something better.
3. There is always someone who can help you.
4. People affected by change should be involved in the planning of change.
5. Pick the right time, place and process for that change.
6. People are pragmatic- they need to see rewards for making changes. Resistance to change is less if the benefits are obvious.
7. Ground the changes within the vision of where the group is heading.
8. If the curriculum is to improve, teachers must be committed to the significance of self-improvement.

The role of parental involvement in schools is also changing. Not only is the level of involvement of parents in schools being opened up but there is also a difference in how parents are being viewed in this process. Many preconceived beliefs are being eroded. One such belief is the fact that for many decades parents have been viewed as clients with similar rights and expectations. A more recent perspective views parents as partners in the educative process.

Gary Bridge (1978, p.115) believes that clear guidelines for effective parent participation is essential to enable constructive educational changes to occur. These guidelines focus on six key elements. They include,

1. Recognition that parents are not a homogeneous group. In planning for educational change, school administrators should carefully consider who will be affected and how they should or should not be involved in the design and implementation of the innovation.
2. Leaders at every level of management should have clearly articulated and publicly stated policies with relation to the kinds of decisions that parents will be asked to make and how the decision will be met.
3. Parents seem to be most concerned and interested with educational change that pertains to curriculum innovations and instructional methods.
4. Parental involvement in educational change will be most effective when parents know what is demanded of them ; therefore schools should set clear objectives for parent participation.
5. Parents are equally well informed about other schooling matters, and this means that some are more able to assist in any change.
6. The importance of the time frame. When controversial innovations are planned the tolerance level is quite short particularly if interests are being threatened. On the other hand it can take some considerable time before parental involvement can be secured for constructive innovations.

2. 10 CURRENT REALITY

The climate of parental involvement in schools in Queensland has seen significant changes in the last four decades. In 1964 the new Education Act gave statutory approval to parent bodies such as Parents and Citizens Associations and Parents and Friends Associations stressing the concept of a partnership between parents and school. During the 1970s there were a number of government committees and reports such as the Radford Committee report and the Campbell report that saw significant change in the Queensland educational scene in the areas of

accountability, assessment, and review. Many of these changes brought some concern among parents, teachers and students alike. Some of these concerns were based upon the introduction of some aspects of curriculum, while other concerns surfaced about changes to the means of assessment, particularly in high schools.

It wasn't until 1978 that some of these concerns began to be addressed. Another Queensland Parliamentary Committee chaired by Mr. Mike Ahern began to confront some of these challenges. One of the many recommendations of the Select Committee was the need for increased parental and community involvement in Queensland education. Yet very little in this area was achieved.

In the last decade many other committees have been convened and reports have been presented. These include, Education 2000 (1984), the Viviani Report (1990), Focus on Schools (1990) and the Hughes Report (1992), *Managing Curriculum Development in Queensland*. Queensland Education Departmental policy has reflected many of these reports.

Focus on Schools reinforced the understanding that education is becoming a partnership between the school and the community, and strong ties are being established between the two. It also pointed out that recent educational research provides evidence of the powerful influence which parents have on their children's success.

(Your School Image, 1992, Dept. of Education. Qld. p.26)

Many initiatives in this area of parental involvement in policy development have emerged in government and non-government schools particularly in the the last decade.

2.11 CONCLUSION

The literature review has examined the historical role of parents in the educative process until the present situation. Although the roles that parents can assume in education are changing there is still flexibility to provide for participation at a variety of levels. Viewing parents as partners in this ongoing process is a challenge for many involved in education. As partners in this process, one of the responsibilities that parents have is to design collaboratively, with the professional teaching staff, the directions and policies of the school community.

No journey is without its problems and there are some prevailing conditions that impede this level of school governance. Many of these barriers are myths and the eradication of these impediments are crucial. The literature review has confirmed that parental involvement in schools has a very positive influence on the school life of the students. Collaboratively developing school policy at the local level is one responsibility and role that until recently parents have had little opportunity in which to participate.

CHAPTER THREE

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research was to investigate the collaborative role of parents and teachers in policy development in primary schools. Studies cited previously (Dwyer 1989, Epstein 1988, Mortimore 1988) would suggest that parental participation in policy making has significant benefits to a school community.

This chapter describes the methodology employed in this research study. To identify the most suitable research design, a suggestion from Shulman (1987, p.12) provided an appropriate strategy.

We must first understand our problem and decide what questions we are asking, and then select the mode of disciplined enquiry most appropriate to those questions.

Essentially the focus of the thesis was the examination and documentation of the collaborative role of parents in the development of school policy. From this participative process model four major research questions emerged.

Research Question One

Do parents wish to be involved in the collaborative development of school policy design?

It became important to determine if parents sought to participate in policy making in the first instance, prior to further investigation. Once the answer to this question was clearly communicated then the remaining three research questions related to the process, assumed greater significance. These questions were.....

Research Question Two

What are the factors and conditions that need to be present to promote parental involvement in policy development?

Research Question Three

What are the barriers and obstacles that impede the involvement of parents in policy development?

Research Question Four

What are the benefits to the school community of parental involvement in school policy making?

3.2 RESEARCH ORIENTATION

The qualitative and quantitative research perspectives offered much to this study. Each perspective of methodology contributed a different perspective to the research design. The goal of the researcher was to select the methodology that best suited the specific situation in which the research was to be conducted.

Patton (1987, p.9) revealed that,

The quantitative approach had the potential to measure the reactions of a great many people to a limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical analysis of the data."

The qualitative approach on the other hand is characterised by observations and interviews although not exclusively. It encourages indepth examination, usually with a smaller group and produces copious amounts of detailed data. These data are often collected as open-ended transcripts, without the necessity or compulsion to make the obtained data fit limited, predetermined or standardised categories or outcomes. (Patton, 1987, p.9)

The methodology selected for this study was qualitative in nature. As the three groups of participants were relatively small in number it enabled qualitative data to be more easily gathered and analysed. The reliability of quantitative material obtained from the small groups of participants that characterises this study would have questionable value to wider applications.

The qualitative data gathered endeavoured to capture the richness of experience of those participating in the research by direct quotations revealing the emotions involved, and the identification of perceptions of teachers and parents in their various roles especially in the area of policy development.

The data that were consistent with those of a qualitative research project were obtained from interviews, questionnaires, journal records and observations. The qualitative approach also allowed the direct participation of the researcher in the process. This involvement enhanced the depth of detail able to be ascertained from the various sources. These three sources included committee members, school staff, and the general school parent body.

3.3 CASE STUDY APPROACH

The most appropriate methodology for this research was a case study. The relevancy of this methodology for investigations into educational enquiry is confirmed by Walker (1983, p.26) when he states that,

While case study methods of research have a long history of use in educational enquiry, they have a particular attraction for those with an interest in curriculum for, in curriculum research, case studies offer a means of integration across the disciplines of the social sciences. They also offer an emphasis on synthesis rather than on analysis and a means of approaching hidden curriculum, informal social structures and unintended consequences of action on the same terms as formal curriculum, social, and management structures. In other words those who share a view of the curriculum field as organized around issues rather than around theories, find in case study an empirical genre appropriately flexible, eclectic and capable of creating surprises.

Case study then is a general term which encompasses a number of perspectives "having in common the decision to focus on enquiry around an instance" (Adelman et al, 1976, p.141). The instance selected for further study and scrutiny is the examination of the collaborative development of school policy by parents and teachers. Walker (1980, p.33) enriches this vision of case study to include the process to "capture and portray those elements of a situation that give it meaning" Further elements of the study are the motives and associated benefits that characterise the formation of this policy process.

Wilson (1979, p. 448) describes a case study approach as,

a process of research which tries to describe and analyse some entity in qualitative, complex, and comprehensive terms not infrequently as it unfolds over a period of time.

Walker (1983, p. 155) describes case studies as,

Primarily documentary and descriptive in character, but are marked by the attempt to reach across from the experience of those who are the subjects of study to those who are the audience.

Both authors suggest that there are some basis generic characteristics that are common to all case studies. The characteristics of case studies that Walker and Wilson promote are that they are particularistic, holistic, longitudinal and qualitative in nature.

The case study methodology of this research follows the guidelines suggested by MacDonald and Walker (1975) as cited in Hanifin (1993, p.67). These six key factors include,

(a) Case study research responds actively to practitioners' definitions of situations, conceptual structures and language thus facilitating the creation of alternative realities for practitioners.

(b) Condensed field work draws case study researchers closer to the traditions of journalism, documentary film-making and the novel rather than case study in the social sciences in order to fit the time scales of participants.

(c) Rather than setting proof as a primary goal, the case study worker increases understanding of the variables, parameters and dynamics of the case under study.

(d) Validation is obtained via a continuous process by those involved. The continuous cross checking of perceptions of the observer with those of parents was an important aspect of methodology.

(e) The reliability of the study (i.e. probability of its findings being confirmed by replication) is significantly enhanced by the expressed reactions of the characters portrayed to the report in its final form.

(f) Confidentiality is accorded to participants. The sharing of control over data with participants, means that the researcher often has to face the fact that some of the finest data are lost. Conversely, access to knowledge about sensitive issues may guide the research in significant and unexpected ways.

This research then is a case study, modelled on the guidelines suggested by MacDonald and Walker (1975), of an action research project that was collaboratively conducted by teachers and parents to develop a school policy in the area of computers and technology.

3.4 PARTICIPANTS

The school community in which this study is set is an outer suburban Brisbane primary school. It is located in a predominantly white, middle class socio-economic area and has a population of 402 students. The school has been established for sixteen years and is located in a growth population area. For the purposes of this study the school will be known as St. Adrian's.

The participants in this project included the researcher who was the principal, parents, teachers, and consultants in the computer and technology field. Specific focus for the data collection was on the committee of five that was established to formulate a new policy for computer education at a school-based level. This committee consisted of two elected representatives from the Parents and Friends Association and two staff members. The fifth member of the committee was the principal. This committee consisted of four male members and one female member. The female member was a teacher.

The two parent representatives, Allan and Brian, were elected from within the Parents and Friends Association because of their work experience and indepth knowledge of the computer and technological field. The two staff members, Colin and Desley, volunteered their services and have demonstrated a knowledge of computers and their applications to the classroom environment. The principal's role was one of facilitator and co-researcher.

Consultation with the staff and parent body was also conducted. The parent community of St. Adrian's consisted of 269 families. The staff consisted of fourteen classroom teachers, twelve of whom were female and two male, teaching in years one through to seven. There was a blend of youthfulness and experience with the average age of teachers being 32 years.

3.5 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The role of the researcher, in this case the principal, was one of participant observer in the project. Becker (1968) defines participant observation as,

A process in which the observer's presence in a social situation is maintained for the purpose of scientific investigation. The observer is in a face to face relationship with the observed, and, by participating with them in the natural life setting, he gathers data.

There are several forms of participant observation and these tend to vary depending upon the role assumed by the researcher. Herbert Gans (1962) differentiates between these forms of participant observation on the grounds of the behaviour of the researcher.

1. The researcher acts as observer- being physically present but not actually involved in the events he studies.
2. Researcher participates, but as researcher - the researcher is actually involved, but his participation is determined by his research interests.
3. Researcher participates - the researcher abdicates his research role and is involved "for real". After the event he returns to the role of the observer and perhaps analyses his own actions as participant.

In the above differentiation, the appropriate form of participant observation selected by the researcher is the latter explanation. The principal was involved in the action research process and at the conclusion of the project analysed his own actions and those of the committee and the wider community of St. Adrian's. Since the principal assumed the role of participant observer, he also however had a declared vested interest in a positive outcome and the development of a suitable policy for the school.

3.6 SETTING

The purpose of this case study was to examine the collaborative development of St. Adrian's computer and technology policy. A committee consisting of Allan and Brian (the two parent representatives), Colin and Desley (the two teacher representatives) and the principal, was established to formulate a policy in consultation with the wider parent community and the school staff. The methodology of the computer and technology committee was an action research project.

3.7 TIMEFRAME

The action research project was conducted over a four month period from September through to the close of school in early December 1993.

TIME FRAME PLAN

COMMITTEE PLAN

1.	General Plan (1 Month)	Reconnaissance Field of action First and subsequent action steps designed
2.	Act (2 Months)	Two formal consultations with P. & F. Two formal consultations with teaching staff. Suggestions from both groups accepted.
3.	Evaluate (1 Week)	Computer hardware and software purchases authorised.
4.	Revise Plan (2 Days)	To commence in pupil free days

At the conclusion of the project to develop a computer and technology policy the research involving the analysis of data commenced. This process of evaluation and consultation was conducted from February through to May 1994. Below is the timetable of the case study to answer the four research questions.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Question 1.	Do parents generally wish to be involved in school policy development?	Sources of Information	Obtaining Information	
			How	When
Information Required	Do parents wish to be involved in policy development?	School Community	Questionnaires	Feb. 1994
	How do parents feel about current levels of involvement in policy development?	Committee members	Interviews	April 1994
	Do parents feel comfortable in policy development in academic areas?		Journal	August 1993 to Dec. 1993.
	Do parents feel comfortable in policy development in non - academic areas?			
Research Question 2	What factors promote parental involvement in policy develop ?			
Information Required	What are the school related factors that promote parental involvement?	School Staff	Questionnaire	Feb. 1994
	What are the non school related factors that promote parental involvement	Committee members	Interviews observation	April 1994
Research Question 3.	What are the barriers that inhibit parental involvement in policy development?			
Information Required	What are the school related barriers that inhibit parental involvement ?	School community	Questionnaires	Feb. 1994
	What are the non-school related barriers that inhibit parental involvement ?	Committee members	Interviews	April 1994
Research Question 4.	What are the benefits associated with parental involvement in policy development?			
	Benefits listed as they pertain to students, school and parent body.	School Committee	Questions Interviews	Feb./94 April /94

3.8 PROCEDURES

This case study was focused on the collaborative development of a computer and technology policy. The research questions were framed to permit an examination of parental and staff attitudes towards this level of joint participation. The research questions were also framed so that the collected data could be contrasted and compared with the wisdom of the literature. Authors such as Bridge (1978), Pettit (1980), Marsh (1988), Pugh (1989), and Cairney and Munsie (1992) discuss the concept of partnership, the barriers to this involvement, and the benefits of collaborative policy development.

3.9 DATA COLLECTION

The purpose of the case study was to investigate the role of parents in policy making in a primary school environment. Major directions were to examine the perceived benefits of participation, the barriers to involvement, the conditions that promoted parental involvement and how parents generally viewed parental involvement in policy development.

The data collection instruments used in this case study were qualitative in nature and included journal records, interviews, and questionnaires. The journal entries recorded the developments associated with the progress of the curriculum policy committee and the interactions of members. The interviews conducted involved the identification of insights gained by the curriculum committee members from the process and any subsequently suggested improvements to this process.

Questionnaires were distributed to the parent body and the teaching staff to ascertain the realities, attitudes and commitment to the concept of parental involvement in curriculum policy making in the future.

Journals

The important characteristic of the journal was that a continuous record of developments were kept. Elliot (1991, pg.77) contends that "they should provide accounts of observations, feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, hunches, hypotheses and explanations". Journals need to be properly dated and not just report the bare facts but to also include apparent motives, emotions and conversations where possible. Journal entries recorded the progress of the committee, interactions and the developmental stages of the policy.

Interviews

The second instrument used for gathering data was the interview. There were many advantages that interviewing had over other forms of data gathering. These included the elements of flexibility, a high response rate, and the face to face communication which also allowed for the recording of non-verbal observations. Other considered advantages suggested by Burns (1990, p. 302) include

individualised appreciation can be shown to the respondents, the researcher can control the sequence of items, the gathering of extensive data can be obtained on a small number of complex issues.

When conducting the interviews with the curriculum committee members, there were basically three general approaches that were possible when collecting these

qualitative data. Patton (1987, p. 109) describes these characteristics as centred around the types of preparation, conceptualisation, and instrumentation.

Elliot (1991, p.80) also stipulates that there are three broadly based interviewing styles. He refers to these as “structured, semi-structured, and unstructured”. The three available choices in interviewing techniques are basically, 1) the informal conversational interview, 2) the general interview guide approach, and 3) the standardised open-ended interview.

The preferred style utilised in this research was the general interview guide approach or the semi-structured approach. The strengths of this style were that the topics of discussion were planned prior to the interview and these remained consistent for all interviewees. The topics were loosely structured to allow probing by the interviewer and this elicited responses that were not predetermined by the interviewer. As the time was limited, the guided approach helped to keep the interview to relevant areas of research. It helped to keep the interaction focused. The semi-structured approach provided a flexible framework, which encouraged individual responses to a variety of issues.

Questionnaire

The third instrument used in the data gathering process was that of a questionnaire. When constructing the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), a reference group of two parents, two teachers, and two administration personnel was established to reflect on the design and structure of the instrument. Constructive criticism was obtained and this led to changes in terminology and improvements in the clarity. The questionnaire was distributed to all available parents and teachers of the school community so that there was no possible sample bias.

The questionnaire had two components, the first being a section where responses were sought to questions with answers being provided on a five point Likert (1932) scale for measuring attitudes, from 1.Strongly Agreeing to 5. Strongly Disagreeing.

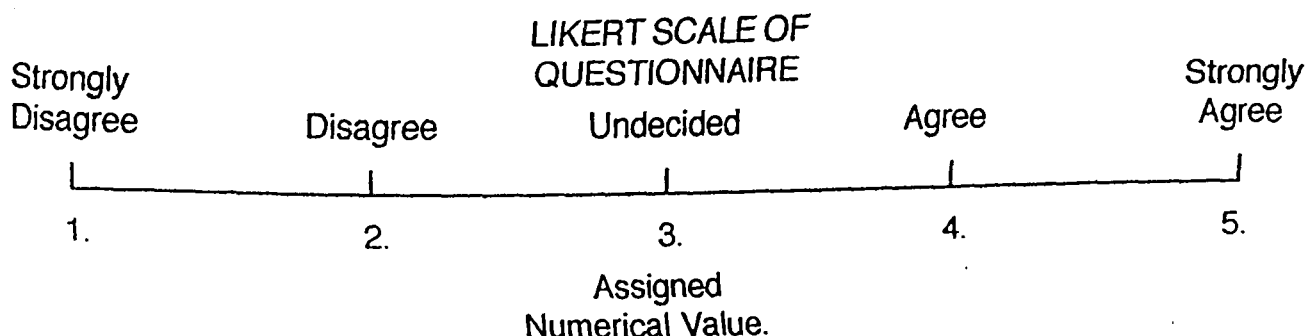


FIGURE 3.1 Five Point Likert Scale for Measuring Attitudes.

The second part of the questionnaire relied on open-ended responses to a series of questions.

Open-ended responses to questionnaires provide the most elementary of qualitative data available to the researcher. The narrative comments from the open-ended questions are typically meant to provide a forum for elaborations, explanations, meanings and new ideas.
(Patton, 1987, pg.10)

Conclusion

The three forms of data collection, the journal, interviews and questionnaires provided qualitative information and insights from the curriculum policy development committee, school parent body and the teaching staff.

3.10 DATA MANAGEMENT

The data collected from each of the sources were managed by different means. The journal entries kept by the principal were of the stages and interaction related

to the action research project. At the conclusion of the project the researcher reflected on the process, the dynamics and outcomes of the project in the light of the research questions. These questions related to specific aspects identified in the literature review. Those were factors that promoted parental involvement in policy making, the barriers experienced, and the perceived benefits of the concept. Colour coding of related concepts assisted the researcher in the collation of data to answer the research questions posed.

The interviews were conducted with the committee members. Their responses to the semi-structured interview approach were recorded, with their permission on audio tape and a written transcript of discussions was compiled. A parent committee member, Brian, was unable to be interviewed due to interstate work commitments. However he completed an indepth written response to questions consistent with those put to each of the other interviewed members. All interviews were conducted by the school principal.

The written transcripts of the interviews had a margin on the right hand side of the page where coded responses were highlighted for inclusion in the results. Direct quotations of interviewees were colour coded for comparison and verification of literature findings.

The questionnaire was firstly distributed to the teaching staff at a fortnightly staff meeting and responses were returned to the school administration centre. The distribution to the staff prior to parents, was intended so that if any questions arose teachers would know the structure and content and be able to assist with any queries. The impending parent questionnaire was highlighted in the weekly school newsletter. The time permitted for the return of surveys was three weeks.

The questionnaire and accompanying explanatory letter were distributed to all available parents via the eldest child in the family. This questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary in design. In all, 239 questionnaire sheets were distributed. Not all families were represented on this day due to illnesses and in addition some had elected to commence their long weekend holiday earlier than expected.

The return rate was quite high by previous standards when compared with uniform and religious education surveys conducted earlier in 1994. The response rate was pleasing with 55% of families responding while 88% of teachers responded.

The questionnaires were collected and randomly assigned a numerical three digit code to allow collating by computer resources. The eight variables within the survey were identified. Wiersma (1986, p.24) describes a variable as "a characteristic that takes on different values or conditions for different individuals". There are many types of variables including independent, dependent organismic, intervening, control and moderator variables. In this case the variables identified were independent and organismic. The independent variables simply classified the responses of the survey, while the organismic variables delineated the sex, age and the role of each of the respondents. Two was the minimum number of levels for the variables while the greatest number of levels was five which directly correlated to the five point Likert attitudinal scale.

Each of the variables located in the questionnaire was assigned a numerical value which highlighted the type of respondent either male or female, the age category of the respondent, and the particular response to the five attitudinal questions which

comprised part A of the questionnaire. The computer was used as an efficient means of categorising responses. The mean attitudinal responses for parents and teachers for each of the questions was calculated. By utilising the "Tiny Editor" computer programme the categorising according to role, gender, age and response was made possible. There were 148 valid responses to the questionnaire.

The responses to part B of the questionnaire were open-ended and these attitudinal responses were all transcribed onto separate pieces of paper and coded using Open and Axial coding procedures. Coding is the method by which the data is broken down, conceptualised and put back together in a new format. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.74) define open coding as ,

the analytical process by which concepts are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. The basic analytic procedures by which this is accomplished are : the asking of questions about data; and the making of comparisons for similarities and differences between each incident, event and other instances of phenomena. Similar events are labelled and grouped to form categories.

Axial coding is the process of relating subcategories to a category. It is a complex process of inductive and deductive thinking involving several steps.

Coding was once again conducted with the literature in mind with the concepts of benefits, barriers and the factors that promote parental involvement in policy uppermost in the process.

Open and Axial coding methods as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as well as colour coding were engaged to assist in the analysis of the qualitative data supplied by participant observational journal entries, committee interview transcripts and the open-ended responses by parents.

3.11 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The concepts of reliability and validity in any research project are of paramount importance. Reliability as Burns (1990, p.245) contends is based on two assumptions.

The first of these is that the study can be repeated i.e. other researchers must be able to replicate the research, employing the same procedures, and the second assumption is that two or more people can have similar interpretations by using the same categories and procedures.

The replicability of the research project in this school would be most doubtful because of the inherent change that the research has brought to the school community on this specific occasion. It would be possible in similar schools with a desire to involve parents in policy making.

The concept of validity has two perspectives, these being internal and external. Since this case study had the specific task of examining the role of parental involvement in policy making, and it was set in a specific environment, the results and conclusions were pertinent to this specific school.

The use of triangulation does increase the validity of the findings and the data gathered. Triangulation may be defined as, "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (Burns,1990). However Elliott (1991,p. 82), views the idea of triangulation as that "of collecting observations or accounts of a situation from a variety of angles or perspectives, and then comparing and contrasting them". There are number of different angles or perspectives that are available to the researcher to gather these observations and information.

There are generally four effective types of triangulation. These methods include 1) data triangulation, 2) investigator triangulation, 3) theory triangulation and methodological triangulation (Patton, 1987). Of these four types, data triangulation and methodological triangulation exist in this study. Data triangulation involved the gathering of data from three sources. Ball confirms that (1982) data triangulation is the notion that every form of data is potentially biased and that the use of a variety of different forms of data collection can eliminate or highlight these biases by convergence. Data in this case study were obtained from the policy development committee, the school staff and the school parent body.

Methodological triangulation was obtained by the use of a variety of methods such as the keeping of a journal, interviews, and extensive questionnaires were designed and implemented. The questionnaires were anonymous and the sample involved the parent population of the school. The validity of the questionnaire was enhanced by the use of a reference group of parents and teachers to provide feedback about clarity and design prior to the distribution.

The major source of validity in this action research project was internal validity, built upon data and methodological triangulation.

3.12 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

To examine the perceived benefits, the conditions that promoted parental involvement, the barriers to this involvement, and parents attitudes to their involvement in policy development, a case study methodology of investigation was necessary. A qualitative research perspective allowed indepth probing of the policy

committee, the staff, and the parent body. This data gathering was collected via a journal of committee proceedings, interviews with committee members, and surveys of staff and parent perceptions.

The validity of the study was considered at each opportunity. The triangulation of both data and methodology assisted the task of contrasting and comparing the data obtained. Other measures particularly related to the staff and parent questionnaires also enhanced the validity of the study. These measures included the establishment of a reference group to critique the quality of the surveys, the design of the survey, no sample bias, and the relatively high return rate of responses all of which contributed to the validity of the study.

The data were collected from parents, staff and committee members. These underwent a process of coding to enable the information to be analysed and reconstructed into a report format to answer the research questions posed.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the case study. Essentially the focus of this study was to examine the collaborative role of parental involvement in school policy development. The case study sought to investigate the role of parents and teachers within the St. Adrian's school environment.

Consequently the following questions became pertinent to the research.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE.

Do parents wish to be involved in school policy design and in what capacity?

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO.

What are the factors and conditions that need to be present to promote parental involvement in policy development?

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE.

What are the barriers and obstacles that impede the involvement of parents in policy development?

RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR.

What are the benefits to the school community of parental involvement in school policy making?

4.2 STUDY DESIGN

A case study approach was the methodology chosen as it permitted direct observational and investigative methods to explore the current reality of parental involvement in the life of the school. This methodology ensured that qualitative data were collected from three sources.

Firstly, participant observations of an action research project involving the development of a collaboratively formulated school computer and technology policy were recorded in a journal. Secondly, interviews were conducted with the committee members. Thirdly, a questionnaire was developed to gain a wider perspective of attitudes of the school parent body to parental involvement in policy development.

Journal entries detailing observations of the process were recorded over a four month period. Interviews were conducted with the parent committee members Allan and Brian, and teachers Colin and Desley. The questionnaire was distributed to the parent body and staff.

As data gathered from the parent and staff questionnaire were central to answering the first research question it was pertinent to examine who responded to the survey. The responses to the questionnaire were gained from 148 people comprising of 136 parents and 12 teachers. In proportion to the total population 55% of the parent community responded while 88% of the teachers on staff responded. Computer-assisted analysis highlighted the various categories such as age, sex, staff or parent, and the mean score for each question.

In other descriptions of the respondents, 68% of responses were gathered from females, while males contributed 32% of the data. This ratio was consistent with previous surveys conducted in the school community during the recent uniform review (Unpublished school report,1993).

A full description of questionnaire respondents is revealed below according to age and gender.

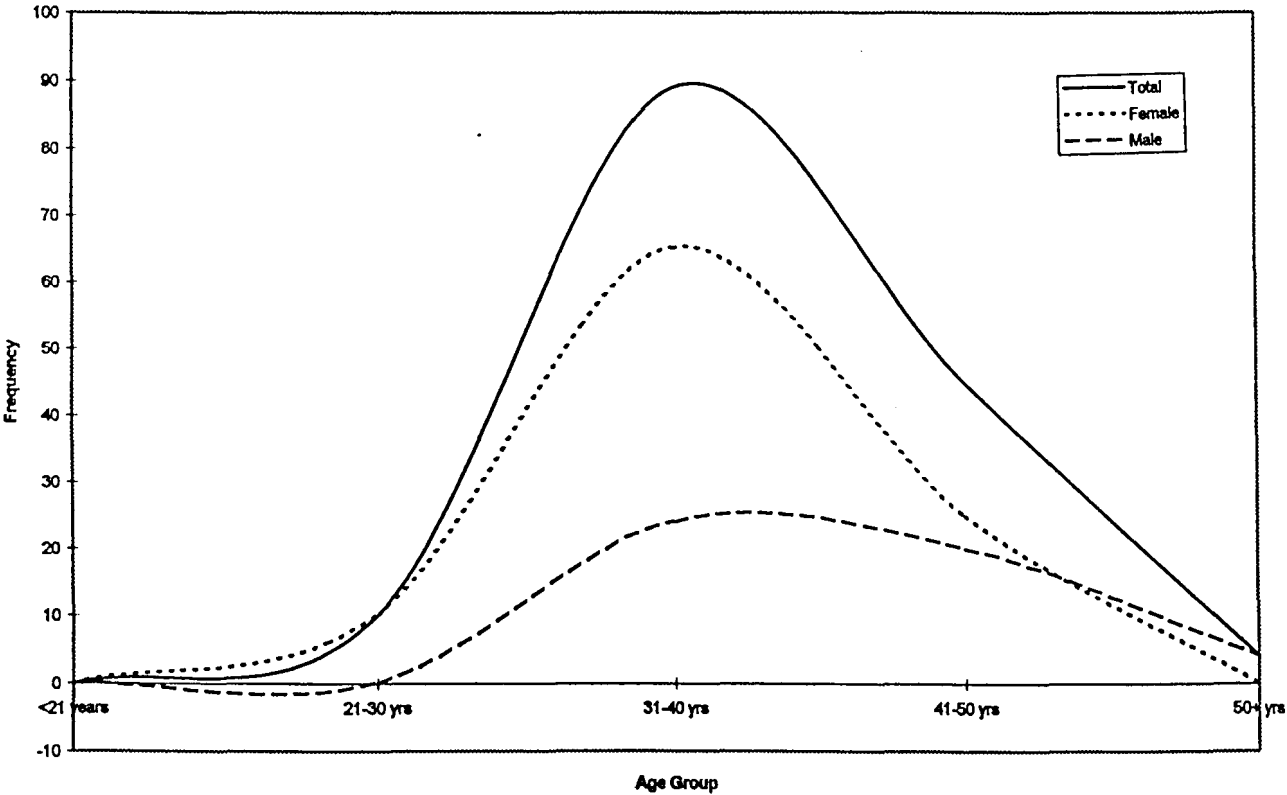


Figure 4.1 Age Distribution Total and by Gender.

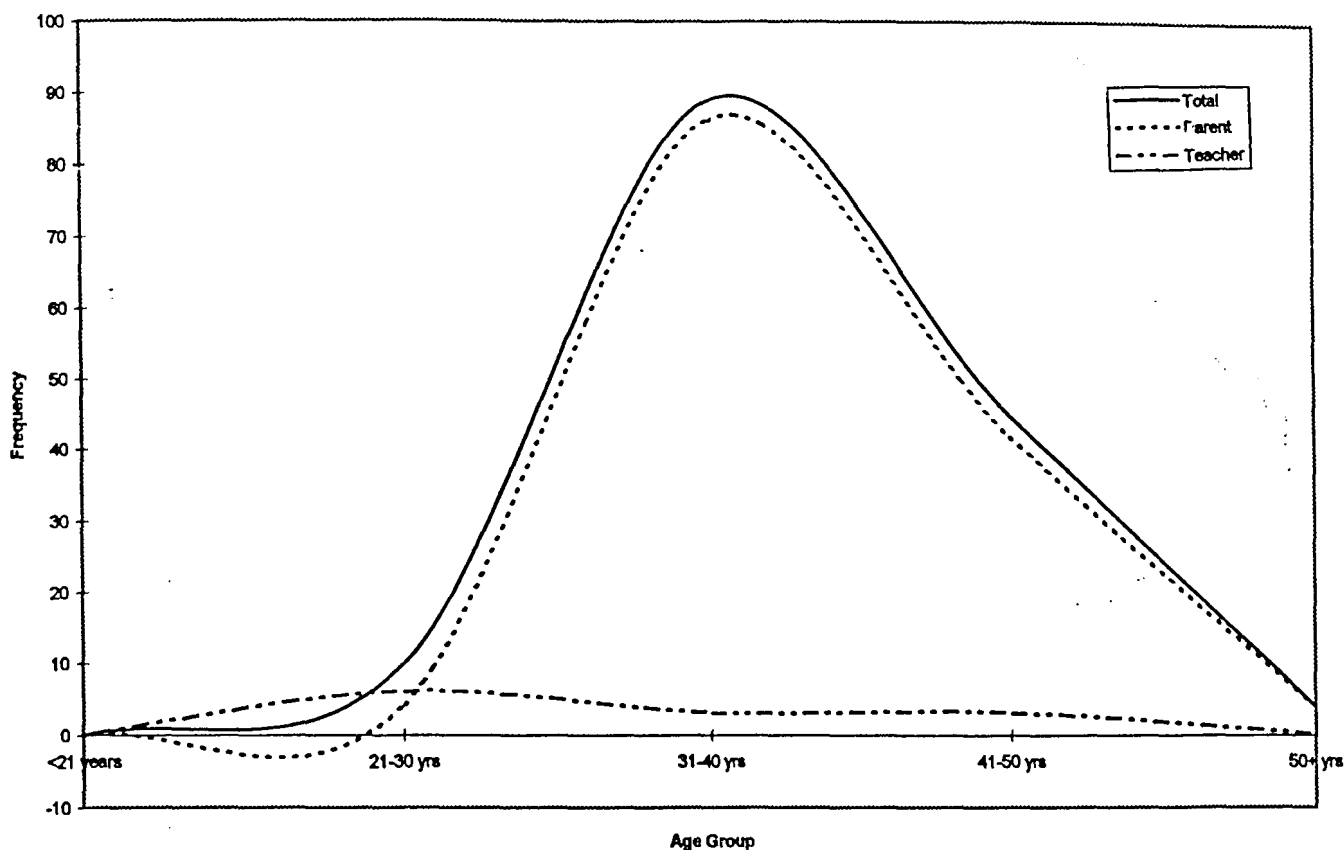


Figure 4.2 Age Distribution by Total, Parent and Teacher.

The age of parent and teacher groups surveyed ranged from 21 years to 50 years and over. The largest proportion of parent responses to the survey were gathered from the 31 to 40 years age group. This consisted of 63% of the total responses. The largest cluster of responses from the teachers fell within the 21 to 30 years age group. This consisted of 50% of staff responses.

4.3 FINDINGS

This section addresses each of the four research questions central to the examination of the collaborative role of parents in school policy development.

4.3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

Do parents wish to be involved in school policy design and in what capacity?

This question is central to the research as there is little to be gained from endeavouring to involve parents in policy development if they do not believe they have a substantial contribution to make to the functioning of the school. Once this important question is answered then further investigation concerning who should be involved and the role that they assume needs also to be addressed. Data were collected from whole a school questionnaire (teachers and parents) and interviews with committee members.

The findings of the questionnaire indicated that a clear majority of parents (89.8%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to be involved in policy development. The mean parent response to this question after numerical coding (1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) was 4.1, which indicated that parents wished to be involved in policy development.

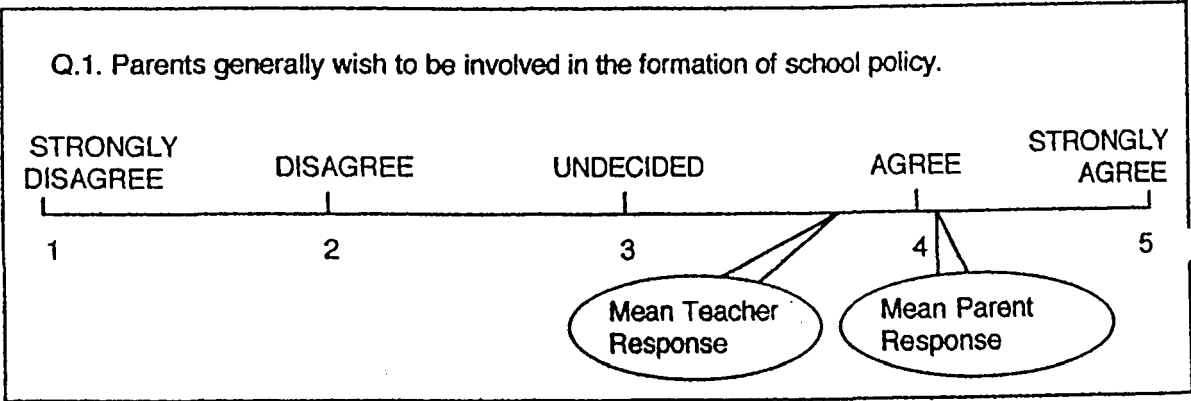


Figure 4.3 Mean Responses of Parents and Teachers

Data further revealed that the older the respondent the lower the score recorded. This pattern signified that the older the respondent, the less they sought to be involved in school policy development. This is highlighted by the following table.

Age	Mean Score.
21 to 30 years	4.1
31 to 40 years	4.1
41 to 50 years	3.8
50 years +	3.7

FIGURE 4.4 Parental Involvement in Policy Development.

When the school community was asked the question whether the current level of parental involvement and consultation in policy making was about right they replied with the following response 1% strongly disagreed, 17% disagreed, 21% were undecided, 57% agreed , and 3% strongly agreed.

On this occasion more than half of the respondents agreed that the present level of parental involvement in policy development was about right, while a considerable proportion of 21% were still undecided. A significant group of parents (18%) disagreed with this position. It is also interesting to note that the teacher perception of parental involvement in its current format was slightly higher (3.4 for parents as compared to 3.7 for teachers), than the parents' perception.

The mean responses from parents and teachers relating to the current level of parental involvement in policy making at St. Adrian's School is illustrated by FIGURE 4.5.

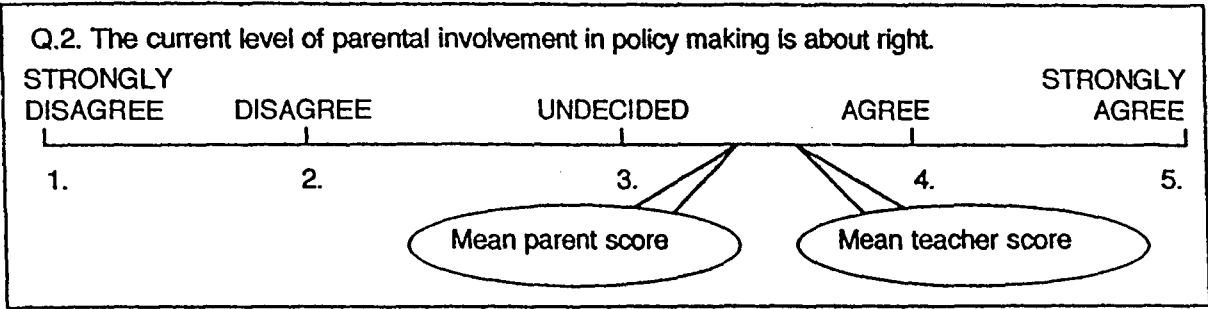


FIGURE 4.5. Mean Parent and Teacher Score regarding the Current Level of Involvement in Policy Development.

From the data it can concluded that although more that half of those surveyed were comfortable with the current levels of involvement in policy development, a significant proportion, 18% of respondents, however were not comfortable with the current levels of parental participation in policy development.

In taking this question of the current level of parental involvement in policy development a step further it is interesting to view parental responses when considering how parents feel when developing policies in the academic and non-academic areas.

When asked the question if parents felt comfortable in collaboratively developing policies in non-academic areas, (eg. discipline, uniforms.....) the response by the school community was overwhelmingly favourable. Those who either agreed or strongly agreed with the concept of parental involvement in non-academic areas recorded a score of 93%. This was a resounding result in favour of parents' being involved in policy development. There was no significant difference in response

from the teachers' perspective. Both parties were in accord with the concept of collaborative parental participation in school policy development in non-academic areas.

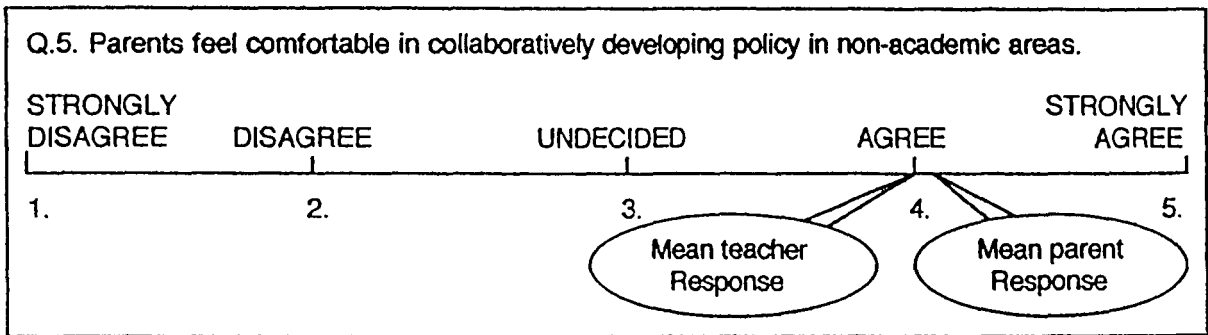


FIGURE 4.6 Mean Parent and Teacher Responses regarding Parental Involvement in Non- Academic areas.

When investigating the issue of parents' involvement in academic policy development (eg. maths, language, etc.) the response is interesting to examine. The ratio of parents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed with parental involvement in policy making in the academic field totalled 56% with a further 19% who were undecided. This was a clear statement of 75% of parents who failed to agree with this position. The mean score for this involvement was 2.7 while the teachers' perception of this aspect of involvement scored even lower with a mean score of 2.4. Both teachers and parents felt uncomfortable in collaboratively developing policy in the academic area.

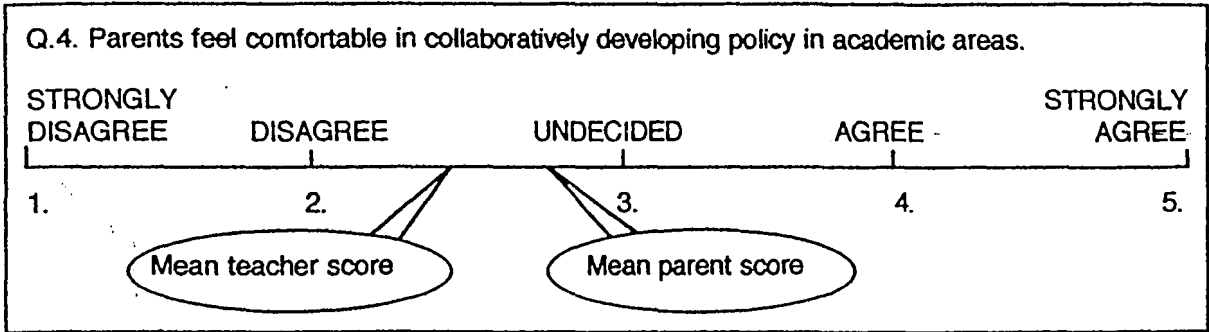


FIGURE 4.7 Mean Response of Parents and Teachers regarding Parental Involvement in Academic Areas.

This area has traditionally been the exclusive domain of teachers in the past in this school's history. These results in the academic and non-academic areas confirms the position adopted by Morgan (1974), (cited in Ebbeck, 1979, p.4) when she identified that teachers, "are likely to admit parental involvement to the extent that it does not overrule or undermine the habitual right of teachers to define and decide matters of pedagogy". Teachers were less comfortable than parents when collaborative policy making in academic areas was considered.

The largest groups of parents who were comfortable with this level of involvement in the academic scene were the 21 to 30 and the 31 to 40 age groups who scored a mean of 2.8. The groups least comfortable were the older age groups which scored a mean of 2.4.

Data supplied from the journal confirm that the mean age of the committee members was 35 years. The survey results highlight that the 31 to 40 years

category of respondents was the group most comfortable with policy formation whether academic or non-academic areas were involved. It is also relevant to note that according to the journal records the mean age of the parents and teachers who participated on the committee was 36 years. They came from the group identified by the survey data as being the most comfortable with academic and non-academic policy development.

Summary

In summary it would appear that the school community in general supported the notion of parental involvement in school policy making with 89.8% of parents surveyed responding in the affirmative. The position with regard to the current practice of involvement was that more than half agreed that the level of parental involvement was right, while a significant proportion were still undecided. When the issue of whether parental involvement in policy development should be in all areas or only in non- academic areas, the conclusive opinion of the parent body was that they felt comfortable in the non-academic areas and uncomfortable in the academic areas. This position was also supported by the teaching staff of St. Adrian's School.

The results of the survey indicate that the parent community of St. Adrian's school, strongly seek to be involved in participative governance (89.9%), particularly in the non-academic areas (93%). This level of participative governance allows parents to be responsible in the decision making process in the area of policy formation and shared executive powers, eg. joint committees.

The mean responses to the questionnaire summarise the various attitudes of parents to the concept of policy development at St. Adrian's.

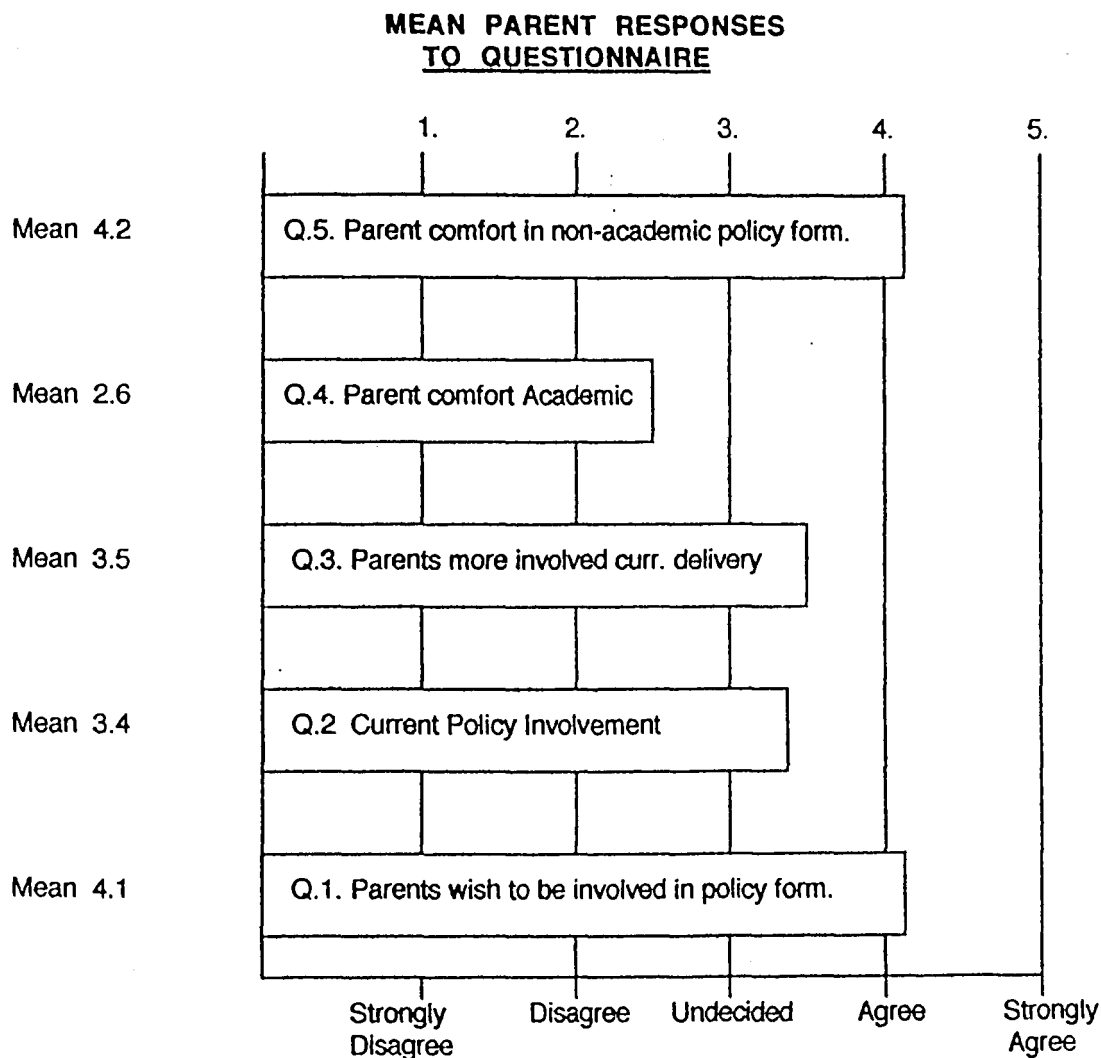


FIGURE 4.8 Mean Parent Responses to Questionnaire

In conclusion, from this data it is easy to see that parents currently wish to be involved in school policy development. It is also obvious that parents currently are not comfortable with participation in academic areas but are very comfortable in the non-academic areas of policy formation.

4.3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

What are the factors and conditions that need to be present to promote parental involvement in policy development?

There are many factors and conditions that need to be present to promote effective parental involvement in policy development. Not all of the following factors need to be present at the same time although parents and teachers have identified them as being necessary to promote involvement.

The qualitative data for this question were gathered from committee interviews, school questionnaires and journal records. The analysed data were thematically coded initially and then open coding procedures as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990), were applied to identify the various factors. The labels that were applied to the themes arose from the data. The respondents' words have been used to identify each of the factors that promote parental involvement in policy formation.

Different factors will necessarily need to be present to appeal to different parents. These interrelated themes identified from the data supplied, fall into eight categories. The factors that promoted parental involvement in policy making at St. Adrian's school were the presence of a *Conducive School Atmosphere*, *the Role of the Principal*, *Open Communication*, *Building of Relationships*, *Motivation / Incentive*, *Education*, *the Process* and from time to time *External Factors*. Each of these factors will be discussed in some detail in the following pages.

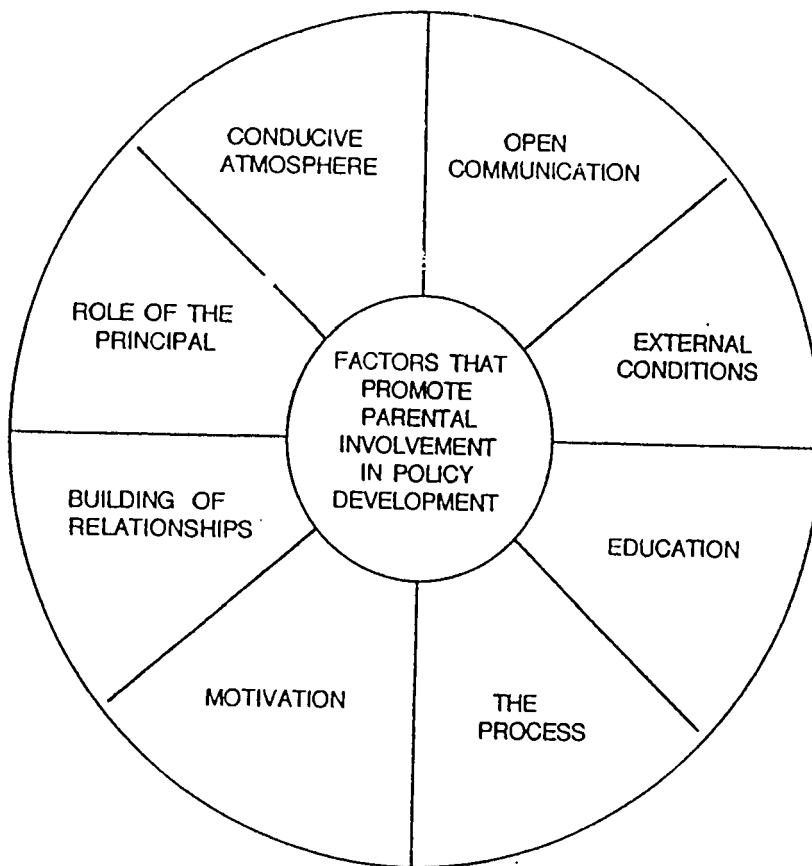


FIGURE 4.9 Overview of the Identified Factors that Promoted Parental Involvement in Policy Development.

I will briefly expand on each of these factors that promote parental involvement in policy formation.

Conducive Atmosphere

One of the major factors that promoted parental involvement in policy formation, that was identified by parents responding via the questionnaire, was the presence of a school atmosphere that was in their words *open, friendly* and *welcoming*. Without this quality being present, parents were not as readily inclined to volunteer their time and services. Other criteria were also deemed to be important by parents and these were that atmospheres of *mutual respect* and *trust* be maintained.

This was considered significant so that as a parent expressed it, *they felt comfortable and felt free to speak out and be involved* in policy development in an environment that was supportive and non-threatening. Stonehouse (1989, p5) concurs with this description of a conducive atmosphere when he cites characteristics such as “mutual respect, trust, sensitivity to the perspective of the others, and teamwork”, as being essential factors in the building of a conducive atmosphere that promotes parental involvement in policy development.

Role of the Principal

It is apparent that this feature has a very significant influence on the involvement of parents in policy design and review. Many parent survey responses stressed that the principal needs to be *approachable* and have *developed a good rapport with parents*. A relationship built on mutual respect and professional ability is crucial to the participation of parents. In most cases it is the principal who initiates policy development and an invitation to parents to become involved is important. A general invitation or a personal approach to participate in policy development by the principal and staff is welcomed. One parent's opinion was *that the level of parental involvement fostered by the principal is indicative of the quality of the leader*. The principal is responsible for the tone and effective functioning of the school and must be considered an integral factor in the promotion of parental involvement in the school.

Open Communication

Data supplied by parents identified open communication as an important factor that enhanced their involvement and ability to participate in school policy development. This *communication needed to be two-way* which indicated the need to listen on

the part of all concerned. Allan, who was a parent committee member, observed *that once they* (meaning parents) *feel that they are being listened to they will often return the favour by listening to others*. Communication between school and home, needed to be regular and kept couched *in simple English*, which was *free of jargon*. The use of jargon by teachers and technicians was a factor that impeded parental involvement and is discussed later in this chapter.

Other aspects that promoted parental involvement in policy making was the availability of information and progress reports via normal communication channels such as newsletters. Brian, who was the other parent representative on the policy committee, commented on *the need to formally report back to the school community via the school newsletter and presentations at P.&F. meetings*. Open communication through surveys, etc. often permitted welcomed input from the wider school community. This communication as highlighted by parent survey responses often led to greater *ownership of decisions* arrived at by committees.

Building Relationships

Data indicated that parents and staff viewed *healthy relationships* as necessary for collaborative policy making to be possible. Parents also considered *encouragement by staff for parental involvement* as being necessary to the success of such a venture. Allan believed that, *Everyone has a small but important part to play* and by working together for a common cause the benefits of appropriate policy direction will soon be realised. Allan, a parent committee member, quoted *there is not one thing we have to do 100% better, but 100 things that we have to each improve 1%*.

Relationships are built on trust, respect and a willingness to co-operate. With any relationship, feelings can become strained from time to time and this was evidenced in the early stages of the life of the policy committee. A journal observation by the participant observer records *conflict* existed between parties on the computer policy committee regarding which was the more appropriate hardware for school purposes. This sub-theme of building relationships was later defused when further research was compiled to clarify the different perspectives and expert views were canvassed. A committee member recalled,

He enjoyed coming to the realisation that teachers like every other profession are biased inwardly. Some of the assertive or even aggressive statements (that was expressed by teachers) were put into perspective and were no longer threatening. By the time the education process of the committee was underway we were rapidly approaching a consensus.

The social interaction and contact between parents and teachers who were working in the same direction were other factors that promoted the concept of parental involvement. Spry (1990, p.144) also identified the aspect of social contact as being a factor that helped participation.

Motivation

Parental involvement in policy development will often hinge on the motivation or need for such a commitment. Most parents as revealed in the survey data are motivated by *a feeling that we are contributing positively to school issues* and or *the desire to improve things*. Other parents perceive it as an opportunity to *correct any biases* or *update policy where needed*. It was reported frequently that a pervading *sense that we can make it better for our children* motivated many parents. Brian's motivation for participation in the project was that,

He had a vested interest in ensuring that his children feel comfortable and secure in their school environment and that the school policies addressed this issue.

One of the major motivations of staff was the opportunity to tap into the knowledge and experience that was present in the parent community. Colin, who was one of the teacher representatives recalls, it was an opportunity for the staff to *call on the expertise that was available within the parent body of the school*. Edwards and Redfern (1988, p.163) also cite this as a factor that should motivate school communities to collaborate when they state “parents offer a considerable pool of expertise across the curriculum which would be foolhardy to overlook”. The availability of appropriate motivation is a factor that promotes and encourages parental involvement in policy development.

Education

The provision for on-going parental education and training in the curriculum area was considered essential for future participation in policy development. Parent perspectives revealed that the *offering of up-to-date courses in curriculum areas such as Maths, English / Language Arts... etc. so that we don't feel threatened* verified the need perceived by parents in general to be more informed. Bridge (1978, p.115) highlights the need to ensure that parents are well informed and prepared prior to participation in any educational activity. With *more information available prior to involvement* in policy development parents are *more confident* in themselves to make a constructive input.

The Process

The process design was considered by parents and teachers as an important tool in the promotion of parental involvement in policy development both then and in the future. Since the process was consultative in nature and drew upon the collective wisdom of both parents and staff it was well received when implemented. Various aspects of the process were appreciated by all. Parent survey responses included *identifying clear objectives, developing operational guidelines, good co-ordination of parents and staff, and a fair say in the due process* as being central to a satisfactory procedure. Caldwell and Spinks (1988), Stonehouse (1989), and Shaw (1993) would support these criteria as being necessary practices for the formation of good school policies. Brian's committee experiences also supported the belief that *a clear description of objectives, etc. and an element of formality regarding workshops and meetings helped the process.*

Other aspects identified by parents, to be considered were the use of *surveys* that were *opinion orientated* and offered *anonymity* as this aspect of process is less time consuming for parents and *avoids possible loss of face*. When parents saw that the process design was truly collaborative in nature and that their opinions were valued this added to the commitment and enthusiasm.

External Factors

Government policies as stated in Education Department publications such as *Your School Image* (Qld.) and or Systemic initiatives such as Archdiocese of Brisbane - *Shared Directions* and the *Self Renewing Catholic Schools Program* were considered by parents to be a factor that had the effect of promoting more parental involvement in policy development. It gave greater confidence to parents to become involved if they were being invited and encouraged from other agencies.

Summary

In summary the reported factors that promoted parental involvement in policy development in this specific community were the presence of a friendly and conducive atmosphere within the school, the invitation and support of the principal and staff, open communication channels, the building of relations between parents and staff, the process design, the motivation to become involved and on occasions some external factors.

Many of these factors are consistent with those highlighted by Spry (1990, p.131). They included *the process, facilitation, consensus, openness, and social contact*. The factors that were identified by both parents and staff that promoted collaborative involvement in school policy making were many, however there are also some barriers that were experienced by St. Adrian's community and these are soon to be discussed.

4.3.3 RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

What are the barriers and obstacles that impede the involvement of parents in policy development?

The barriers experienced by parents and staff during this study were, Time Constraints, Fear of Inadequacy, Apathy, Jargon, and Negative Parent Energies. These responses have been contributed by both committee members and the wider school community. These topics are each briefly treated in the following pages.

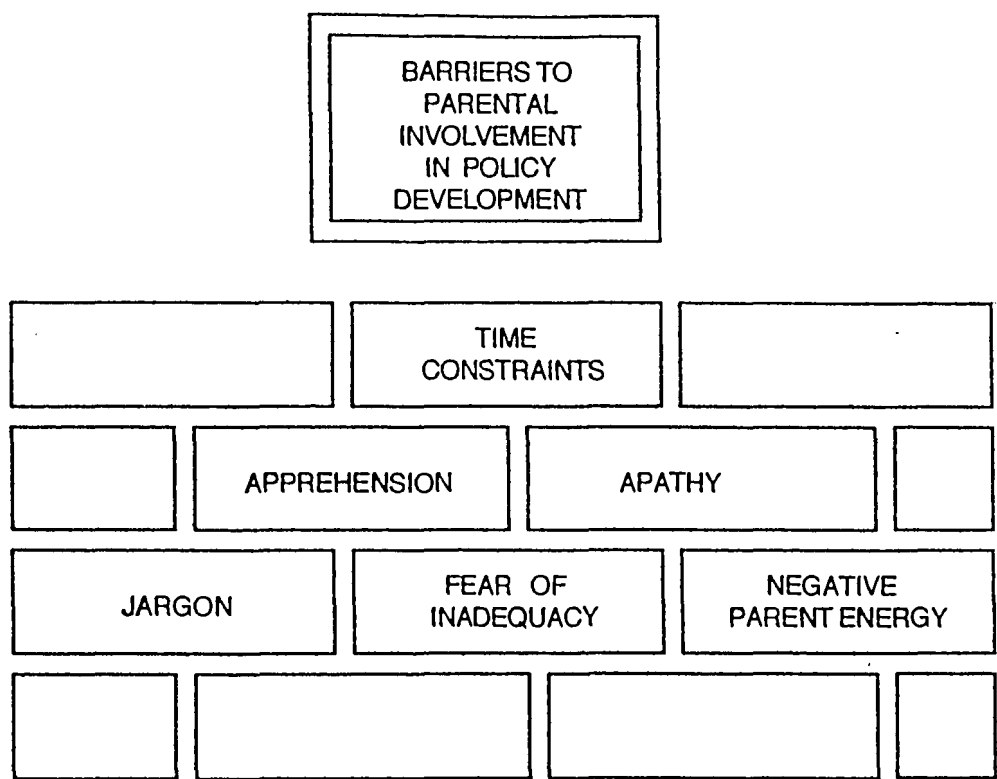


FIGURE 4.10 Barriers to Parental Involvement in Policy Development.

Time Constraints

The first and the most shared response to the question of identification of the barriers that impeded participation in policy development was the limited time that was available to parents. Parents attributed the time constraints to a number of reasons. Firstly there was the need for a large proportion of families to have *both parents working* to meet economic commitments. Some of the comments from parents included, *parents are too busy in these times with their work responsibilities even if they were interested*, while another parent comment identified that *working parents find it particularly hard to get to meetings*. Pettit (1980, p.89) also confirms that time constraints due to both parents working is a significant barrier to parents' accepting a more extensive role in their children's schooling.

Other survey responses revealed the challenge of children attending different schools, in many cases three schools (Preschool, Primary, Boys Secondary and or Girls Secondary Colleges). This factor divided the already limited time resources of parents. This topic warrants possible further investigation particularly from a parents' perspective so that greater commitment is possible by families to the one educational facility. The difficulty of time constraints was also noted in the committee observations recorded in the journal entries.

A suitable time for the committee to meet was difficult to arrive at due to different family and work schedules. Meetings were scheduled for Tuesday afternoons. These were later changed to shorter meetings before school on Friday mornings. The last two had to be conducted at mutually agreeable times on Saturday mornings to fit in with the busy work schedules of both teachers and parents.

Fear of Inadequacy

Data indicated that this is a very genuine concern for some parents. Some of the views expressed to the researcher via the parent survey confirmed the fears that involvement in policy making would pose for many parents. These concerns were that some parents were *not confident in their ability to formalise and accurately communicate their thoughts, the fears of their own school experiences, the fears of being ridiculed by other parents or academics, while another felt intimidated to join in at meetings.*

Many parents felt *uncomfortable* and not confident in their own abilities particularly in the academic area. This is attested to by the following parent responses that *ignorance, being away from the academic area for too many years, and the lack of*

educative knowledge especially in curriculum areas were reasons that heightened this fear of inadequacy. Another parent contributed that she felt the *inadequacy brought on by peer pressure from other parents* as being an obstacle that hindered her involvement. Berger (1991) and Cairney and Munsie (1992), also confirm that anxiety, intimidation and fears restrict the involvement of parents in schools.

Whatever the concern expressed it was very real to many parents. From the teachers' perspective there were no feelings of inadequacy, particularly in the academic field however some apprehension existed on the joint committee in the early stages of policy development. The topic of apprehension will be developed later in this chapter.

Apathy

The feeling of apathy regarding involvement in school activities was a significant concern for some parents. One parent went so far as to say that *Apathy was your main barrier to participation* in policy development. Whilst it is not important and sometimes impossible to involve all parents given the size of the school, it is important to encourage parents to contribute to the debate and final outcomes. Another parent expressed this apathy as *the unpreparedness of some parents to try to give of their time to become involved*. Another view of this obstacle is expressed by a parent when he stated that *someone else will do it*.

Jargon

The barrier of the use of jargon by the teaching staff when referring quickly to curriculum issues was one concern that some parents expressed. This was

confirmed by parent responses which cited examples such as, *keep the language simple or parent friendly as we don't all have degrees.*" Although this was not an insurmountable obstacle, from observations recorded of committee meetings, it appeared to be soon overcome with an explanation of acronyms and definitions where necessary during discussions.

Negative Parental Energies

Generally this aspect is limited, however it is damaging when it does occur and it makes the person reluctant to participate in future projects. Parental criticism can be directed at specific committee members if policy direction is not progressing along with the individual's expectation. It was noted in one of the committee interviews with Allan that,

Not everyone is as mature as you would like to think they can be . Some people like to bulldoze their opinion through, and actually become belligerent. Teachers can be guilty of it too. It becomes a battle of compromise and issues , on top of a full life.

Although this issue is not a common occurrence, further research into the area of computers and a detailed examination of the acquired data led to a consensus position. Some negative energies are a reality of life when dealing with many diverse opinions and personalities. Cairney and Munsie (1992, p.25) suggest that sustained effort by teachers and administration is required to overcome negative energies and obtain consensus.

Apprehension

There existed some apprehension between parents and teachers working collaboratively in forming school policy. Some of this was due in part to not

knowing each member of the committee prior to the commencement of the project. Teachers did not know the parents and the talents and skills that they were offering the school community and parents only knew the teachers by sight and reputation. This aspect was considered in the interview transcript of Allan after the project had been completed. He recalled *the feelings initially felt towards the teachers were awe, admiration, fear, and respect all mixed together. The reputation that teachers get is a students' reputation not a real world reputation, I now understand the difference between the two.* Yet again this feeling of apprehension surfaced when Allan was questioned about being involved in the process.

An area that was a little disconcerting was of being on a committee with teachers where I had no experience other than my school life to judge what teachers are like. My memory of reactions from previous experiences with teachers was interesting. It led to a subtle awakening that teachers are just as human as everyone else.

Brian, who is a professional person in the computing field, was one who felt some apprehension initially, whilst developing a school policy in computer education. As he recalls he felt *can I really do this, or should I let someone else?* It was noted by observations recorded in the journal that this sense of apprehension was reduced by the regular contact and the openness of the proceedings.

Apprehension was not limited to parents, as teachers initially felt the involvement of parents in policy making particularly in the academic area as an intrusion into their domain. This is illustrated by a teacher's reflection when she says *I felt comfortable with parents (involved) in non-academic areas but didn't feel as comfortable in the academic area.* This teacher's position is consistent with the acquired data obtained from the parent and staff surveys where teachers generally disagreed with involvement in the academic area (mean of 2.4) while supporting the involvement of parents in the non-academic areas (mean of 4.0) .

Yet another parent perspective supportive of this position expressed that, *teachers are professionals in their field and as such should not have parents interfering and trying to take control away from teachers*. This opinion of parents who do not want to interfere in the academic domain, when contrasted with the data supplied from the parent survey, is consistent with the findings.

Apprehension towards the project existed initially with both parties. It was overcome by explanations of the process and additional information. Some teachers viewed this development as threatening and their feelings need to be respected as do those of parents.

In summary, the data revealed that there were several reasons for parents' reticence towards involvement in policy development. The stated obstacles included, time constraints of parents, apprehension, some fears of inadequacy, other concerns dealing with parental apathy and the value placed on education, the language or jargon used and periodic negative parental energies. Spry (1990, p.125) also identified apprehension, insufficient time, and the presence of jargon / new concepts as being factors that hindered parent participation. Although a barrier-free environment will never be possible to be created to enable full participation for all parents would be rare, it is possible to reduce the barriers that are within the control of the school community.

Implications for Schools

Many of these barriers can be faced and minimised. Solutions could include day and corresponding evening meetings if the situation warranted (Time Constraints), awareness of staff of appropriate language (Jargon Free), and the encouragement

and support of parents along with educative opportunities that would reduce the level of inadequacy felt by some parents.

In the literature Pettit (1980, p.89) identifies some of the barriers that are beyond the control of school authorities but often do exist. These include factors such as ill-health, physical or mental handicap, existence of younger siblings, family separation and language. There are many genuine solutions to other obstacles and barriers to parental involvement in policy development. As Cairney and Munsie (1992, p. 25) explain, "don't expect parent involvement to take off over night - sustained effort is required", particularly by administration and teachers.

4.3.4 RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR

What are the perceived benefits to the school community of parental involvement in policy making?

The benefits identified by this study of the collaborative involvement of parents in policy development are many and have been categorised into five general concepts. These concepts were identified from the data supplied from the parent/staff survey and the interviews conducted with committee members. These included the concepts of Partnership, Skill, Democracy, Quality and Ownership. In the following pages I will briefly treat each of these concepts that were identified as the benefits of such a project.

Constructive Partnership

The findings of the research project was characterised by an increased awareness

of the process of school policy development. The fact that teachers, parents and administrators collaboratively developed the policy in consultation with the wider school community highlighted, as one parent described, the *unity* that existed to provide the best possible directions for the school to follow. Other parent observations revealed that the *awareness stimulated interest* in the project. It also *made parents and teachers aware of each other's difficulties* in this specific area. The heightened awareness of the difficulties and challenges that face teachers and parents has been considered by Marsh (1988) and Bastiani (1993) as being a significant benefit of parental participation in schools.

This collaboration of parents, teachers and administrators in the process was highlighted as it brought together all stakeholders. Mutual support was evident throughout the process and the resultant policy direction was well received by the community. Another parental observation highlighted that *students loved seeing their parents involved* in the policy development.

Data indicated that parents felt this collaboration has led to greater team spirit. Comments provided by different parents include, *resulted in more harmonious atmosphere, cohesive family spirit, spirited environment, improved community spirit, and a feeling of self satisfaction.*

This constructive partnership was fostered by open communication between parents and teachers, preliminary research being conducted on the topic of computer education, sharing of information and *the broad cross-section of input from the school community*. Following this constructive partnership the resultant policy has in the words of one parent, *a wider perspective, more accurate sense and understanding of real world requirements and conditions.*

Other parental observations have revealed that this level of consultation and involvement has *parents more interested in school* and has made them *feel part of the school*. It has also ensured that *the school reflects community beliefs*. The regular communication has led to greater knowledge and understanding of the need for policies and parents are also *more aware of current school policies*.

Another property of the formation of a constructive partnership between staff and parents is that of co-operation to achieve a mutually desirable goal. Pugh (1989) and Bastiani (1993) both reported that the shared sense of purpose and the mutuality which begins with listening and valuing each other's contribution are fundamental to the establishment of a constructive partnership.

Not only was the co-operation within the committee evident but also *co-operation from home*. This led one parent to respond by saying that *school life is an extension of home life*. The co-operation between school and home should be very visible and parental involvement in the policy process just reinforces this view. This co-operation has given as one parent describes it, *a hands-on feeling in the development of my children*.

Product Quality

Another benefit perceived by parents and staff has been the quality of the collaboratively designed policy. The formulated computer and technology policy was enhanced by the involvement of parents in the process of policy formation. From observations recorded in diary form by the participant observer, this policy had clearly expressed rationale, objectives pertinent to the student's needs and a sequential process of skill acquisition through the year levels. The policy was readily embraced by both teachers and parents.

This satisfaction relating to the quality of the finished product by the school community is not dissimilar to the experiences reported by Della-Dora (1979, p.70) when he states that,

Diverse groups composed of teachers, administrators, and parents usually end up making decisions which provide for more scope and flexibility than most of the individuals in it might have chosen prior to the group participation. Group processes conducted in an effective fashion, tend to foster tolerance for diversity, greater open-mindedness, and more respect for minority viewpoints.

The collaboratively developed policy certainly provided greater direction and scope than was originally anticipated by staff at St. Adrian's. This was confirmed by the teacher representatives on the committee.

Available Skills

The utilisation of available skills in the parent community enabled the committee to quickly focus its energies. The committee selected was a specialist committee comprising people in the computer and technological field as well as the academic perspective. This is confirmed when a parent committee member described its structure as,

a specialist committee....half of the committee driven by academic criteria and academic evaluation while the other half were technologists who were bringing to bear some technology skills. The taking of practical real world experiences and putting them into a policy framework that was designed to allow the children to absorb it at the best rate given all other factors was the objective of the exercise.

The contribution of specialised skills by the parent community to the policy formation committee ensured a wider perspective of experience and knowledge. Marsh (1988, p.84) also highlights the benefits of utilising the skills available within any community when he states that, *parental participation increases the richness of the activity because of the wide range of skill that can be provided by parents.*

Democratic Process

The process of the policy development drew responses by parents that this was a *much fairer way* to design new policies. Marsh (1988, p.84) argues that *parents and other citizens have the right in democratic countries to participate in school decision making.* The democratic process allowed those parents who wanted to voice their opinions an opportunity to do so in the desired manner.

Because of the consultation and communication involved in the process, a parent expressed a view that she felt *that parents were more accepting of policies if parents have had a say.* Brandt (1979, p.45) further develops the strengths of a democratic process of policy formation when he acknowledges that,

the sharing of power with parents is not an abdication of one's professional leadership role. On the contrary, it provides an opportunity to understand parents' interests and goals and to learn new ways to achieve them. If we avoid perpetuating the traditional practice of formulating decisions from the top, we are less likely to impose our own beliefs on others or to make decisions for others.

Moreover, well informed parents contribute to wiser decisions. Parents who are involved in decision making grow in their ability to shape policy.

The democratic process adopted by the committee was viewed by the school community as a significant beneficial development in the collaborative formation of school policy at St. Adrian's. This then raises the final category that could be defined as a benefit and it is the quality of ownership.

Ownership.

Since the involvement of parents in the collaboratively developed computer and technology policy, more ownership of the decision and directions has been evident. Parents view this process as a powerful model of commitment and ownership. This is verified by parental opinions recorded on the survey which confirm the feeling of ownership present within the school community. These parent responses include, *ownership provides greater acceptance...*, *parents feel more ownership...*, *policies respected and followed...*, *greater inclination to support school policy...*, *higher level of responsibility* . Bastiani (1993, p.105) also confirms that ownership is one of the outcomes forged by parental involvement in school decisions.

The sense of ownership was not confined to the parent community as the committee also felt that *both parties* (teachers and parents) *have a sense of ownership about what is happening*. With this ownership comes greater commitment to the policies and directions of the school. As a result of the collaboration by parents and teachers a computer and technology policy was designed and it received immediate acceptance. As a result a financial commitment was given by both the school administration and P. & F. to the implementation of this policy.

In summary the benefits to a school community of parental participation in policy development are many. Those benefits identified by this community were the development of a constructive partnership, quality policy formation, involvement of community skills and talents, a democratic process was employed and finally the presence of a feeling of ownership permeated the school. Other benefits such as those claimed in the literature by Marsh (1988), Pugh (1989), and Bastiani (1993) would begin to appear over a longer time period than this study permits, as would some possible negative aspects.

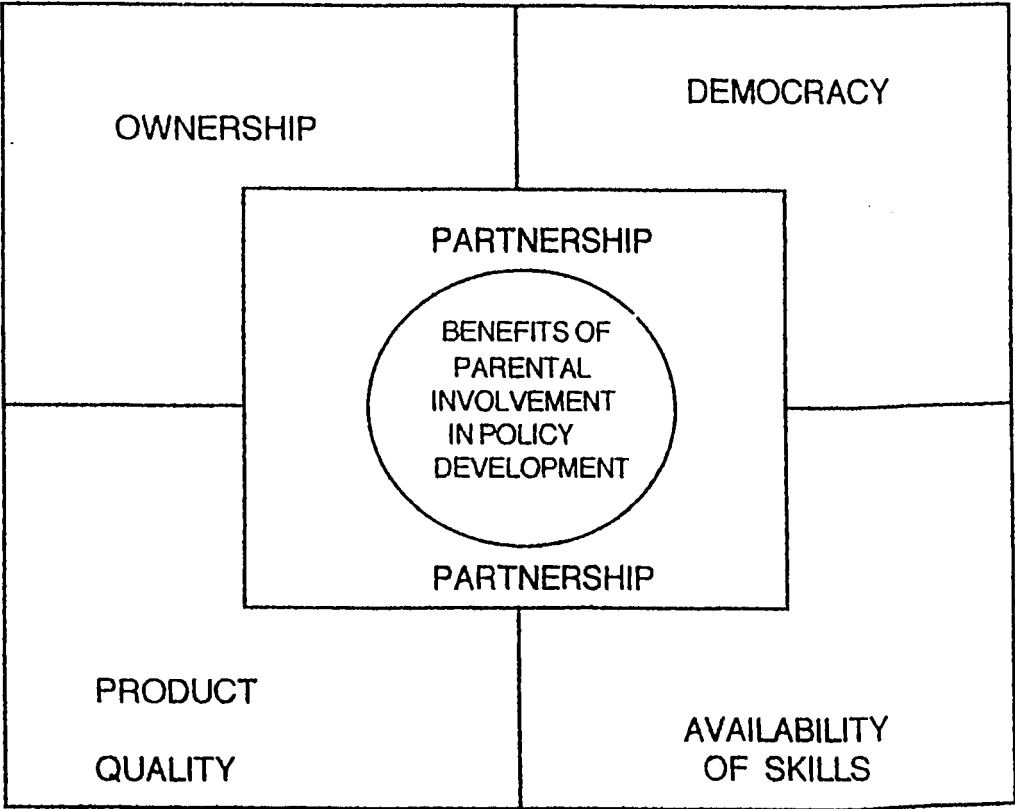


FIGURE 4.11 Summary of Benefits of Parental Involvement in Policy Development.

4.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.

The findings of this research are centred around the collaborative process of policy development at St. Adrian's school. The outcomes of this study demonstrated the readiness and the willingness of this school community to become involved in policy development. It also identified the factors that needed to be present to promote this level of collaborative policy formation. Unfortunately, significant barriers to this active participation were also revealed and these findings needed to be addressed in any future collaborative policy development initiatives. Finally, after some reflection on the process of parental involvement in policy development, the perceived benefits of this research project were highlighted by St. Adrian's school community.

Research has verified the important role that parents have in the education of their children, although this has not always been respected. Parents are now invited to fulfil many roles within the functioning of the school. These roles were highlighted by Marsh (1988) and Berger (1991) and ranged from parents as spectators to parents as policy makers.

It is in the context of "Parents as Policy Makers" that this study is grounded. The analysis of the data gathered in this study examined aspects of parental involvement in policy development. Four questions were answered in the process of this analysis. The findings of the study were significant in that they revealed that parents wished to be involved in school policy development. This concept had a very high level of support from both parents and staff.

Once the question of involvement in policy formation was answered in the affirmative, there needed to be further clarification relating to policy areas. A

division between academic and non-academic policy appeared the logical dichotomy. Data gathered indicated that parents and staff were comfortable formulating policy collaboratively in the non-academic area, however not as comfortable at this time with formulating policy in the academic area. Thus one of the findings from this research project was that parents wanted to be involved in collaborative policy especially in the non-academic areas of school life.

Since involvement was a desired quality by both the school and the parent body and with an eye to future parental participation, it was then necessary to identify those conditions which promoted this parental involvement in policy development. There were eight conditions that St. Adrian's school community identified that promoted this collaborative participation. These findings were the existence of a conducive atmosphere, the positive role of the principal and staff, the opportunity to build relationships (parents and teachers), an appropriate reason for involvement (motivation), a suitable process, open communication channels, educational opportunities available and periodic external influences.

As Fullan (1982) expressed " it is a crying shame that there are so many barriers to parental involvement". St. Adrian's school community identified six barriers to this level of participative governance. The findings included insufficient time, inadequacy felt by some parents, apathy, the use of educational jargon, apprehension and the presence of negative parent energies. Given that one can find an excuse on any occasion not to become involved, Cairney and Munsie (1992, p.9) believe , "parents will need to be convinced that the involvement will be an enjoyable experience, not a threatening and patronising one". Much of this responsibility must rest, in the first instance, with the principal and staff.

The benefits of this parent participation in policy formation are many, however five categories appeared as significant in the data collected. The findings of the research that revealed the perceived benefits included aspects associated with a constructive partnership, the quality of the end product, the availability of a more diverse bank of talent and skills, the attractive nature of a democratic process, and the increased level of ownership and commitment that was evident as a result of this policy development.

The benefits of parental participation in policy formation will continue to compound with each successful venture. Success breeds success / achievement breeds achievement. The benefits of parental participation in the formation of policy direction are considerable and longlasting.

CHAPTER 5

REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS

5.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the role of parental involvement in policy development. The thesis documented the process of the development of a computer and technology policy. It harnessed the collaborative energies and talents of the parents, teachers and school administrators of St. Adrian's primary school.

Consequently the following questions became pertinent to the research.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE.

Do parents wish to be involved in school policy design and in what capacity?

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO.

What are the factors and conditions that need to be present to promote parental involvement in policy development?

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE.

What are the barriers and obstacles that impede the involvement of parents in policy development?

RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR.

What are the benefits to the school community of parental involvement in school policy making?

A brief summary of the answers to these questions is provided later in this chapter.

5.2 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The study was essentially qualitative in nature. A case study approach was the methodology chosen as it permitted direct observational and investigative methods to explore the current reality of parental involvement in school policy development. The process adopted by the committee was an action research project, while the role of the researcher was that of participant observer. It permitted the researcher access to an understanding of the collaborative policy development process to an extent not directly possible just by using the insights of others gained only through interviews.

This case study of an action research project ensured that qualitative data was collected from committee members, parents and the school staff by utilising three modes of data gathering. These three research instruments were interviews, progressive observations recorded in journal format and questionnaires.

This accumulated data of the reality of the collaborative role of parents in policy development within a primary school environment was coded and collated to answer the research questions posed.

5.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ANSWERED

The first Research question was,

Do parents wish to be involved In school policy design and in what capacity?

The data conclusively demonstrated that the parent body of St Adrian's generally wished to be involved in school policy design. There was a definite preference expressed by parents for involvement in the non-academic areas as compared with the academic areas. Data also indicated that it was generally the younger parents who more actively sought collaborative involvement in school policy development.

The second Research Question was,

What are the factors and conditions that need to be present to promote parental involvement in policy development?

Essentially there were eight factors and conditions that were identified by the St. Adrian's school community that promoted parental involvement in policy development. These included the existence of a conducive atmosphere within the school that was characterised by friendliness, openness, and mutual trust. The supportive and encouraging role of the Principal was considered by the school community as being central to the success of involving parents in policy formation.

Open two way communication and a consultative process were integral to the promotion of parental participation in policy development. Other factors revealed by the community as being important included the opportunities provided to build

relationships with teachers and other parents, and the educational inservicing that was provided for parents. Another factor that promoted parental involvement in policy formation was the existence of a suitable incentive for parents to give of their time and talents. External factors such as government and / or systemic policies often encouraged parents to accept invitations to become involved in school policy development.

The third Research Question was,

What are the barriers and obstacles that impede the involvement of parents in policy development?

St. Adrian's school community indicated that there were six significant factors that impeded collaborative parental involvement in school policy development. The highlighted barriers were that there was often insufficient time due to family and prior commitments to dedicate to such a project. Other obstacles revealed were the feeling of inadequacy experienced by some parents, expressions of apathy by others and the use of technical language or jargon by teachers. Further barriers identified by the school community were the initial apprehension felt by both teachers and parents, and the presence of some negative parental energies that hindered the process.

The final Research Question was,

What are the benefits to the school community of parental involvement in school policy making?

The benefits of the collaborative involvement of parents and teachers in school policy formation were identified and coded into five categories. These included the evolution of a constructive partnership between parents and teachers, which drew upon the collective talents and skills of the school community. A significant benefit was that the completed policy was comprehensive and expansive in scope which reflected the diverse input of the community. Other benefits related to the attractive nature of the consultative process and the increased level of ownership and commitment by staff and parents that was evident towards this policy development.

5.4 THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The study examined the collaborative role of parents in school policy development. The consultation avenues engaged by the policy committee were a positive feature of the process. Although there were several barriers to parental participation identified by the community, the study clearly demonstrated that parents sought to be involved in policy formation within the primary school environment.

Although it is recognised that this study is limited in its scope and generalisability the outcomes highlighted the significance of the role of parents as partners in the education process. The findings of this research confirmed much of the existing limited knowledge related to this sphere of parental collaboration in school policy formation.

Many challenges lie ahead for this partnership between the school and the family. A major barrier to greater participation by parents in education and in particular, policy development, is the apportionment of available parental time between the segregated levels of educational facilities such as pre-schools, primary schools and secondary boys and girls schools. This unfortunate fragmentation of parental

support and participation in schooling will continue to restrict the amount of involvement parents can contribute to the educational process in many Catholic school environments. This aspect of parental involvement is worthy of further research.

Current developments include recommendations from the Report of the Review of the Queensland School Curriculum (1994), *Shaping the Future*, which was chaired by Professor Wiltshire. This review which was conducted while this research was in progress, reinforced the desirability of parental involvement in policy formation. It states that,

parents need not be involved in the minutiae of program planning, but it is essential that they participate in the framing of curriculum policies for the school and the monitoring of the effectiveness of these policies. (Shaping the Future, p.210)

In conclusion, this research study has highlighted the value and desirability of parental involvement in policy development. It has also revealed the factors that promoted this collaborative process and also the barriers that impeded this partnership. Finally, this study has also identified the significant benefits for school communities that were obtained from parental involvement in policy development. Future collaborative parental involvement in policy formation will continue to build upon these foundations documented in this study at St. Adrian's school.

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SURVEY PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL POLICY MAKING**Respondent Profile - Parents**


Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Age Grouping	21 yrs. to 30 years.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>		31 yrs. to 40 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
			41 yrs. to 50 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
			50 yrs. and above	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Please tick the appropriate categories)


Definition of policy: " Policy is a guide for discretionary action and a broad and general direction given to someone to implement. Policy states what is to be done, sometimes who is to do it, but never how or when." (Twomey and Hughes, 1993)

Part A. In our school community.....


1. Parents generally wish to be involved in the formation of school policy .

SD D U A SA



2. The current level of parental involvement and consultation in policy making is about right.

SD D U A SA



3. Parents should be involved more in the delivery of the curriculum in the classroom. (Reading groups, library, tutors, specialized skills, etc.....)

SD D U A SA


4. Parents feel comfortable in collaboratively making policy in academic areas. (eg. Maths, Language etc.)

SD D U A SA


5. Parents feel comfortable in collaboratively developing policies in non academic areas. (eg Discipline, Uniform etc.)

SD D U A SA


Part B.

6. What do you feel are some of the benefits of parental involvement in policy making?(please comment).....

.....

7. What do you feel are some of the barriers to parental involvement in policy making?.....

.....

8. What do you feel are the factors that promote parental involvement in policy making?.....

.....

Many thanks for your cooperation,

Mark.

Appendix 2.

DISTRIBUTION OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Parents wish to be involved in the formation of school policy.	0.7%	6.1%	3.4%	71.6%	18.2%
2. Current level of parental involve. in policy development is about right.	1.4%	16.9%	20.9%	56.8%	3.7%
3. Parents should be more involved with the delivery of curriculum in class.	1.4%	25%	18.2%	39.2%	16.2%
4. Parents feel comfortable collab-oratively dev. policy in academic areas	8.8%	47.3%	18.9%	20.3%	4.7%
5. Parents feel comfortable collab-oratively dev. policy non-academic area	0.0%	4.7%	2.7%	64.2%	28.4%