A CASE STUDY OF PARENT-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP.

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(i)

CERTIFICATE

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

During the past three decades a great deal has been written about the role parents have in their children's education.   The literature has followed an evolving understanding of this role from involvement through participation to parent-school partnership.   Although some professional educators have been slow to recognise such a partnership, there is now no doubt that parents are beginning to see it as their right.

The problem for schools is not just to implement legislation about parent-school partnerships, but to make meaning for the whole community out of this further change. Partnership was defined as the state or condition of being a partner through participation, association and joint interest, with the implication that each partner has an essential, though different, responsibility and role. Because of this, each partner has a respectful appreciation of the role and wisdom of the other.

The aim of the study was threefold. It investigated the concept of parent-school partnership as it is understood by a small group of parents in one Catholic primary school. It facilitated the identification of the structures and procedures that either hinder or enhance parents' attempts to forge such a partnership; and finally it sought future directions for authentic leadership. Other schools of similar size and circumstance may find the process and conclusions of this study to be beneficial.

By using a case study methodology, the research allowed parents to informally express their understandings of the parent-school partnership and to make suggestions for enhancing the relationship.

An analysis of the data collected, identified four aspects of school life as having prime importance in establishing meaningful partnership: good communication, a welcoming school climate, the valuing of every individual's best effort, and allowance being made for the socio-economically disadvantaged.

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CHAPTER 1.   THE RESEARCH DEFINED.

1.1.   Introduction.

Since the 1960s there has been a marked and evolving interest in the understanding that parents have an essential role in the educational process of their children (Beecham & Hoadley, 1979;   Beare, 1974).   This evolution began with the recognition of the need to involve parents because of their knowledge of the child's development (Fullan, 1982;   Brown et al, 1987).   Gradually this understanding of the parental role moved from involvement by invitation to participation by right (Brehaut, 1981; Bremer, 1980; Hunt, 1980).   However in more recent times there has been a further call for a 'parent-school partnership' that recognises the unique and essential role of the parent in education (Graham, 1994;   Finders & Lewis, 1994).

Catholic education was profoundly effected by Vatican II, Medellin and the writings that followed (eg. *Gravissimum Educationis, 1965;   Church in the Modern World,* 1965;   *The Catholic School,* 1977; and *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School,* 1988).   The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education explored the issue of parental participation in education and produced similar findings to the later evolving scholastic literature, but from a different perspective.   Church documents declare that parents are primarily and principally responsible for the education of their children:

> As it is the parents who have given life to their children, on them lies the gravest obligation of educating their family.   They must therefore be recognised as being primarily and principally responsible for their education. The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.   ...   The task of imparting education belongs primarily to the family, but it requires the help of society as a whole (Gravissimum Educationis. 1965. Para 3).

Parents are therefore exalted to participate in the work of the Catholic School and to work   cooperatively   with   all   members   of   the   school   community   (Sacred

Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). In addition, these Church documents further challenge Catholic educators to return to Christ's teaching and include parents who may be considered the 'poor' within society.

The Second Vatican Council in the 1960's acted as a watershed in the history of the modern Church. The whole structure of Church was shaken by Pope John XXIII's firm belief that human progress is part of God's unfolding plan and that the Church must be open and proactive in the face of modern advances (Spry & Sultmann, 1994; Marinelli, 1992; Lane, 1991). A gathering of the Bishops of South America at Medellin extended the challenge by reclaiming Christ's 'option for the poor' (Dorr, 1983). The whole social justice concept of openness and inclusion, if taken seriously, meant that Catholic education had to examine the role of parents in the education of their children (Lane, 1991; Balasuriya, 1990; Sobrino, 1984; Treston, 1983).

As primary educators, parents begin a child's education through family interaction at home, and the school they choose builds on the socialisation they have begun (Morgan & Giovanni, 1991; Treston, 1992). To be worthy of parental choice a Catholic school has the responsibility to establish a leadership style that can meld the authoritative teachings of the Church with the best contemporary educational practice and thus provide a climate that is open and inclusive and that recognises all parents in genuine partnership and authentic community.

1.2.   The Parent-School Partnership Defined.

The Macquarie Dictionary defines partnership as a state or condition of being a partner through participation, association and joint interest. Implied in the term 'partner' is a recognition that each has an essential (if different), responsibility and role and therefore, each of the partners has some authority in the undertaking. In

educational partnership, the authority stems first of all from the role of parent, teacher, or administrator. It also stems from acknowledging the different and unique bodies of knowledge which each brings to the educational enterprise (Fullan, 1982; Brown et al, 1987). In a partnership everyone's power is respected and enhanced and the gifts and wisdom of each individual are recognised and valued bringing a richness and synergy unavailable to authoritarian leadership (Graham, 1994; Covey, 1991).

It appears that the process of negotiation is vital in developing partnerships that work (Deer, 1992). In the first instance, partnerships imply consultation which may be either "passive" or "active" (Middleton, 1990). While passive consultation has its place, it appears that active forms are a major means of generating partnership between different groups. Secondly, partnerships also imply consultation that is respectful of the individuals involved (Covey, 1990). Both parties should appreciate the distinctive role and abilities of the other. In this way trust is built and influencing relationships may emerge (McArdle & Spry, 1996).

There also appears to be stages in the development of a partnership. In particular, five stages have been identified (Deer, 1992). These include:

1. Novice   2. Advanced   3. Competent

4. Proficient   5. Expert.

"Novice partners" are beginning to recognise the differences that exist in the roles and knowledge base of their partners. "Advanced partners" have some appreciation of sharing of wisdom and are prepared to accommodate expanded opportunities and unexpected insights. "Competent partners" are comfortable with new insights and new tasks. "Proficient partners" are active participants who have a wide experience of different ways of tackling unique situations. Finally, "expert partners" recognise an equal distribution of power. This is a true partnership as the "whole" of their decision

making represents much more than the sum of their individual contributions (Covey, 1990).

1. 3.   The Problem.

While many within Catholic Education acknowledge the desirability of a stronger parent-school partnership, others find this a "new and maybe unwelcome prospect" (Ryan, 1993). Underlying this concern is the problem of finding meaning in this change. If this innovation is to be successful, teachers, school administrators and parents need to find meaning in what should change and how to go about it.

As principal of one Catholic primary school in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, I have in recent times faced this problem of finding meaning. While I had philosophically accepted the need for a stronger form of partnership within my school - and in particular, that partnership should include parents who are considered poor within our society - I was unsure of just how to proceed. It seemed that an active and respectful consultation with parents would provide a direction for future leadership in the school.

1. 4.   The Purpose of the Study.

The purpose of this study is to strengthen parent-school partnerships within this Catholic school through a process of active and respectful consultation. In order to achieve this, the study has a threefold aim:

> \#   to investigate the concept of parent-school partnership as it is understood by a small group of parents in one Catholic primary school;

> \#   to identify the structures and procedures that either hinder or enable parents in their attempts to work in partnership with the school;

> \#   to establish some future directions that could assist leadership to further enhance parental partnership in a Catholic school.

1. 5.   The Context of the Study.

This research project is being carried out in a Systemic Catholic primary school, which for the purposes of this study will be known as St Faiths. St.Faith's has an enrolment of approximately 260 children in about 170 families, ten classroom teachers, a fully released principal and eight part-time ancillary or specialist staff. It has been established for fifty-four years and boasts several third generation students and many second generation ones. In recent years there has been a significant change in the composition of the parental body of the school because of increased real estate value in those properties around the school and proximate to water views. The socio-economic range of families at the school now encompasses the whole continuum of very poor to quite affluent. This has resulted in a degree of resentment and jealousy within the parent body. The wealthy are considered by some to be aloof and self righteous. The high profile, prestigious positions in the parent organisations, eg Chair of the School Board, and President of the Parents & Friends Association, are now mostly held by the more affluent parents, who usually have more time and greater community influence.

These parents sometimes appear to lack understanding of their less affluent counterparts and belittle their meagre efforts at support. Some of these families, who do contribute time and money to the best of their ability, complain that the more affluent are favoured by the school community because of their high profile.

This attitude was contrary to the spirit of the school's Mission Statement which identifies the shared vision of the school as valuing "...collaboration, interaction and mutual support, utilising the rich variety of each person's talents and interests." (Appendix 1).

In an attempt to rectify this problem the need for stronger parent-school partnerships was recognised in the ongoing Self Renewing Catholic Schools cycle.(1)   An initial step during 1994 was to acknowledge and celebrate those parents currently involved in any way, and a survey gathering this information was undertaken.

A multitude of activities and names of parents resulted. Photographs of some parents and children involved in these activities were displayed in a large photograph album together with the lists of names and activities gathered from parents. These great achievements were celebrated and the parent body was praised and thanked for their efforts.   The album was left in the foyer of the school where it is readily accessible to current and prospective parents and students.

Following this experience, it was decided to continue the renewal program in conjunction with this study. As researcher/principal, I identified the need for an active and respectful consultation with parents for the purpose of further strengthening parent-school partnerships.

1. 6.   Limitations of the Study.

This study acknowledges the chaotic nature of effective change (Gleick, 1987), the difficulty of establishing an effective community within the Catholic church structure at this present time of post-Vatican ecclesiology (Higgins, 1991; Hellwig, 1985) and the need to find authentic organisational models that can structure a community in such a way that all members recognise themselves as having "...equal worth, living from the Spirit, free children of God" (Duignan, 1996; Schillebeeckx, 1990, p.207). The scope of these acknowledged parameters together with the brief timeline which necessitates only sampling of parental opinion, are identifiable limitations.

(1)   S.R.C.S. is a school renewal program sponsored by Brisbane Catholic Education. It requires school communities to regularly review their practice and work systematically towards bringing about an improvement (Sultmann & Spry, 1994).

1. 7.   Design of the Thesis.

This study begins with an investigation of what parent-school partnership in education means to parents and how leadership of a Catholic school can enhance partnership. Chapter two reviews three areas of literature that impinge on this subject. It explores the evolving understanding of parental partnership in education, Catholic social justice issues and leadership styles that may enhance genuine partnership in authentically Catholic schools.

The third chapter is concerned with the design and methodology of the research project. The research design employs a case study approach with a general interview guide process within a qualitative paradigm of research.

The findings of the research are presented and analysed in narrative form in chapter four and chapter five reviews and synthesises the research, finishing with some suggested directions for ongoing development.

1. 8. Conclusion.

This study acknowledges the evolution of the understanding of the role of parents in Catholic education. In the period 1970 - 1996, the parental role has been variously understood in terms of involvement, participation and lately, partnership. The parent-school partnership is now defined as mutual respect based on sharing of power.

At the outset of this study the researcher identified the gap that existed between the rhetoric and the reality of the parent-school partnership. It became obvious that it was necessary to work towards an active, respectful consultation with parents in this particular Catholic primary school. This study would help the researcher and others to find meaning in this innovation. In addition it was expected that categories provided in the following literature review would assist further meaning making.

CHAPTER 2.   LITERATURE REVIEW.

2.1   Introduction.

The purpose of this study is to strengthen parent-school partnerships within this Catholic school through a process of active and respectful consultation. In order to achieve this, the study has a threefold aim:

    #   to investigate the concept of parent-school partnership as it is understood by a small group of parents in one Catholic primary school;

    #   to identify the structures and procedures that either hinder or enable parents in their attempts to work in partnership with the school;

    #   to establish some future directions that could assist leadership to further enhance parental partnership in a Catholic school.

The role of parents in children's' education has been a central, evolving theme in the literature since the 1970s when a new era of parental involvement in schools began and is here explored for partnership and what it means. In the 1960's the Second Vatican Council restated its theology in terms of community and participation, and the gathering of Bishops at Medellin reclaimed Christ's 'option for the poor' (Bokenhoffer, 1992; Dorr, 1983). As a result, the whole spectrum of Catholic education changed, bringing the theological perspectives of community and social justice into a new focus. These authoritative teachings of the Church foreshadowed the scholarly literature in the area of parental partnership and this forms the basis of the second theme examined. The third theme examined in this study is authentic leadership for Catholic schools, since a suitable leadership style is essential if genuine partnership is to be established and maintained.

Thus the three areas of Literature reviewed to inform this study are:

- Parent-School partnership - educational perspectives;
- Parent-School partnership - theological perspectives ; and
- Authentic leadership.

2. 2.   Parent-School Partnership - Educational Perspectives.

The understanding of the role of parents in the education of their children has changed dramatically during the last three decades.   From the late nineteenth century, when Government Education Acts excluded Church schools from funding, parents have commonly had some involvement in Catholic education because they were responsible for providing the physical resources of the school.   Fundraising was an essential element of this responsibility.   The schools were staffed by religious sisters and brothers who, while not paid a wage, had to be supported and were dependent even for their food on the vagaries of fundraising - "the major source of funds came from the laity who energetically raised money through fetes, dances, as well as making direct contributions."(Ryan & Sungaila, 1994, p.11; Fogarty, 1960, p.5).   At this stage however necessary the parents were to the school, they had little or no power in their children's education.

In the 1980's the concept of parent involvement evolved into a beginning understanding of parent participation, which sought to recognise and value the special role parents had because of both their unique knowledge of the unfolding development of their child and the variety of gifts and life skills they themselves enjoyed.   Soon parents and whole communities became aware of this evolving attitude and began to realise that the democracy which they knew to be their right could be a participative democracy as well as a representative one (Brehaut, 1981; Bremer, 1980; Hunt, 1980). Parents were no longer prepared to sit back and let

someone else act on their behalf. They wanted to know how best to participate in their children's education.

Throughout Australia, State governments, parent associations and teacher associations, each from their own perspective, began further investigation. Parental participation became such an important issue of good practice, that States **legislated** for parents and other community members to be involved in school decision-making (Loke, 1994; Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in W.A., 1984; Ministerial Paper No. 2, 1983; Schools Commission, 1981; Federation of P.& C., 1979). Educational authorities were obliged to require structures in schools that gave parents access to shared leadership.

Classroom teachers' previous understandings, which sought to bring parents along to meetings to 'remediate' them or to interest them in fundraising or maintenance activities (Finders & Lewis, 1994), began to recognise the increasingly wide variety of possible ways that parents could participate. This more enlightened view acknowledged parents' activities in both instructional and non instructional involvement ranging from coaching children in Key Learning Areas in the classroom through to regularly reading the school newsletter.

Unfortunately, in many instances, this produced little meaningful participation or sharing of power because some school authorities subverted the required participation through "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves, 1994; Middleton, 1990). In this way it was made to appear that parents had power to influence the decisions of the school, when in fact their activity was being administratively regulated into predictable forms. Power was still firmly established in school administration and the mandated collaboration brought only inflexibility and inefficiency (Hargreaves, 1994). In some cases, token participation was allowed to those middle-class parents who had the linguistic and social competencies required (Apple, 1979). Despite legislation, power was not shared in these communities and

it has been only in more recent times that the literature has identified and outlined many arguments to justify moving on to genuine partnership between schools and parents (Graham, 1994; Finders & Lewis, 1994; Treston, 1992; McGaw, 1992).

Even now, attitudes in the general educational community are slow to change and the literature of the 1990s continues to urge the professionals to reassess traditional views on parental participation, in order that new inclusive structures can be set up to empower parents to take their essential role as partners in the educational endeavour (Beare, 1995; Finders & Lewis, 1994; Graham, 1994). The professionals need not fear a loss of power or a demeaning of their own role in this process. Inherent in the understanding of the term 'partnership', is the awareness that each of the partners has an essential (if different), role and responsibility. Therefore each has some authority and power in the undertaking and the resulting synergy and richness of shared and enhanced wisdom, benefits everyone involved (Covey, 1991; McKinney 1987).

In 1994, when officially launching the International Year of the Family, the Prime Minister referred to partnerships between families, professional educators, communities and governments, highlighting the evolving understanding of the role of parents as they work with educators (Federation of P & F Associations Qld, 1996). Catholic education had long before been led into this understanding because of its basis in Gospel values and because of the influence of the Vatican ll documents which clearly named parents as being primarily and principally responsible for the education of their children (Vatican II, Gravissmum Educationis. 1965. Para 3).

2.3.   Parent-School Partnership - Theological Perspectives.

Post-Vatican II, a new ecclesiology projects an image of Church that is mobile - "a pilgrim people, in process of assembling as the people of God.: a seed of unity and hope and salvation for the world that is still growing" (Hellwig, 1985 p.18). This new Church is for everybody and is set in the context of all human history, relationships and responsibilities. It has a vital part to play in all matters relating to human living, especially ecology, poverty and social justice. The Council's theology of *communio*, and the "...call for greater collegiality in the church...(and)...the definition of the church as the 'people of God' " (Higgins, 1991, p. 67), were perhaps its greatest gifts to Catholic education. No longer an institution, the Catholic school was to become a community (The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, 1988, para 31). Further, this community dynamic was to be its identifying mark: "What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love" (Declaration on Christian Education, 1965, para 8)

Although the concept of partnership has emerged in education only in the last fifteen years or so, (as a further development of involvement and participation), it has been a theologically vital concept as old as the New Testament. The word used in the Gospel, 'Koinoinia' is usually translated 'community' but "...can equally be correctly translated as ... to be in partnership" (Graham, 1994, p.6). It clearly rejects the domination of any one group over another and is essentially imbeded in social justice, a relational justice which "...focuses especially on those who are on the margins of the covenanted community" (O'Keefe, 1995, p.31).

This does not mean that everybody in a school community has the same gifts and contributes equally. It does mean that the variety of gifts possessed by each individual is recognised and valued. By the sharing of individual wisdom a new and much greater collective wisdom is achieved (Covey, 1991; McKinney, 1987). How can individuals be valued and in what way can the wisdom of each be accessed? The answer to this problem can be found in an exploration of the renewed image of Church flowing out of Vatican II writings.

First of all consideration is given to the need to have schools that are specifically Catholic. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education leaves no doubt about this:

> ...the Catholic school has its place in any national school system." (Para 14) and "...the Church is absolutely convinced that the educational aims of the Catholic school in the world of today perform an essential and unique service ..." (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. 1977, Para 15) .

At the same time, unless the Catholic school is faithful to Gospel principles and reflects Vatican II's evolving participatory and communal emphasis, it loses credence as distinguishable from all other schools (Pejza, 1994.).

Post-Vatican II, our new ecclesiology projects an image of Church that is mobile - "a pilgrim people, in process of assembling as the people of God.: a seed of unity and hope and salvation for the world that is still growing" (Hellwig, 1985 p.18). This new Church is for everybody and is set in the context of all human history, relationships and responsibilities. It has a vital part to play in all matters relating to human living, especially ecology, poverty and social justice. The Christ of the Gospels becomes the core and essence of this Church which seeks a participative 'People of God" model (Treston, 1990) and desires to recapture Christ's option for the poor.

The concept of 'option for the poor' is relatively new for the modern Church. In Medieval times, the Church strongly supported the 'status quo' of the culture, expecting of its children, obedience and passive acceptance of their 'station in life' (Bokenhoffer, 1992). Although the Enlightenment began to cultivate an understanding of individual value, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the Church began to develop its theology of Liberation. Following the Second Vatican Council, the lead was taken by the Bishops of South America at Medellin.

> Medellin gave inspiration to committed Christians all over the world. The Vatican itself was deeply affected by Medellin and its aftermath. The major documents concerned with social justice issued by Rome in the following decade, have to be understood as being at least partly a reaction to all that is represented by Medellin...(Dorr, 1983, p.158)

Using four headings, Medellin presented the challenge of swinging away from alignment with the rich and powerful, back to the solidarity with the poor that Christ modelled (Dorr, 1983; Bokenhoffer, 1992):

1.   **Structural Injustice:** which deplores those structures, built up over the years, that permit and even contribute to the alienation of the fringe dwellers.

2.   **A Poor Church:** that denounces material poverty as an evil; that practises an attitude of spiritual poverty and gives effective preference to the poorest sector.

3.   **Conscientisation:** that educates the masses of ordinary people to an awakening to their own rights and dignity.

4.   **Struggle for Liberation:** liberation is used with the connotation of humanisation, and even the need for solidarity with those suffering injustice and oppression.

(Dorr,1983, p.158)

Option for the Poor is underpinned by Scripture (eg Lk16:19; Mk 10:17) - and the very style of life of the Christ who showed a preference for the ordinary people - the least influential (Nolan, 1976).

Clearly showing a preference for the poor and least accepted, presents a challenge for Catholic Schools. The Council's theology of *communio*, and the "...call for greater collegiality in the church...(and)...the definition of the church as the 'people

of God' " (Higgins, 1991, p. 67), were perhaps its greatest gifts to Catholic education. No longer an institution, the Catholic school was to become a participative community (The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, 1988, para 31). Further, this community dynamic was to be its identifying mark: "What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love" (Declaration on Christian Education, 1965, para 8). Such a climate not only values each individual despite socio-economic standing, but actually practises an option for the poor and those on the periphery of the community for whatever reason.

To establish this climate a Catholic school would need to establish a leadership that could move beyond political-historical models (Foster, 1989) and bureaucratic-managerial models (Rost, 1989) to a model that could enable genuine partnership.

2.4. Authentic Leadership

The concept of partnership does not sit well with authoritarianism or domination leadership. The evolving leadership models of the two groups mentioned above, while contributing to the concept of leadership (Burns, 1978), assumed domination leadership in which the contribution of the followers was minimised and the complex human dynamics occurring in leadership relationships was largely ignored. Further development identified the discrete elements of management skills and leadership skills which for the purposes of this project can be understood in Covey's terms (1990 p.101) as: "Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall." Leadership in this sense requires not only appropriate managerial skills but also the ability to inspire a group to reach out to a dynamic mutual vision (Rost, 1989).

The transformational leader is one who can identify with the followers, who can take his/her place beside them, understand their problems and build such a relationship with them that the followers are inspired to reach out to higher achievement (Kelly, 1990). This leader is prepared to interact with parents and other community members so as to discover their needs and desires and to move beyond the manipulative interaction of transactional leadership to a desire to transform the needs of all, "...to raise them to a different and higher level." (Foster, 1986). Leaders see beyond conventional boundaries and "... breathe life into what are the hopes and dreams of others. ... Leaders get others to buy into their dreams by showing how all will be served by a common purpose" (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p.9-10). Such a leader would need to establish a management style that permitted openness and inclusion.

The chaos theory of management recognises our interdependence and interconnectedness with others, and the nature of dialectical change. A management style operating out of this theory can view the giftedness of parents as an enormous pool of small fluctuations from which change, in line with the overarching vision, can be encouraged to grow. The 'butterfly effect' will ensure escalating change for the parents, pupils and the whole school (Sungaila, 1990; Gleick, 1987). Within the Chaotic model, the elements of management (policy-making, planning, personnel development, budgeting, supervision, mentoring and review) can be transformed. Under the guidance of the leader these elements can reflect the vision, and value the wisdom of each person in the school community (McKinney, 1987).

By thus valuing parents and building strong and creative relationships with them, the leader can join with the community in a joint seeking of the truth (Duignan, 1996; Jansen, 1995; Burns, 1978). Often this will release a synergy (Covey, 1991) that surpasses the individual expectations of both the leader and the followers.

To be fitting for a Catholic school, an authentic leadership model needs to be centred on Christ, since "Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school." (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, Para 34).   An examination of the scriptural model of Jesus reveals leadership as Criticising, as Energising, as Community and as Service.

2. 4. 1.   Leadership as Criticising.

Christ's leadership did not re-affirm the status quo of religious leadership of the time.   Rather he modelled a revolutionary partnership that is still the central focus of all Christian religions two thousand years after his death.   His leadership revised the understanding of the Old Testament in which the powerful 'senior partner' of the covenant was characterised by " ...kingship, priesthood, prophecy and wisdom" (Wainwright, 1990, p.50).   Jesus revealed a new relationship of filial love and stepped outside the boundaries of his culture in several ways, eg. by calling God 'Father' (Mt 6:9);   and beyond the social boundaries of his time especially by closely associating with, even eating with, tax collectors and sinners (Mk 2:15). His healing and inclusive ways critiqued the social and religious structures of control (Wainwright, 1990).   As a result those who were benefiting from these structures schemed against him (Mk 11:18).   He consistently put aside the prestige and trappings of power and directed his healing powers towards those who were despised (Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, 1995).

This criticising aspect of Jesus' leadership highlights two major issues:
- his compassion was for the disempowered and marginalised; and
- standing with these 'little ones' against the controlling power of the time, brought him suffering and death.

An authentic leader who endeavours to follow such a leadership model and establish a Christian ethos that criticises the culture of our times would need a great deal of courage. Further study of Christ will reveal his source of courage and energy.

2. 4. 2.   Leadership as Energising.

Christ's dynamic awareness of the loving presence of his Father was vital to all he did and said. To the sick, the maimed and the possessed, Christ showed the energising power of faith and love (Mt. 8: 28-32; Mk. 1: 39; 2: 23-26). He gathered a new community who could live by the new vision. They were the lame (Mt 9:1), the lepers (Lk 17:11), the deaf and dumb (Mk 7: 31), tax collectors (Mt 9: 9), women (Lk 8:1) and sinners (Lk 7: 36-38). The energy of Christ's vision touched them in their misery and showed them the presence of God in their midst (Mt 4: 17). For equity of inclusion of the poor and marginalised in today's society, Catholic school leaders, following Christ, need to seek them out, build relationships that will form them into a community and walk with them in such a way as to represent the love of God in their midst.

2. 4. 3.   Leadership as Community.

The essence of Christ's style of leading, and the core of the newly found church he left behind, was community. The relationships he chose were those of friendship rather that master-servant:

> No longer do I call you servant, for the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends for all that I heard from my Father I have made known to you (Jn 15: 15)

Using a participatory style, he transformed his disciples and empowered them beyond human capabilities, sending them out with power to cure illness, heal leprosy and drive out demons (Mt 10: 8).

Jesus gathered a community from the fringe dwellers of his day - the poor, the tax collectors, women and sinners (Mt 5:1; Lk 5:1). The ordinary people followed

him, crowding around him, bringing their sick, and longing for his words of healing and wisdom. Even when he was tired and apparently lacking the resources to help them, he would not turn them away (Mt 14: 14; 15:30). Throughout his life, Christ modelled relational community with participatory leadership. By his compassion and untiring efforts he taught his new rule of service.

2. 4. 4.   Leadership as Service.

The communal dimension of Christ's leadership was based on the principle of service. He lived among his people as the one who serves, and who has like expectations of his followers (Mk 10: 42-45). At his Last Supper, Jesus taught this in both word and action when he washed the feet of his apostles and told them: "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also must wash one another's feet. I have just given you an example that as I have done, you also may do" (Jn, 13: 12-15). If a leader could serve school community fringe dwellers in this way, the transformation would become evident.

2. 5.   Conclusion.

The focus of this study, parent-school partnership, necessitated a threefold review of the literature. In particular, three areas of the literature were studied. These were:

- . Parent-School partnership - educational perspectives;
- . Parent-School partnership - theological perspectives ; and
- . Authentic leadership.

This review identified the evolution of the role of parents in education from involvement through participation to partnership. It also identified a number of themes that were considered helpful in understanding how the researcher, as principal in one Catholic primary school, should go about making the vision of parent-school partnership a reality. This understanding also helped the researcher in formulating the design of this study.

CHAPTER 3.   RESEARCH DESIGN.

3. 1.   Introduction.

At the outset of this study it was assumed that the worth of a research methodology would be established by reference to the phenomenon that it sought to comprehend and the understanding it aspired to develop. In other words, the design should accommodate the purpose and aims of this specific study:

   #   to investigate the concept of parent-school partnership as it is

           understood by a small group of parents in one Catholic primary

           school;

   #   to identify the structures and procedures that either hinder or enable

           parents in their attempts to work in partnership with the school;

   #   to establish some future directions that could assist leadership to

           further enhance parental partnership in a Catholic school.

The study was designed to enable the researcher to investigate the concept of parent-school partnership as it is understood by parents and to identify the structures they believed, were enhancing and inhibiting this partnership. It was hoped that the information thus obtained would form the basis of future change and renewal. The research project has been designed using what was considered the most appropriate methodological framework - case study.

3. 2.   The Methodological Framework.

A case study is a detailed examination of a single subject, group or phenomenon which provides insight into a particular research concern (Burns, 1994; Wilson, 1979; Stake, 1976). Its process is suggested for naturalistic and discrete study within a real life context especially when it is desired to retain the holistic and

meaningful characteristics of the situation. This process is particularly useful when one desires to investigate how people know and understand concepts in everyday life (Burns, 1994).

Two of the important principles of Case Study, validity and reliability, need to be addressed carefully to ensure the authenticity of the study (Smith & Heshusius, 1986). Reliability can be strengthened through the use of multiple sources and validity can be established through triangulation, which allows feedback of the information gathered, in order to achieve the participants' recognition and confirmation of its veracity.

Because this project sought to understand what meaning partnership holds for parents it seemed from the literature that a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach would be most effective (Batchelor & Maxwell, 1987; Kemmis, 1980; Parlett & Hamilton, 1977). The specific qualitative method used was case study, since it permitted information to be gathered directly from individuals in the natural environment of school life. Thus the study of parental interactions and attitudes within the characteristics of a Catholic school setting was possible (Leedy, 1985).

Case studies are sometimes considered conservative in that they provide only a snapshot of a tenuous, fluid situation (Walker, 1983). However, in this case a snapshot of the current situation was most appropriate. The study was intended to provide leadership with an understanding that could facilitate the building of a communal vision and future administrative structures that could enhance parental partnership. A snapshot of what was currently happening, from a parent's perspective, was exactly what was needed. Case study was considered the most appropriate approach since it gave parents an informal opportunity to express their understandings and opinions in their own way.

3. 3. The Description of the Story.

3. 3. 1.   The Interview Technique.

The process used for gathering this information was interview since a face to face verbal exchange allowed for free expression of ideas and gave the participants a chance to shape the content of the interview. The literature acknowledges three approaches to qualitative interviewing:

· the informal conversational interview,

· the general interview guide approach, and

· the standardised open-ended interview.   (Patton, 1990, p.280)

For this project the general interview guide approach was used since it permitted a degree of freedom, flexibility and spontaneity while at the same time allowing the researcher to collect data around common themes and to constantly compare data for snow balling and for exceptions (Cohen & Manion, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Seven questions were used; the first two to assist the respondent to relax thus permitting a flow of ideas, and the remaining five as an aid in guiding the data flow in those channels being researched (See Appendix 2).

3. 3. 2.   Participants.

It would not be practical to interview all the parents in the school community, so in this study, six parents were interviewed thus ensuring a satisfactory degree of reliability and reducing possible bias or distortion. These six participants were selected from those expressing a willingness to take part in the research. A range of family circumstances was considered in order to spread opinion. Thus of the interviewees, one was a young single mother; while another was a mother of five, married for twenty years and in comfortable circumstances. A third was a mother of six who does not work and depends on the income of a sickly husband who

works only intermittently. A young modern working wife and mum with two children was interviewed as was a mother of two who supports her husband in a struggling small business. The last, a deserted wife with four teenagers, takes in ironing to make ends meet.

Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms. To ensure validity an independent validator who was known to the participants met individually with the six parents to reflect back to them the tenor of the information gathered, for their recognition and approval.

3. 3. 3.   Description of the Study.

These six parents took part in individual interview situations with the researcher. Notes were taken during the interview, which was guided by set questions allowing for individual differences in response and for spontaneity in form. Following the interviews, the notes were written up and interpreted, with the identity of the parent protected by pseudonym.

After the interview stage, this interpretation was checked with the parents by a validator to ensure no misinterpretation had occurred. Following this the project was further analysed and written up, with the hope that the findings would have the potential of application across a broad spectrum of Catholic schools.

3. 3. 4.   The Investigator.

The case study investigator required the ability to formulate relevant guiding questions, the skills of a good listener, the ability to be adaptive and flexible and the integrity to exclude personal bias in interpreting the evidence (Burns, 1994). To create an informal climate for the interview, the researcher needed to have a relationship of trust with the participants. In this study the investigator was also the principal of the school who was well-known and trusted by those parents taking

part. She required special expertise in reassuring the participants and isolating the study from all other areas of relationship with them, so that there was little danger of receiving supposedly desired answers rather than genuine opinion and experience. The researcher was careful to offer the invitation to participate and then to explain in detail to those who volunteered, the reason for the study and its isolation from the daily life of the school.

It was also recognised that an independent validator could ensure the data collected, accurately reflected what the participants intended as their views. In this case the validator was also a parent who was known to the participants and trusted by them. She met with each one and reviewed the accuracy of the collated data.

3. 3. 5.   The Timeline.

Since this was a short research project the timeline was curtailed to one year and only two interviews with each participant was necessary - one to gather information and one for the validator to feed back the information gathered. However, had the investigator sensed an incompleteness due to this constraint a further interview would have been negotiated with the participants.

3. 3. 6.   Methods Of Analysis.

In this study data collection and analysis were not two discrete activities. Rather, in the style of Bogdan and Biklen (1982), they were intertwined with each adding to the other throughout the collection and analysis phases of the study. Patterns began to emerge with the second participant and so organisation into themes began. These in turn formed the basis of categorisation and synthesis (Stainback & Stainback, 1984).

3. 4.   Validity and Reliability.

In qualitative research, which usually focuses on phenomena rather than on the tabulation of frequencies of events or behaviours, valid and reliable results can be problematic (Wiersma, 1991). However, the application of good methodology, for example open access to data, consistency in the application of interpretation processes and triangulation to check with participants the reliability of the interpretation, can produce valid results suitable for generalisation.

The methodology used in this study included participation by free choice with the participants willingly giving their opinions in a relaxed and friendly setting. The researcher did not begin with a hypothesis but gradually formulated one as certain themes emerged from the data collected. Since case studies are focused on circumstantial uniqueness and aim at expanding theories rather then providing statistical generalisation (Burns, 1984), the researcher developed the themes that began to emerge from the interviews. As well as the themes being consistent across the range of respondents, they can be seen as applicable to other Catholic schools of similar size and circumstance and can thus be considered valid.

In this study, researcher-subject triangulation was used to enhance the accuracy and validity of the data collected (Cohen & Manion, 1989). This triangulation method involved cross checking the meaning of the data with the respondents by an independent validator which permitted reasonable confidence in the validity of the following findings.

3. 5.   Conclusion

This case study seeks to illumine the phenomenon of parent-school partnership at one Catholic primary school. It particularly focuses on the parental perspectives of this partnership.   Case study was a logical choice since it gave parents an opportunity to talk about this important issue in their own words and in an informal way. Data collection and analysis were intertwined with emerging patterns being organised into themes which then became the basis of categorisation and synthesis (See Appendix 3).   They could also stimulate broad discussion and a deeper understanding of current parental perspectives of the inhibiting and enhancing elements that they encounter as partners in their children's education. The use of this methodology enhanced the possibility of the findings being applicable to other schools of similar size and circumstance.

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS.

4. 1. Introduction.

This study was designed to strengthen parent-school partnerships within a Catholic primary school through a process of active and respectful consultation. In order to achieve this, the study had a threefold aim:

to investigate the concept of parent-school partnership as it is understood by a small group of parents in one Catholic primary school;

to identify the structures and procedures that either hinder or enable parents in their attempts to work in partnership with the school;

to establish some future directions that could assist leadership to further enhance parental partnership in a Catholic school.

Three areas of Literature were reviewed to inform this study. They were:

.   Parent-School partnership - educational perspectives;

.   Parent-School partnership - theological perspectives ; and

.   Authentic leadership.

Because this study put particular emphasis on the meaning parent-school partnership holds for parents, the case study methodology was used and parents were able to informally express their understandings and opinions in the natural environment of school life. Parents were thus given the opportunity to identify the structures and procedures that either hinder or enable them in their attempts to work in partnership with the school and to suggest some future directions that could assist authentic leadership to further enhance parent-school partnership. As a result of this study a number of themes emerged.

4. 2. . Emerging themes.

As respondents were interviewed, notes were taken using a pseudonym for each person and for the school. The notes were re-written and analysed later. For each respondent, one or more main themes emerged. 'Amy' for example, seemed to see everything in terms of equal acceptance for everyone, while 'Jane' returned again and again to difficulties caused by financial constraints: "Young families out there are really hurting, yet every time a letter comes home from school it includes a request for money."

Some of the main themes were common to two or more respondents and these themes were gradually identified and used as a framework for analysis (See Appendix 4). The recurrence of these themes added to the credibility of the information gathered. In order to assure the validity of the data these themes were checked by a validator with the respondents, to reflect both the accuracy and the scope of the information gathered.

4. 2. 1.   Theme 1. Parents' Understanding of Partnership.

The first theme that emerged showed that parents, together with Finders & Lewis (1994), understood partnership best in terms of supporting their children at home. This could take many forms. For Susan, a mother of five school-age children attending four different schools, reading the newsletter to keep track of the 'social' requirements the child would have in the coming weeks, was an essential and practical way to be a partner. The child could thus be assured of being prepared for excursions, returning raffle tickets etc., and Susan could arrange to attend important assemblies, meetings and so on. For 'Jenny', a young single mum, reading the newsletter also represented partnership as helping at home, because it proved her only consistent contact with the school since the workload she carries and the difficulty she has bringing up her son alone, seriously hamper more extensive

interaction with the school. She explained that a parent in her position could not be active around the school but still wanted to be part of the community and to know what was going on.

Jane, on the other hand, cited helping at home with homework and with attitude towards school, as important aspects of partnership. Working slowly and consistently to solve a problem which made it difficult for a child to like school, both empowered the child and gave the mum a real sense of being a worthwhile partner in education. Without knowing it, this Mum was citing the chaotic 'butterfly effect' described by Gleick (1987), because she considered that using little homework problems, or social situations to enthuse her son, would eventually impact on his academic attitude and ability. It showed also an insightful awareness that although this assistance could not take the place of teaching at school, it was none-the-less valuable in the overall educational enterprise. Ann listed helping her child at home with homework and with social concerns as the best ways for parents to be involved although she saw the amount of academic assistance she could give to be limited because of changed methodology: "Things have changed so much that when I show her how to do something now, she says 'No Mum! That's not the right way to do it!' It's really difficult to know what to do." Perhaps one implication for future investigation could be (as suggested by Ann) the provision of education sessions in current methodology to assist parents.

In each of these five cases, the parent seemed to have a clear, if instinctive understanding that her role was equal in importance to, and quite different from, the role of the school, since no teacher could do what the parent at home could do. This was a surprisingly high correlation to the concept in the literature that partnership stems from the unique role of each partner (Fullan, 1982; Brown et al, 1987).

All of the six respondents recognised the importance of helping teachers in the classroom with curriculum matters but three stated categorically that parents should not interfere with the teacher's freedom to teach in her preferred style. "It's good to help the teacher in the classroom but parents shouldn't be trying to tell the teacher what to do". While this attitude reflected the belief that the teacher was the 'professional' and therefore the best educator, it did not seem to imply that parents did not have a role: "It's great for parents to go into class to help the teacher, but they should always do what they're told and not interfere." It did again reinforce the parents' inherent understanding that each partner had different roles and different gifts. These responses also reflected both McKinney (1987) and Covey's (1991) concepts of shared wisdom which when working together result in greater achievement than the sum of both working independently.

"Listening to reading" for the younger students was a popular suggestion for entering into partnership and all seemed to recognise the importance of this to the child and the great assistance this provided to the teacher. In this the respondents were unsuspectingly confirming research quoted by Fullan (1991) in which it was found that "greater number of parent visits to the classroom ... were associated with higher levels of reading progress" (p. 229). 'Ann' again expressed concern that, in this and in other tasks in curriculum, parents feel insecure because school has changed dramatically and the parents' way of working in some curriculum areas is no longer the 'approved' way. Past experiences of poor achievement at school seemed to colour her perceived ability to cope with this difference. In this she reflected the findings of Finders & Lewis, (1994), which named personal experiences of schooling high on the list of "barriers that hinder some parents from participating in their child's education". (p.50).

It was an interesting aberration to the legislation of the eighties, (requiring schools to structure parental access to shared decision-making), that not one of the

respondents suggested that parents should have a role in decision making for the school. The only time the discussion even remotely touched on the topic was when the three parents mentioned above were particular that parents helping in the classroom should **not** tell the classroom teacher what to do. This omission was the more surprising since St Faith's has an active and effective School Board.

4. 2. 2.   Theme 2.   Community.

Except for the concern of two participants that the poorer parents might sometimes feel alienated, all took for granted that the parent body formed an important part of the school community: "There are lots of parents who help all the time". However, it was interesting that only one parent, Amy, made mention of the school community being part of the Parish community despite all the respondents readily recognising the administration and teachers as important in the educational scheme. This underscores a poor perception of the parish partnership about which Graham (1994) writes.

When asked the ways in which the school enhanced parents' opportunity to enter into partnership, all respondents made mention of the school climate. All six parents saw the necessity for a school to be open and welcoming, and expressed appreciation that such was the case in this school. Yet two respondents were concerned that not every family received equal treatment. One respondent clearly reflected the danger that less affluent families could feel alienated by their inability to take part in some of the social functions of the school community because of the cost.   Amy showed concern that some families (the upwardly mobile ones) considered their efforts at helping the school to be of more importance than the efforts of the poorer families. Without using the term, Susan identified a 'fringe element' in the parent body, who do not help because they are not made to feel

comfortable in some circumstances with the more affluent parents. It is not surprising to find this attitude in a culture that pays scant attention to the Medellin cry for an option for the poor. The recent injection of affluent families into a community of struggling young families has naturally inspired their hopes to centre on consumer riches such as luxurious homes, expensive cars and beautiful clothes. Dorr's (1983) description of an attitude of spiritual poverty that gives effective preference to the poor is sadly lacking in this environment.

Echoing O'Keefe (1995), Graham (1994) and Dorr (1983), Amy stated her belief that every person is gifted and that our community would be the richer if the efforts of all were equally accepted and valued. This concept of shared wisdom (McKinney 1987), also drew the attention of 'Cathy' who was concerned that although by far the majority of parents were welcomed and greeted, a few might feel isolated. 'Cathy' saw the school as friendly and the administration and teachers as happy to assist willingly and openly yet thought that some parents formed cliques and did not welcome others into close friendship: "The teachers and the office are fine and always welcome me and are ready to talk to me, but some of the parents are too friendly with their own group and ignore me." Susan had a similar comment -" The teachers are very approachable but some of the parents make you feel useless."

These social justice issues must raise concerns about the genuinely inclusive nature of the school community and the respondents' protestations that the school communicated well with parents might need further professional scrutiny.

4. 2. 3.   Theme 3.   Ways to Improve.

The respondents were asked to identify any procedures which might be inhibiting the partnership with parents and to make suggestions about initiatives leadership

might make in order to enhance ongoing and future partnership. The following four suggestions were each put by at least two parents.

Communication.

The first was a request to continue to value and take pains with communication. The newsletter is greatly appreciated and, for at least one respondent, is very important as a means of keeping in touch. Willingly structuring parent group and individual meetings to openly discuss problems was welcomed as it was thought that parents who did not have easy access to the principal and to classroom teachers would feel devalued and would take their child elsewhere. Both Ann and Jenny commented that: "If a principal and teacher won't listen to parents, they'll just go away". It is valued that teachers are usually open and friendly in their discussions with parents - "Here, we can talk to teachers and have a laugh with them. They're always friendly and willing to listen." By continuing to highlight communication and develop relationships with parents, the school administrators will be tending towards transformational leadership (Burns, 1987) and showing a willingness to admit parents as partners who are capable of influencing the dialogue and contributing to the life of the school (Starratt, 1986).

Welcoming School Climate.

While the respondents volunteered the school climate as a strength of the school, they seemed to attach the concept to the effort the school staff invest in decreasing bullying and exclusion and in welcoming new students and families. Cathy and Ann did not appear to identify parental cliques and exclusion with school climate, nor to support the researched belief that parents who consider themselves to be of a lower social class and excluded on this account, experience a strong barrier to partnership with the school (Sallis, 1988; Jowett & Baginski, 1991; Smith, 1993; Finders & Lewis, 1994).

Valuing Every Individual's Best Effort.

Jane spoke quite strongly about the need for the principal to encourage all parents to help a little and to reassure parents that 'like the widow's mite', whatever they contribute, great or small, it would be graciously accepted. She believed that everyone should contribute from their strength and being a good sportswoman, she coaches a sports team for the school. Jenny hoped we could reassure parents that their help would be welcomed and encourage everyone to do their part for the whole school. Those who could not come to the school could concentrate on non-instructional aspects of partnership and be shown the importance of their efforts. Ann identified helping with being accepted. "If a parent knows that even if she can only do a little and that will still be appreciated, it won't matter that other wealthier parents can do more. . . just a word of thanks makes one feel their effort is important and they will do the same again when they can." All three responses reflect the style of the Scriptural Christ as he choose his disciples from the throng of ordinary people, accepting them for what they were (Mt. 9:9).

Allowing for Socio-economic Disadvantage.

This fourth theme highlights the challenge to leaders of Catholic schools and Systems to "be part of the human face of the Church in supporting the weak and suffering" (Degenhardt, 1996). Most of the respondents alluded in some way to the problem of socio-economic disadvantage. Susan asked that special mention be made of parents' roles because "...when you're new, you don't really know what is expected of you. If you can't afford to do what some others are doing you stop trying!"

Jenny talked openly about the difficulty she experienced because of lack of finance. "It's very difficult when you just have no extra money. It's good to be told that you're not expected to be part of **everything** - but should just do what you can". These words would be very telling for a transformative leader. Not only do they

demand an ability to identify with the follower but also inspire the leader to compassionate service (Edwards, 1987). To increase a parent's self-esteem by acknowledging as important the little she can do, is to empower the parent as partner in the educational enterprise.

Ann made no secret of her inability to assist the school financially but seemed convinced that her assistance at home was important to the school and that for this reason the school needed to assist parents by instructing them in the new methods of teaching. "Some parents can't help with money but do their best with homework and the children's attitude. The trouble is the way you do things has changed and that makes parents feel insecure "... to have classes showing parents how things are done would be good." This is clearly a suggestion for greater empowerment of parents and even if 'classes for parents' may be only part of the solution, it highlights a problem for a transformative leader to address with the whole community.

4. 3. Conclusion.

The themes that emerged as a result of this study provide an insightful understanding of partnership in which the parents' role was both indispensable and different from that of the teachers. While the respondents perceived St Faith's to have an open and accepting climate, there was some concern that socio-economic differences in the parent body led, in some cases, to less affluent families being excluded from groups of more affluent families. In suggesting areas for leadership to concentrate efforts in order to enhance partnership, the respondents identified: ongoing development of channels of communication; the need for continued pursuit of an open and inclusive community; emphasis placed on the grateful acceptance and encouragement of all the efforts of all parents whether affluent or not; and a sensitivity to the financial burden carried by some families.

CHAPTER 5.   REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS.

5.1   Introduction.

The purpose of this study was to strengthen the parent-school partnership within a Catholic primary school through a process of active and respectful consultation. In order to achieve this, the study had a threefold aim:

 #   to investigate the concept of parent-school partnership as it is understood by a small group of parents in one Catholic primary school;

 #   to identify the structures and procedures that either hinder or enable parents in their attempts to work in partnership with the school;

 #   to establish some future directions that could assist leadership to further enhance parental partnership in a Catholic school.

To guide this purpose, three main areas of the literature were investigated:

 .   Parent-School partnership - educational perspectives;

 .   Parent-School partnership - theological perspectives ; and

 .   Authentic leadership.

The research was designed around a case study of six parents using a guided interview technique in order to provide a relaxed environment permitting parents to be reflective, open and honest in their responses.   Parents knew their identities would be protected and they voluntarily and happily participated so there is every reason to believe that the design of the research achieved its purpose.

5. 2.   The Research Questions Answered.

The information gathered from the respondents was analysed into themes and these were checked by an independent validator with the participants to ensure reliability and validity. As indicated in 4.3 above, the parents interviewed displayed a secure and insightful understanding of their partnership role in the education of their children. From their parenting role, the participants seemed to have intuited a clear and practical awareness that the many ways they help at home and in the classroom make them indispensable in the educational enterprise. This awareness is contrary to the research discussed in Finders & Lewis (1994) where most parents interviewed did *not* see themselves as important in the educational process. By the same token one could expect that the last two decades of evolution of the role of parents in education could be beginning to influence the ordinary parents in the perception of their role (Duignan, 1996; Beare, 1994; Fullan, 1982). The concept of partners being equal in worth but having different roles as explained by Graham (1994), Beare (1994), Whitehead & Whitehead (1991) and Fullan & Stiegelbauer (1982), did not seem to present any problem to these parents.

The literature paints a picture of the leadership style of Christ for the imitation of leaders in Catholic schools. It would be expected that such a style would enhance parents' self-esteem and ability to become partners in their children's' education. Four Scriptural models were identified in this study - criticising, energising, community and service. In their responses the parents clearly expected community and service. Christ's option for the poor did not manifest itself but there was a strong expectation that the school community should be inclusive and that everyone has a right to equal acceptance. The servant leadership style of teachers and administration was obviously appreciated but also quite definitely expected. Parents

seemed to understand that if a school staff was not prepared to listen to parents the easy option was to go to another school.

The four themes suggested by parents to assist in setting future directions again indicated a well-developed concept of the importance of the parental role in education. The fact that the parents understood the value of open and inclusive community (O'Keefe, 1995; Covey, 1991; McKinney, 1987 and Foster, 1986) would indicate an awareness of each individual's worth. However, the next step of giving preference to the poor did not seem to be a burning issue for the parents.

5. 3. The Conclusions of the Study.

As a result of this research project, it has become obvious that the following future directions would ensure worthwhile renewal and enhanced parental partnership in St. Faith's:

* The principal, as a transformative leader, could seek to identify with the parents, regardless of their socio-economic status in order to tap into their wisdom and to better formulate a common vision. Particular attention could be given to structuring increased channels of communication - eg. improved newsletters, informal meetings and 'methodology classes'.

* Parents do have a secure, if instinctive understanding of their role in educational partnership and would probably benefit from some inservice in extending their influence and formalising their partnership in education.

* Readings and discussions for parents based on Vatican II documents relating to Christ's option for the poor and on McKinney's 'shared

wisdom' might begin to relieve the exclusion experienced by some 'fringe' families.

* The grateful acknowledgment of every effort, no matter how small, from every parent, would affirm and encourage partnership and enhance the possibility of increased awareness of partnership.

* An increased awareness of those families suffering from financial constraints accompanied by compassion and sensitivity could be a modelling of 'option for the poor' and of Christ's servant leadership.

In conclusion, it can be argued that this study has achieved its purpose. Even though it has been designed for a limited area of concern in a small Catholic school, it could be shown that other schools of similar size and in similar circumstances could benefit from these findings or at least be inspired to investigate their own parental understandings of partnership in the educational enterprise.

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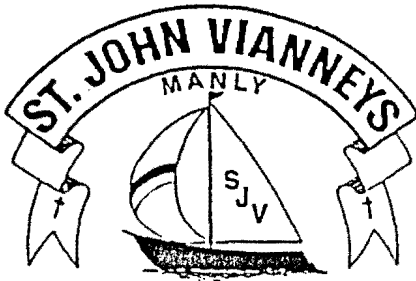
In GOD We Trust

MISSION STATEMENT

St. John Vianney's is a Catholic School Community

which aims to foster an environment based on the

values of Christ, especially kindness for each other,

compassion for the needs of all and the celebration

of individual differences.

In a spirit of openness, respect and trust, each member

of the school community is encouraged to develop to

his/her fullest potential through collaboration,

interaction and mutual support, utilising the rich

variety of each person's talents and interests.
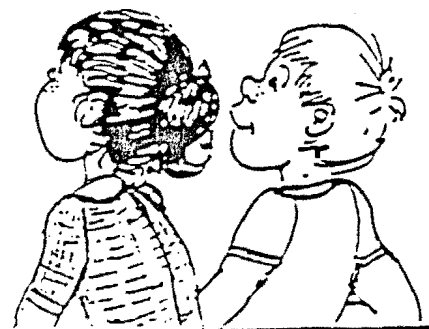
APPENDIX 2.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INTERVIEWS.

1.   Can you recall memories of your own years at primary school and tell me about the happy and the unhappy times?

2.   Were your parents involved in your schooling?

3.   Do you believe parents in this day and age should endeavour to be involved in the education of their children? And how best do you think this involvement can be achieved?

4.   Would you be able to describe any current participation in the education of your child/children that you see as really worthwhile? Are there any other participatory activities that you would like to take on?

5.   In what way do you see the school inhibiting this involvement? Are there any set administrative processes that make you feel your contribution is unappreciated or is peripheral only?

6.   In what way do you see the school enhancing this involvement or encouraging further participation? Can you identify any administrative processes that have fostered or encouraged your participation?

7.   Do you have any suggestions for additional processes or procedures that the school could initiate in order to further support parents in partnership for their child/children's education.

APPENDIX 3.

COMMON THEMES IN RESPONSES.

Parents understand partnership in terms of helping their children at home and working with the teacher at school without interfering in the teacher's role.

Parents are happy with the open and welcoming community environment but are concerned that not all parents are welcomed equally or that all efforts receive equal gratitude.

Areas to be addressed by leadership are seen as:
* continuing to develop lines of communication;
* continuing to enhance the open and welcoming climate of the school;
* encourage all parents to help in whatever way they can, even if it is only a little;
* value the efforts of all parents.
* be more sensitive to the financial difficulties which some parents experience;

Appendix 4.

RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.

EMERGING THEMES.   RESPONDENT:

Parents understand partnership in terms of

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
helping their children at home	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
helping in the classroom without interfering in the teacher's role	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

The school is considered open and welcoming, however attention must be given to:

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
welcoming all parents equally	✓	✓		✓		
gratefully accepting all efforts to help			✓	✓	✓	

The following are areas for leadership focus:

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
continue to develop effective lines of communication.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
enhance and further develop welcoming school climate.	✓		✓			✓
encourage all to help as best they can.	✓	✓	✓			
value the efforts of all parents.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
be more sensitive to families with financial difficulties.		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓