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Dialogues with Students, Parents and

Educators about Parent Involvement at the

Secondary Level

by

Shelley Robinson

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"The closer the parent is to the education of the child,
the greater the impact on child development
and educational achievement."

Michael Fullan

Abstract

In response to the call from Alberta Learning for parent involvement (Alberta Learning Program of Studies, 1999), schools are considering how to effectively involve families. In a pluralistic society where educational values differ, the "educational community" benefits from asking what successful educational "support" and "involvement" look like, according to whom and on what basis. Such close-up narratives allow educators to better understand how to proceed in collaborative partnerships with students and parents.

This study asks the following: How does involvement look and feel to students, parents and educators? And as a result of this reflexivity, what can be deemed to be the essence of a home and school relationship that most effectively supports students and curriculum? A high school educational community was interviewed including seven involved parents as defined by Epstein et. al. (1997), their seven children, and seven teachers. The paper also involves other educational voices from this school division.

These interactions have been analysed to discover patterns and differences to identify the relationship between home and school variables, and challenge or support the existing research on parent involvement. The responses in this study vary most dramatically when the participants talk about direct versus indirect parent involvement, although both types are deemed as important forms of "active" parent involvement (Epstein, 2001). There also appears to be a positive correlation between the various types of active parent involvement (Epstein et. al., 1997) and positive student academic and social performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my son Andrew William Smith because he inspired me to become an involved parent in his schooling. He seems to enjoy my involvement to the degree that I want to know how to continue supporting his education. He's still in elementary school, but I believe that due to this research, I have developed a better understanding of how to be involved in his secondary education. I imagine I still have much to learn as I experience this topic first hand with my son in his future academic and extracurricular endeavors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

Considering the Topic of Parent and Community Involvement

Many of the emerging Alberta school curricula for kindergarten to grade twelve state that it is no longer just the responsibility of the teachers to help students learn successfully and effectively in the school system. For example, the new *English Language Arts Program of Studies K-9 and 10-12* which was written in the context of the *Western Canadian Protocol Framework K-12* states that the "[r]esponsibility for language learning is shared by students, parents, teachers and the community" (Program of Studies, 1999, p. 2). As a result, parents are encouraged to access information about their adolescents' program through the Alberta Learning Website www.ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca. This "institutionalising" of parent involvement through the curriculum is endorsed by researchers and educational practitioners across North America (Gettinger and Guetschow, 1998). The various curriculum documents in Alberta are no longer kept for the privileged few that teach in the classroom. It is now a legal public document accessible to everyone, including the students. This accessibility of information can be perceived as threatening to the educational community or it can be found to be a tremendous opportunity for collaboration between the school, students and the parent community.

Traditionally in Alberta, parents have been expected to be involved to some degree in the home programs of their children if these children were found to have special needs. To accommodate special needs students, the Alberta Department of Education has formed various initiatives such as The Parent Advantage. As well, the Alberta Teachers' Association has engaged parents through a program entitled Partners in Learning where they state that there is "[a]n extensive body of research as well as common sense [that] tells [them] that in order for students to experience success at school, there must be strong support and assistance at home. Parents, teachers and students are indeed partners in learning" (Buski, 1996, p. 1). These home-school learning teams that focussed on school driven initiatives to involve parents in the instance of special needs and mainstream programming were very important in the early to mid 90's when extensive research on the value of the "parent advocacy" began to surface.

Provincial School Council Initiatives also arose around the same time.

> To help facilitate the co-operative efforts needed to give our children the best education possible, amendments to the 1994 School Act provided for the establishment of school councils. These councils are designed to give parents, students, teachers and other community members' meaningful involvement in decisions that affect their school. In addition, school-based decision making is being implemented throughout the province so decisions will be made as close as possible to those affected by them. (School Council Resource Manual, 1995, p. A1)

Premier Ralph Klein proclaimed at this time that the true restructuring of education comes from the parents' input and control. Councils were expected to define their procedures and appeal processes (Molnar, 2003). Since this time, "learning community" initiatives have begun developing across the province as school boards grapple with how to involve parent communities in a meaningful and collaborative way.

In response to this call for parent community involvement from the province, we aren't always certain, as educators, how to involve families, and where not to incorporate their "support." What is the line we draw in the sand between ourselves and the families, and where do we blend and merge our efforts? Teachers often find it difficult to determine which parents want to help and which ones can help, especially as the students advance into secondary education. Everyone involved in the "educational community" needs to evaluate what effective educational "support" and "involvement" looks like, according to whom and on what basis.

Many quantitative research studies have tried to address these types of questions about parental involvement from various measurement angles (Baker, Gersten, Keating, 2000; Edwards, Warin, 1999; Elliot, Arthurs, Williams, 2000; Simon, 2001; Feuerstein, 2000). "Parent involvement appears to be one area where it is a win-win-situation for all parties. This is not to say that there are not challenges to be met, but it appears that where parent involvement programs are well planned, properly organised and supported by the school administration, they tend to produce successful results" (Rothwell, 1994, p. 14). However, despite the evidence of the value of parent involvement, there appears to be less research indicating how to achieve these optimal programs and partnerships, and "[a]s a result, most schools have made only limited progress toward developing and sustaining effective parent participation" (Epstein, 1992, p. 124).

Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to dialogue with parents and ask them about their

experiences of their involvement with their adolescents, or to ask why they are not involved in certain areas of their child's education if this has been their decision. As well, what are their adolescents thinking about the experience of school and having their parents in the educational picture? Do they perceive this to be a desirable experience and one that is profitable to their education as a whole? And, how would teachers like to see the relationship between home and school operate ideally? According to educators, where do parents fit in the educational picture? These questions are the foundation of an important educational dialogue that illuminates some of the research already in place on this topic. **The dominant research question for this study on parent involvement is the following: How does involvement look and feel to students, parents and educators? And as a result of this reflexivity, what can be deemed to be the essence of a home and school relationship that most effectively supports students and curriculum?** This thesis question attempts to go beyond as well as illuminate what has already been analysed and evaluated in other studies on the topic of parent involvement.

Within this dominant thesis question, the study attempts to answer five guiding topics to assist in getting to the heart of the dominant thesis question. These five topics address the fundamental themes expressed in the literature review considering the perspectives of parents, students and educators on this topic:

1. What motivates parent involvement?

2. How are parents recruited, prepared and trained? How are educators trained to inspire greater and more effective involvement?

3. What types of roles are parents performing at the high school level and

what are the parent, student and educator reactions to these roles?

4.   What kinds of positive and negative experiences are resulting from this

involvement for everyone involved?

5.   How do students of involved parents respond academically, socially or

otherwise to their parents' involvement?

Establishing a Common Understanding: Terminology and Theory

Types of Community Involvement

For the purpose of this study, the terms parent and family involvement are used

interchangeably to include the significant adults, such as guardians, grandparents, aunts,

uncles, step-parents, foster parents and other caregivers in the home community. I borrow

Burke's (2001) definition of "community" as "the presence of beliefs, feelings, and

relationships that connect members of a school community to each other; it provides a

sense of belonging to something that transcends the situational relationships in an

organisation" (p. 47). For the purpose of this study, I will refer to an "*educational*

community" as the dominant stakeholders involved: parents, students and educators,

although in the educational world this is recently being identified in a broader way in

various combinations as "learning communities." It is necessary to point out that in an

educational community not all parents desire to perform or have the type of qualities

necessary for this responsibility.   "There should be a balance between collective action

and individual responsibility in communities…" and a good community will "find a

productive balance between individuality and group obligation" (Gardner, 1989, p. 3).

Strong communities can be developed by considering the integration of the various

elements of community that empower its members: "shared values, commitment, a feeling

of belonging, caring, interdependence, and regular contact" (Epstein, 2001).

Epstein's et. al. (1997) popular model of parent and community participation is

what many researchers use to define the various types of parent involvement in their

studies and it serves this study as well. She defines six types of parent involvement

sponsored by the school that can be found in a learning community ranging from

involvement in the home to the school as well as into the community. This model clearly

indicates what is considered to be overall "supportive" parent community involvement:

- Type 1—Parenting: includes schools helping parents develop supportive home
  environments.

- Type 2—Communicating: [Schools and parents] support effective home and
  school communications about school programs.

- Type 3—Volunteering: [Schools and parents] provide volunteer recruitment and
  involvement activities at the school and in other locations.

- Type 4—Learning at home: [Schools and parents] offer parents information about
  how they can support their adolescent academically.

- Type 5—Decision-making: [Schools] involve parents as decision-makers at the
  school site.

- Type 6—Collaborating with the community: helps schools, parents, and
  communities collaborate together to strengthen school programs and family

support resources. (Epstein et. al, 1997, p. 4)

Parents often fit into one or more of these types of involvement and it becomes apparent

that the presence of the community can be felt in many different ways when supported by

the school.

An Alberta *school council*, which falls into the category of Type 5 of Epstein's

model

> is designed to give parents, students, teachers, and other community members'
> meaningful involvement in decisions that affect their schools. In addition, school-
> based decision making is being implemented throughout the province so decisions
> will be made as close as possible to those affected by them…[S]chool councils
> may *choose* to become involved in decisions that set direction for the
> school—establishing a mission statement, a vision statement, guiding principles
> and objectives. The school council may develop strategies for achieving these
> objectives. Each school council will determine its own level of involvement,
> depending on local need. (Alberta School Council Resource Manual, 1995, pp. A1
> and A2)

There are various definitions used to describe the two outcomes of parent

involvement: the first being the type of involvement that benefits the parents' children

directly and the second describing the type of involvement that benefits and influences all

of the students in the school program. For example, Rothwell defines the former as

"individual" and the latter as "collective." For the purposes of this study, I will refer to

Rothwell's definitions to describe these two types of involvement—individual and

collective, and when I use the descriptors "direct" or "indirect" it will be to describe

whether a teacher is working directly in the school with the teachers and students for

specific educational outcomes, or indirectly out of the school in more supportive and

extracurricular roles or in the school in a more indirect capacity such as performing a role

with the school council.

Constructs that Support and Deter Involvement

In response to the issue of why parents become involved or choose not to be involved, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) indicate three major constructs on which parents consider their involvement effective and necessary. They are the following:

> *First*, parents' role construction defines parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in their adolescents' education and appears to establish the basic range of activities that parents construe as important, necessary, and permissible for their own actions with and on behalf of adolescents. *Second*, parents' sense of efficacy for helping their adolescents succeed in school focuses on the extent to which parents believe that through their involvement they can exert positive influence on their adolescents' educational outcomes. *Third*, general invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement refer to parents' perception that the adolescent and school want them to be involved. (p. 3)

These constructs assist in understanding the parent sense of worth in the school that is so often diminished by the time their adolescents reach high school (Simon, 2001).

 "[F]amily involvement tends to decrease as adolescents get older" (Baker, 2000) for various reasons such as "a lack of commitment from staff and administrators, family barriers, inadequate resources and cultural and language barriers" (Rothwell, 1994). Parents often believe that their adolescents neither want nor need them at school, that the curricular demands exceed their knowledge base, and that the school is uncomfortable with their presence in the busy high school culture. These beliefs prevent many parents from connecting with the school. Other obstacles include:

> …values held about parents' roles, attitudes about changing those roles, lack of skill in enabling parents to participate, lack of imagination about what is possible, and a lack of political will to ensure a change, will severely challenge those who wish to enlarge parents' role in schools. (Ross, 1994, p.9)

As well, some of the parents have a negative educational history and transfer some of

these experiences to their involvement or lack of involvement with their children's schooling. Kaplan and Kaplan (2000) found in their study about the effects of negative junior high school experiences of mothers on the junior high school experiences of their children that "mothers' negative school experiences are related significantly to the negative experiences of their junior high school children" (p. 242).

Communication roadblocks arise as parents and teachers take on various roles in their involvement with one another. Parents play roles "ranging from inadequacy to abrasive domineering that inhibit their ability to effectively communicate" (Berger, 1995, p. 233). Berger describes six parent roles that interfere with home-school interaction: 1. Protector (overprotective); 2. Inadequate (avoid school contact); 3. Avoidance (defensive avoidance behaviour due to bad history); 4. Indifferent-parent; 5. Don't-make-waves role (concern for negative implications for child if they become involved); 6. Club-waving-advocate role (expresses views through confrontation and power plays). She also describes school blocks that are often unintentional. She lists five educator roadblock roles: 1. Authority-figure role (lock parents out of decision-making process); 2. Sympathising-counsellor role (focus on the inadequacy of the child to console the parent; 3. Pass-the-buck role (refer concerns to another department); 4. Protect-the-empire role (united, invincible staff); 5. Busy-teacher role (no time to communicate). All of these roles interfere with effective and authentic communication about education and children. These masques also prevent equal and respectful partnerships between the school and the community from emerging.

These barriers indicated in various studies have implications for designing

successful models for parents' involvement in schools. There is literature explaining how to make parents who are from all walks of life feel welcome in a school and capable as school volunteers at the secondary level. There are various suggestions about parent in-services and training (Kershaw and Blank, 1999; Kaplan, 1992) as well as encouraging various types of school initiated communication with the parents (Feuerstein, 2000; Epstein, 2001; Berger, 1995). Many research projects are devoted to determining how to overcome the obstacles faced by schools, and have developed various community-school models and frameworks, some mandated and others evolutionary (Becker and Corwin, 1997; Elliot and Williams, 2000). The premise behind these models seems to be that when the school system and/or school adopts a welcoming environment to the entire community, it allows parents to find their place in the system and their "voice" (Shields, 1994) where this voice has often been undervalued or squelched by unknowing school educators. School surveys which typically occur in Alberta high schools once every one or two years often provide this type of global response to school questions and matters of the larger school community; however, other types of more one-on-one communication can open valuable conversations with schools and parents.

Many parents desire having a "voice" in the system and not just the traditional "attendance roles" allocated to them by schools. "Voice" is one of the most commonly identified themes of building a better system (Shields, 1994). On-going conversations about how parents feel about their involvement and where they fit are very important in building a better collaborative environment. Parents often have a lack of self-confidence in their abilities to assist with the school and their children's education. Hoover-Dempsey

and Sandler's Efficacy Theory and related research seems very effective in addressing many matters about parent involvement from why parents are involved to how to build a sense of efficacy in the community. "[P]arents with a stronger sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school will be those most likely to decide that that involvement will yield positive outcomes for their children" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, p. 27). Parents who feel that they can in some way impact their children's learning in a positive way become involved and often stay involved for longer periods of time.

Principles and Variables

It is difficult to write a paper about focussed parental involvement experiences while referring to generalisable constructs about parent involvement because each small community of parents, students and teachers is so unique. However, it still proves important for this study to establish some basic principles about parent involvement. The principles indicated by Ross's (1994) study entitled "What Parental Involvement Means to Student's Learning" suit the purposes of this study:

- Most parents care about their adolescents and their progress

- Parents currently contribute to their adolescents' schooling

- Parents bring many strengths and talents to their participation in schooling

- Parents can contribute much more to their adolescents' schooling

- Parents can learn new parenting techniques, thus expanding the quality of

their involvement

- Parents know their adolescents and can share insights and perspectives with teachers to help improve teaching

- The relationships between parents and adolescents are different from those between teachers and adolescents

- These differences must be acknowledged when teachers suggest ways to help adolescents

- When requesting involvement, teachers must seek to understand what is involved from the parent's standpoint

- Parents have their own reasons for becoming involved in their adolescents' education

- Parental involvement is a process of development that changes over time as parents and teachers acquire better skills. (p. 8)

By having these researched principles as a premise of assumptions for this study, it becomes interesting to assess how each situation in each interview supports or contradicts these ideals. This research project recognises that the school cannot control home and contextual variables (Feuerstein, 2000); however, the school can influence the school-level variables that might positively impact the above parent involvement principles.

Attention by research is paid to the socio-economic and educational categories of parents most involved in their children's education (Desimone, 1999; Kaplan and Kaplan, 2000). There is an indication in this literature that a certain type of involvement indicative of the middle-upper class parent is more conducive to many school environments because

the teachers themselves are of a similar background and have similar values and educational philosophies. "[W]ith respect to social-class differences, Lareau (1989) has found that middle-class parents are better able to meet school and teacher expectations for parent involvement than are working-class parents" (Becker, et. al., 1997, 513). Therefore, many schools perpetuate this upper-middle class involvement and create through training "social capital" that is congruent with the school staff and philosophy (Coleman, 1987). However, Kershaw and Blank (1999) point out that "[e]ffective partnerships also prise diversity and inclusiveness, realising that everyone brings their own unique talents, resources, and energy to the collaboration" (p. 4).

Previous Research Advocating Involvement and Conditions of Involvement

The dominant stream of research in the area of parent involvement at the secondary level advocates that parent involvement improves students' attitude toward school, homework habits, school attendance and overall levels of academic achievement (Baker et al., 2000; Berger, 1995; Edwards, 1999; Epstein, 2001; Simon, 2001). According to Trusty (1999), "[P]arents are the most influential force in children's educational development" (p. 230) and this extends into adolescence (Simon, 2001). Epstein (2001) states that "Educators need to understand the contexts in which students live, work, and play. Without that understanding, educators work alone, not in partnership with other important people in students' lives. Without partnerships,

educators segment students into the school child and the home child, ignoring the whole child" (p. 1). This "segmentation" creates an environment of anonymity in many highly populated school cultures to the degree that the dominant form of contact that the families receive from the community is distressing or confrontational in light of motivational, behavioural and achievement difficulties (Burke, 2001; Watkins, 1997 and Kay, 1997).

It is also very evident in the research focussing on secondary students that maturing students who are no longer in the very formative years of schooling respond differently to having their parents around them or helping them with their schooling than they did when they were younger. Secondary adolescents function differently psychologically than children in elementary school and their parents are no longer the dominant influences in their lives.

> It is not until adolescence that one's self-concept begins to stabilise to any great degree. Much self-concept development occurs during adolescence. It is during adolescence that the individual realises that "I am unique," "I am separate from others," and "I have some control over the individual who is me…Opinions expressed by parents may be given less credence and sometimes are challenged openly…The importance of home relationships may decrease in the adolescent's mind while there is increasing importance placed on peer relationships. This is a component in the development of a separate and distinct identity and an important factor in the development of independence. (Campell and Gollick, 1988, pp. 75 and 78)

As a result, the reaction of secondary students to parent involvement can be mixed and is dependent on various conditions such as the method and approach of the involvement, communication style and other factors that promote positive relationships between the adolescents and their parents (Balli, 1998; Campbell and Gollick, 1988, p. 79).

Because students are dominant stakeholders in the educational community of this study, it is equally important to consider their perspectives on parent involvement.

Although studies have indicated the effects of parent involvement on student grades, very few studies have examined the students' reactions and their interpretations of parent involvement in relation to their performance at and attitudes about school. One of the few studies with direct quotations of students' reflections about parent involvement is written by Balli entitled, "When Mom and Dad Help: Student Reflections on Parent Involvement with Homework" (1998). It demonstrates that middle school students can have very positive comments about their parents' support, but can also become frustrated and confused in the process of this support, regardless of the outcomes. This study notes the prominent decline in parental support at the secondary level and the need for more research on this complex topic.

There is also an indication that the benefits of parent involvement extend beyond just the student. In fact the involved parents and educators benefit as well. The parents feel good about the connections they are making with the school and their children, and the teachers feel that by incorporating the community into their practice they have a better sense of their students and the community (Warin, 1999). "[A]dults receive benefits as great as the students from the experience of meaningful involvement in the life of a young child" (Baker et. al., 2000). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) research indicates that parents with high-involvement teachers were more positive about school and more aware of teachers' interest in their involvement than were parents with low-involvement teachers. Further, the high-involvement teachers themselves, unlike their low-involvement counterparts, worked to involve all parents, regardless of socio-economic level (p. 29). Again, the students also benefit from all of this involvement provided that the relationships

that they experience with their parents and teachers are positive relationships.

Parent-child relatedness is a large topic in the context of parent involvement. There are various definitions of parent styles, but the definition that best fits the parents who relate successfully to high school students in this study is the "authoritative parent role" by Shirley Moore (1992). She distinguishes parents as being either "authoritarian" (low in nurturance and high in parental control), "permissive" (moderate to high in nurturance and low in parental control) and "authoritative" (high in nurturance and moderate in parental control). "High level of nurturance combined with moderate levels of control help adults be responsible child rearing agents for their children and help children become mature, competent members of society" (p. 3). These types of parent qualities are referenced in many of the descriptions by the participants in this study.

Collaborative Process

The dominant finding in related literature suggests that "[w]hen educators guide parents and solicit their participation, parents respond with increased involvement to support student success" (Simon, 2001). The concern to be cognisant of is pointed out by Becker et. al., (1997) when they states that "much of the literature is on how to get parents more involved and how to 'change' parents to conform to school expectations" (Lightfoot, 1978 as cited by Becker et. al. 1997, p. 512). Researchers (Balli, 1998; Ross, 1994; Rothwell, 1994) acknowledge the importance of the school impetus for promoting a

school-community partnership; however, they also concentrate on the important next step

that should not be ignored when considering developing an educational community. It is

to develop a collaborative process that considers everyone in the school and home

community equally.

> [S]uccessful partnerships are collaborative in nature; they are based on equitable
> status and mutual respect among individuals. Home-school partnerships, in
> particular, involve shared commitment, responsibility, and accountability for
> outcomes, and are based on the belief that both parents and teachers are necessary
> resources for improving education for children. (Balli, 1998, p. 40)

Establishing the roles that both parents and teachers can play in the lives of the students' is

critical for developing a strong program. This two-way partnership appears to be the

optimal and ideal relationship between home and school (Balli, 1998; Kershaw and Blank,

1999).

Overview of Research Paper

This research paper will continue in Chapter Two to describe the interviewing

process and the context of this study acknowledging the specific limitations while

attending to the significant value of such an interviewing opportunity. Chapter Three

highlights conversations with parents and literature on corresponding themes and opens up

key considerations for parent involvement in this community. Chapter Four focuses on

the student perspective and specific excerpts from these conversations are intermingled

with other related research which leads us to the interpretations of the teachers in Chapter

Five. The teacher perspective in this chapter both contradicts and reifies some of the

findings in the previous chapters about what motivates parent involvement and what

deters it. However, the administrators' responses in Chapter Six allow us a broader and very insightful look at the history and some recommendations for parent involvement initiatives at a school and divisional level. Chapter Seven interprets the themes that emerge with direct and indirect parent-school involvement and the implications of these findings.

Chapter Two

The Process of Discovery

Mode of Inquiry

The mode of inquiry for this study is the naturalistic inquiry method of in-depth

interviewing. This mode allows for the reconstruction of the "respondents' constructions

(emic inquiry)…" as opposed to the positivistic approach which adopts a "construction

that they bring to the inquiry *a priori (etic)*" (Birnbaum and Emig, 1991, p. 195). There

seem some obvious advantages afforded by this method that allowed for the examination

of "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between

phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and when multiple sources of evidence

are used" (p. 195). The study involves all of the key features of qualitative research:

qualitative data, context sensitivity, emphatic neutrality, and inductive analysis (Best and

Kahn, 1998). The interviews are semi-structured to allow for some systemising and

categorising of the data as well as a flexible style that promotes a more conversational

interaction with some open-ended potential. As a result of this interviewing approach,

there are opportunities for greater personal insight and a better understanding of the

unique case orientations of each grouping of interviews. "As a data-gathering technique,

the interview has unique advantages. In areas where human motivation is revealed

through actions, feelings, and attitudes, the interview can be most effective. In the hands

of a skillful interviewer, a depth of response is possible that is quite unlikely to be achieved

through any other means" (Best and Kahn, 1998, p. 322).

Subjects and Context

After considering some of the research that suggests that schooling outcomes are positively influenced by family background (Kaplan, 1992; Kay, 1997; Hoover-Dempsy and Sandler, 2000), Chestermere High School through the assistance of the principal became a willing participant in this study. It is a public school in the Rocky View School Division, which is a suburb and rural jurisdiction surrounding Calgary, Alberta, Canada. This school has undergone many changes over the past five years with teachers and administration. The current principal, who has been in the school since September 2001, is an administrator who knows the students well because he was also the principal of the elementary and middle schools in the same community. The principal was hired by the Rocky View School Division for this position because of his expertise with parent involvement and because of his background in this particular school community. He was also hired to grapple with various difficulties emerging in the school and community related to smoking, drug use, teen violence and vandalism as well as some staff dissension over the many changes that have occurred in the school in the recent years. The school division felt that this principal's involvement would stabilise the growing dissension in the community over these matters as well as raise the school assessment survey standards that are presently very low within the community (see Appendix A). The principal now feels strongly that involving the community in the issues arising in the student population is the necessary next step for finding solutions to the problems that are emerging at this school.

The principal introduced me to seven parents from the school council who were willing to be interviewed for this project. There were some significant qualities shared by this research group. All seven of the mothers that were interviewed were Caucasian women with middle to upper class family orientation. The fathers were described briefly as supportive in other capacities and on occasion described as getting involved with the school council or other special events and career days at the school. As well as having been involved in various roles on the school council, these women had all been involved with their children's schooling on an ongoing basis since their children started school. However, most of this parent group's type of involvement at the senior high level had been described as "out of the classroom" and on the sidelines with the following involvement indicative of some of the indirect and supportive roles found in Epstein's Types of Involvement Model (Epstein et. al., 1997, p. 4): support work at home; school council, hot lunch program; school store, extra-curricular programs most specifically band; graduation and sports; specific parent groups focussing on school issues; fundraising and other parent recruitment. A couple of the parents still worked directly in a classroom with teachers for specific and short units with which they had expertise, but for the most part they felt they had "stepped back" from volunteering directly in the classroom.

They each described becoming involved because they wanted to know more about what their children were doing and learning in school and were up front about having a guiding interest in the school because of their own children, but described that they had learned in this process that by helping the school as a whole they were doing a greater service in the long run for their children as well as other children in the school. I actively

tried to recruit the participation of parents who were not involved in the school to provide comparative data, although my thesis focus is about involved parents. However, even after recruiting participants to help me identify parents who might be willing to be interviewed about this topic, I was unsuccessful in having uninvolved parents volunteer to be interviewed.

From this point, these parent participants authorised the next stage of interviewing, and each parent introduced me to one of their children in the high school. This group of seven students then had one strong similarity, and that was that all of their parents were actively involved in the school and with the school council for what they described as the collective good of the students (Rothwell, 1994). None of the students had described any recent involvement of their parents directly in their classroom, although two of them explained that they had had parents involved in other classrooms in the past for specific units where their parents had specific expertise. They had less in common with one another as evidenced in their grades and interests. The favourite subjects of the students varied greatly with responses being anything from science to band and art. All students were passing their subjects and four of the seven students self-reported having grades of eighty percent or higher in all subject areas, while the others ranged from grades of sixty to ninety-five percent in their classes. These students were identified by the principal as being fairly successful students. All of the students described themselves as being either moderately satisfied or satisfied with the school experience. It became apparent in the interviews that these students were independent thinkers with a fairly strong sense of self-concept. Although this particular high school has grades nine through twelve, these

participating students were in grades ten to twelve.

These students then made recommendations to me for teacher participants, although some of these teacher recommendations overlapped from student to student and were not specific to any one of these students. Again, these teachers had one initial common variable, students who had actively involved parents. These teachers were suggested by parents and students because they had been involved with these students in positive ways. They also felt that these teachers would be receptive to this study and would provide open and honest input. The seven teacher participants teach a variety of subject areas in grades nine through to twelve: home economics, language arts, English, French, math, drama, career and life management, band and fashion studies. The teachers had a variety of backgrounds where some had been teaching for several years and others were fairly new to the profession. Four of the teachers had children of their own who were either grown up or very young, and the remaining three teachers had no children of their own. It was a bit more difficult to find time to interview these participants, but I found that they were receptive to the process and had some very definite opinions and ideas about the topic of parent involvement.

The voices of other researchers, educators, and school and divisional administrators not directly involved in the focussed participant groups were incorporated into this research as "side-line respondent" voices in order to substantiate, or complement the experiences of the participants. The high school principal responded to the topic of parent involvement after I have completed the initial three phases of interviews. Although I did not share any information with him in advance of his interview, he seemed to

anticipate the interview and respond to the topics that we both established as important in the context of the thesis question and guiding topics. The new high school counsellor who just began working at the school in September 2002 addressed the five key topics with a different psychological focus. I was fortunate enough to be able to interview three divisional representatives: the new Rocky View School Division Superintendent (as of March 2002), Associate Superintendent and the Supervisor of Collaborative Services. Each had a strong educational perspective on the issues of parent involvement in light of their extensive training and constant contact with the parent community in the Rocky View School Division. Their expertise provided a very different perspective on this topic. All of these voices offered insight into the larger school and divisional picture. My understanding of the participant responses took on a larger and more global meaning as I put the pieces of these various interviews together to better understand this topic of parent involvement at Chestermere High School.

Data Collection

      I interviewed each of the twenty-five participants once over the course of two months at the beginning of their school term in September and October of 2002. This one interview seemed to exhaust the comments and input they had on this topic. I asked them to phone me if they had any other thoughts on the topic. I did not receive additional information. I interviewed the participants including the principal and the school counsellor directly at the school and the other interviewees at the Rocky View Education Support Centre in the same period of time. Each person interviewed was interviewed

independently except for two sets of two students who chose to be interviewed together.

I kept the interviews confidential from each other except in the instance where the

students were interviewed in pairs and they were able to share information. Interviews

lasted approximately forty-five minutes to two hours. I asked everyone if they would be

receptive to being tape recorded, and all but two of the participants agreed. The

interviews were then transcribed so that I could reference them for the research (see

Appendices C, D, E and F for a selected excerpt from a chosen parent, student, teacher

and administrator interview respectively).   I also took notes in all of the interviews to

provide me with an overview of my findings. I referenced the parents and students by

corresponding numbers to establish anonymity while also maintaining a connection

between the two. For example, Student One and Parent One are related. The teachers

that I have also numbered do not necessarily correspond with any one student.

The thesis question and the five topics considered in light of the research were

turned into five guiding questions that I prepared in advance in an outline format. In some

cases, I decided the sequence and wording of the questions in the course of the interview

to allow for a more informal and open-ended interview process within the constructs of

some key topic areas. I found that this allowed for a more open-ended discussion, which

in turn developed this study in a variety of ways. I considered carefully the following

dangers of being too directive in the interviews as qualified by Patton (1990): "The

purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in or on someone else's mind. The purpose

of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind (for example, the

interviewer's preconceived categories for organising the world) but to access the

perspective of the person being interviewed" (as cited by Best and Kahn, 1998, p. 254). I introduced the interviewing process carefully, promoting that I was not looking for any specific conclusions; rather, I was hoping to hear what it is that they had to say about this important topic and the key sub-topics as well as any extensions that they could think of relevant to the topic. Questions did naturally evolve into other questions within the discussions and I was satisfied that the participants were informed and seemed clear that they could go in any direction and express any opinion they had about this topic as the interviews progressed.

Guiding Questions

The five guiding questions were the following for each participant group:

Parents

1. How and why did you become involved with the school?

2. Do you feel that you were adequately prepared for the roles that were requested of you or that you hoped to undertake?

3. What types of supportive roles have you performed in or out of the classroom that have supported your child's performance and/or curriculum?

4. What have your experiences been as an involved parent with specific examples of either positive or negative experiences?

5. How has your child responded academically, socially or otherwise knowing that you have been involved?

Students

1. Why do you think that your parent became involved with the school?

2. How is your parent involved in the school and do you think they were adequately trained or prepared for their involvement?

3. How have they helped you? How has their involvement not helped you? And how comfortable do you feel with the various types of involvement they take part in or might take part in with the school?

4. How has it been to have your parent involved in your program with specific positive or negative examples?

5. Have you felt a difference in your performance at school, interaction with your peers or anything else since your parent has been involved?

Teachers

1. How and why have parents become involved in your classroom and why are they not involved as well?

2. Did you feel that the parents were adequately prepared for the roles that you requested of them or that they hoped to undertake?

3. What types of supportive roles have parents undertaken in your program or extracurricular programs to support students and their education?

4. What specific experiences have you had with parents involved in your program that might be positive, negative or both?

5. How do students respond academically, socially or otherwise with parental support?

When interviewing other educators within the school division, I altered the five guiding questions to consider these respondents' varying expertise about parental involvement, although I stayed within similar guiding themes. Because these people were interviewed after the initial group of participants, the questions evolved in these discussions to build upon the understandings that arose in my initial discussions with the participants. These more open-ended questions accommodated the years of training and experience that these respondents had in this area.

Principal, Counsellor and other Administrators

1. What has been your experience with parents at the secondary level?

2. What do you think and feel about parent involvement at the secondary level?

3. What do you think is necessary to build adequate and supportive school and community relationships?

4. What education is required for students, parents and teachers to integrate efforts for positive schooling experiences? And what does an ideal parental involvement model look like to you?

5. Do you think that there are significant correlations between academic, social and other student behaviours? Please support these opinions.

Ethical Considerations

A parent information/consent form was given to participants in advance by the high

school principal to confirm the details of the study and confirm their participation. The letter indicated that there are no evident risks inherent in participating in this study and that confidentiality, codes and pseudonyms would be used in all analyses and reporting of the paper. I made it clear that if the above measures were not effective, I would discontinue the participation of the respondent's interview. I was fortunate that none of the participants or respondents chose to withdraw from the study and the process appeared pleasant and comfortable for everyone involved. I got the distinct feeling that people enjoyed expressing their opinions about the topic of parent involvement. The parent letter indicated that at the conclusion of the study copies of the paper would be provided to people upon their request.

Data Interpretation

These exploratory conversations that I have transcribed from tape or analysed from interview notes have articulated the thoughts of the participants to promote a better understanding of learning and mentorship in the context of this "educational community." These interactions helped to identify key elements of the relationships between home and school that address my thesis question, and challenged or supported the parent involvement principles of Ross (1994). Discovering patterns and commonalties while noting outstanding differences provided me the opportunity to interact with the literature about parent involvement considering the context of each unique person.

The family barriers sited by Rothwell (1994) were significant to the study and arose over and over again: 1) parents do not feel that they have adequate skills to help in a

school situation; 2) parents have negative associations to schools from their own experiences and single parent homes; or 3) dual parent work schedules prevent parents from spending the time that they would like being involved with the school (pp. 16-20). However, in light of these barriers, I attempted to identify themes that are critical to teachers, parents and students that attract or deter them from various aspects of parental involvement.

By carefully documenting my observations and transcribing salient passages from interview tapes and notes, I was able to examine the attitudes, actions and stances of the participants as they relate to the literature and my thesis question. I was able to note what these people perceived to be the essence of a positive home and school relationship that supports curriculum. I promoted dialogue about their perceptions of the school and posed this important question in a variety of ways: "How can the school afford the educational community the ability to connect in ways that are both meaningful and supportive educationally?" What students, parents and teachers think and feel about parent involvement in this study offer interested readers the opportunity to glean information about what the community sees as the function of the school and its role in their adolescents' lives as well as its role in engaging and developing parent involvement. The reasonability of these suggestions would need to be considered in light of the educator's time, the school budget and the district's policy on parent participation. Another desired outcome of this study is to recommend further research in order to ascertain whether the ideas generated in this study might bring about fruitful action. My goal in this thesis was to write an evocative paper bringing to light the intersubjective experiences of those

involved and intermingle what these respondents communicate with the texts of other researchers.

Limitations

This study has some weaknesses because of the choice of interviewing to gather information for the study. Because this verbal exchange of opinions and stories is the major mode of inquiry, the matter of building a trusting and comfortable rapport with the participants in order to gain "truthful" and valuable information became extremely important, especially when I was only interviewing them each once. It was also important to design questions that would both stimulate, but not necessarily direct the course of understanding about parent involvement. I believe that my role as a teacher and a curriculum co-ordinator in the school division did not impact the genuine nature of the interviewing process, but it might have demonstrated a bias towards encouraging community involvement just by the nature of my divisional role.

This study attracted parents who were already volunteering and were in parent circles from which a principal could easily draw and then set up interviews for my research. These parents who are already actively involved might not give an accurate and valid representation of how parents and students feel about parent involvement that would be generalisable to the entire parent community. As with all interviews, biases inevitably surface. These parents, who have a greater awareness of the school's philosophy and school initiatives, might have a greater insight into what the study is attempting. As a result, their answers are likely to be more positive of a school's efforts as indicated by

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) where they indicate that "parents with high-involvement teachers were more positive about the school and more aware of teachers' interest in their involvement than were parents with low-involvement…" (p. 29). Parents who are not usually involved with or for the school or in other more educationally removed roles with their children might be less forgiving of the school's performance.

This lack of generalisability to other school divisions that have a greater diversity of cultural and socio-economic status mixes might also be true because of the white middle to upper class representation of the participant group. These respondents might not offer adequate insight into the various perspectives that might be found with varying SES and ethnic participants had I been able to have any volunteer to be interviewed. However, there are many studies that have used "controls for IQ, SES and ethnicity" (Zellman, 1998, 141) and demonstrate very positive findings of what parents contribute to the school regardless of some of these variables. As a result, I continued with the participant groups that I had available to me. This study was designed to interpret focussed dialogues of parents, students and educators who actually are involved at this particular school setting and for the reasons and with the experiences they describe. As a result, I believe it is an authentic study to this particular school, school division and school community that might be indicative of other similar educational communities throughout the province.

Significance

Despite the extensive quantitative data supporting parent involvement, few

qualitative reports indicate how these educational stakeholders of parents, students and

teachers truly think and feel about the experiences of being involved or having parents

involved in the business of education. It is through these types of close-up narratives that

the research on parent involvement takes a personal shape giving us a unique

understanding of what parent involvement represents at the secondary level, and its

challenges through the eyes of our youth and their caregivers. The recursive meaning of

parent involvement is uncovered through these interviews where "both the observer and

the observed 'may be stimulated to think new thoughts about themselves'" (Dwyer, 1991

as cited by Grele, 1994, p. 16). The interview is a powerful way to "filter our experiences,

thereby defining them, and through which we express our own world views and

ideologies" (Grele, 1994, p. 15).

> More attention needs to be paid to dialogue – which require trust and which
> permits a flowing through of ideas, rather than discussion – which is related to
> concussion or percussion, in which ideas are expressed, but without impact or
> follow-through (Senge, 1990).

These meaningful dialogues shed light on the matters of collaborative partnerships with

students, parents and educators.

"[T]here is no recipe or quick-fix approach to creating successful collaborative

partnerships. Instead, it is a long-term endeavour that involves a great deal of professional

and parental input and shared decision making" (Kershaw and Blank, 1999). The dialogue

that occurs needs to include educators explaining educational "best practices" and parents

explaining their adolescent's home experience and learning styles and abilities. The

students' metacognitive dialogue can also help them to better understand their own

learning and monitoring their success in the context of the home and school.

Chapter Three

Unravelling the Stories of the Parent Participants

Motivation for Involvement

How and why did you become involved with the school?

The responses by parents to this question support what Ross (1994) indicates in

three of his principles of parent involvement, "Parents bring many strengths and talents to

their participation in schooling"; "Parents have their own reasons for becoming involved in

their adolescents' education"; and "The relationships between parents and adolescents are

different from those between teachers and adolescents" (p. 8). However, Ross indicates

that "*most* parents care about their adolescents and their progress", and I found in the

discussions with these parents that they believed that *most* people care about their

adolescents; however, *some* parents are more visible in their involvement than others. The

parent volunteer coordinator with encouragement and support from the school principal is

actively trying to recruit greater involvement.

This entire parent group had chosen to be involved in their children's schooling on

an ongoing basis for most of their children's schooling beginning in kindergarten.

Henderson (1987) concluded that "parent involvement is more effective if it is

comprehensive, long-lasting, and well planned; and the benefits of parent involvement

continue from early childhood through the completion of high school" (p. 4). Each parent

described initially becoming involved because they wanted to know more about what their

children were doing and learning in school. "*I think I wanted to know more about the*

curriculum and what expectations were and how the credits worked. And for me, being new in the high school, that was an awesome way for me to get to know and to be able to fit in with what was going on" (Parent 7). Many of the parents were upfront about having a guiding interest in the school because of their own children: *"[W]hen you have kids you want to be that involved. You have to be, otherwise they stray so fast"* (Parent 6). *"I didn't have to be told to do it. It was like a package when my child came, you know for good or bad, you've got me too"* (Parent 6). *"I wanted to know the teachers and the friends that my kids were having…And I figured that was the best way"* (Parent 1).

It seemed apparent that the school issues were an activating force for involvement for many of these mothers and they believed that involvement empowered them to have a more credible source of input into some solutions for the school and create a better environment for their children. *"I got involved at the high school level, and I'm able to help at the high school more because just the talks with drugs and the attitudes of the kids in the school setting…the disrespect, the damage and things"* (Parent 7) *"We had actually, at his grade eight graduation at middle school, approached the superintendent and talked to him [about the high school] and said, 'We've got to see something change at that school. We're threatening taking [our son] into the city"* (Parent 2). *"But, I think it helps when you go if you have a complaint that they do see that you are in here all the time and … that's part of solving the problem. I'm not going to come in to the school where I don't volunteer and say, 'Look, this is a problem here and I want this fixed.'"* (Parent 7).

I thought that is was my parental duty with my first child…. Then my motives

kind of changed because I wanted to see some system changes. And also, I've got two special needs kids, so, I needed to make sure that I was known as somebody that wasn't out to buck the system. As somebody who was not an adversary, but a team player, a team member. And I needed to be able to be an effective advocate for my kids. So, I thought that to be an effective advocate I needed to play within the system and help them out as much as I could. (Parent 4)

They described that they had learned that by helping the school as a whole they were doing a greater good in the long run for their children as well as the children in the school. They all seemed convinced that they would make a bigger difference to the school by being on the school council than by simply being a parent voice commenting or complaining about school issues. *"And as parents, you're in tune with what's happening in the school and what issues are a problem, as well. So, bring it forth to the council and maybe you have some ideas about what could help some of the issues in the school"* *(Parent 2)*. They did not feel that the school took them seriously when they were on the "outside" and "uninvolved."

These parents felt that volunteering gave them some respect within the school and with the teachers. It afforded them the opportunity to get to know the teachers better, although not all comments about the teachers appeared positive and they still discussed some resistance from teachers about their presence and involvement. *"I find…teachers in the high school demand respect, but I find some of the teachers don't give it…That's what I find…just with observing them" (Parent 1)*. Despite some of these negative reflections, as a whole, they all mentioned that their experiences have helped them develop relationship with the students, teachers and administration that now served them well as their children were going through senior high school.

Types of Involvement

Most of this parent group's type of involvement at the senior high level had been described as "out of the classroom" and on the sidelines with the following: support work at home, school council, hot lunch program, school store, extra-curricular programs most specifically band, graduation and sports, as well as specific parent groups focussing on school issues, fundraising and other.   All of these types of involvement are indicative of Epstein's Six Types of Involvement Model: 1) Parenting, 2) Communicating, 3)Volunteering, 4) Learning at Home 5) Decision-making and 6) Collaborating. A couple of the parents still worked directly in a classroom with teachers for specific and short units with which they had expertise. *"Volunteering in the sewing room was a good place to volunteer and I felt like I was part of that class. And actually, after I had been there awhile, I got to know some of the students in the class" (Parent 2).* However, for the most part they felt they had "stepped back" from volunteering directly in the classroom and many of them were accepting of this change in involvement.

> *[A]s your child comes to the secondary level where they obviously don't need you in as much a nurturing capacity, then the challenge for you is to find a way that makes it acceptable to them to continue to have you be involved on a daily basis that isn't construed as being overly attached or snoopy or controlling or anything else. So, certainly there's a difference between grade one and…secondary. The way that your children are comfortable with being involved changes and probably just as much, you're ability to be comfortable being involved changes as well. (Parent 6)*

Obstacles

These parents also addressed what inhibited their involvement. Although the parents were interviewed independently, the consensus from this group was that parents had distanced themselves from the types of active involvement that they contributed in previous grades because they did not always feel connected or welcomed by the teachers in their classrooms or even into the school. *"[W]hat I learned as volunteer co-ordinator is that sometimes teachers ask for parent volunteers, but they really don't want parent volunteers. They're not comfortable with them in the classroom"* (Parent 6). The parents described teachers' personalities which resemble roadblock roles described by Berger (1995). The role most described indirectly by the parents was the "Busy-Teacher Role" which is "perhaps the greatest roadblock to good communication between parent and teacher…" and this revolves around the lack of "time" (p. 174). These parents felt that there were fewer and fewer requests by teachers for parent volunteers which made the program less viable.

The parents also felt inhibited to help more directly in the school because of the unwelcome reception from their own children. *"I know for a fact that my daughter doesn't ever want me to go to the high school"* (Parent 7). *"My students were not inclined to have me at the high school. They did not want me there"* (Parent 3). *"I think he likes the fact that I'm involved, but I think he prefers me to be involved sort of at a distance…[T]hey don't want to be perceived as a Momma's boy"* (Parent 4).

Some other barriers that were indicated are consistent with the research done on the obstacles of parental involvement (Rothwell, 1994; Ross, 1994; Kaplan and Kaplan, 2000). Two dominant barriers mentioned by other parents are expressed effectively by

Parent Four: *"[T]he content is changed from when I went to school. I did really well in school, but my thought is that it was a long time ago…it is a bit intimidating. And the other thing is, the kids themselves, they're bigger, they're older. I don't think they'll listen to me" (Parent 4).*

Those who felt most comfortable being involved most directly in the school felt that their comfort level had come with some additional educational background. One of the parents who had been a volunteer co-ordinator described this phenomenon in her recruitment of parents:

> *There certainly was a difference in recruiting volunteers if the parent themselves had post-secondary education, as well, because they then felt at least an equal. And they would recognise that their area of expertise was not going to be the same, and their resources weren't the same. But at least if they felt if they had some kind of a post-secondary certificate or diploma or undergraduate degree or graduate degree that at least then… it wasn't an issue then because they felt they knew from their experience that they would be fine here. (Parent 6)*

This comment reflects many of the sentiments shared by the parents about a level of self-confidence that some parents had about becoming involved and that other parents did not demonstrate. It also supports research in an attribution framework which suggests "linkages between parental efficacy and parents' focus on the value of effort, rather than ability or luck, as critical to children's school success" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, pp. 26 and 27). A couple of the parents commented that parents also tend to be more confident when they have had a longstanding relationship with the schools or the extra-curricular programs in the community.

Parent Recruitment and Training

History

Do you feel that you were adequately prepared for the roles that were requested of you or that you hoped to undertake?

The parents identified that this high school had a volunteer co-ordinator periodically over the past decade. *"[S]he's kind of the liaison between the teachers [and community]" (Parent 5).* The feeder middle school volunteer model had a framework for recruitment, training and systemising the program, which had been described by some of these parents as having run very successfully over the past five years. *"We had a whole orientation afternoon and we had coffee and tea and we brought in donuts, and just did a roundhouse, ran a u-shape within the library. Had overheads, did a full presentation for the parents…I had prepared different hand out sheets for them…" (Parent 3).* As a result, this middle school volunteer program evolved into the high school as these parents graduated with their children, and felt that it was important to maintain this program. The same core group of parents continued to be involved on an ongoing basis. *"[Y]ou have a core group of people that are always there and its your same individuals who give their time to the school" (Parent 3).*

Special events and extra-curricular programs were described as significant for recruitment by several of these parents who had all played the role of the volunteer co-ordinator at some time or other, *[With special events] you're more liable to have a different parent who comes in other than your core ones who either work out of their home or are a stay at home parent" (Parent 3).* *"The easiest thing to acquire parent*

involvement is …getting them to drive for a school team or if there's a field trip or to

prepare something to bring into their classroom" (Parent 6). "Sometimes you can pull

in…new faces…for [a] special event [like a] Stampede breakfast…" (Parent 2).

Obstacles to Recruitment

There are obstacles to recruitment. They perceived that the dominant one was

teacher resistance to having parents included for various reasons. Some *"don't even know*

that I'm the volunteer co-ordinator…they don't welcome it" (Parent 1). Although the

feedback in general suggested that the parent volunteer co-ordinator was an essential

liaison between the school and the parents, there was also a sense in these dialogues that

teachers would rather teach their classes themselves without the "hassle" of the parent

connections. *"[T]here is so much already going on there, that to have a parent come in*

and have to stop … becomes an added component…" (Parent 3). There were some

examples of what Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) refer to as a parent "deference

toward the school and parental beliefs that teaching is best left up to teachers—both

variables that may be seen as components of parents' role construction…" (p. 11). It

became evident how important it was to the parents for the teachers to make these parents

feel necessary and welcomed into the school. "The extent to which parents believe

themselves to be invited to participate actively in the educational process will…exert

important influence on their basic decisions about involvement" (Hoover-Dempsey and

Sandler, 1997, p. 12).

Other obstacles described by the participants who had been volunteer co-ordinators were organisational in nature as well as problems with sustaining the interest of the parents that they had recruited: *"I remember calling parents and reminding them that their time was up, you know next week you're in the school for two hours supervising these kids and one parent just saying 'I'm not coming', kind of thing, and kind of reaming me out on the phone…"* (Parent 2). *"[W]hen you call them up and say, 'You signed up for this.' 'Oh, did I?' …They don't even realise that they signed up for it"* (Parent 1).

Suggestions to combat some of these recruitment issues were made by the participants, predominantly by Parent Six. The suggestions were the following: having a parent-teacher wine and cheese to exchange names and ideas for establishing some links for parent; having career days that hosted various skills of parents from around the community; sending out skills surveys in advance of the career day to ascertain where the talents were hidden in the community; and sending out regular and effective school newsletters to transmit the need for and the type of volunteering required by the school.

> *At the end of the year, in the final newsletter that goes out, we put in an announcement for volunteers. And then again at the beginning of the school year, the newsletter that goes out, there's an attached request for volunteers. And we gave different areas, if you wrote in the classroom, if you wanted to come in on the hot lunch program. If you wanted to just come and go sit in the library…* (Parent 3).

Training

Formally training parents once they have decided to become involved was happening at the high school in a couple of ways. Two of the parents were aware of the

school council handbooks. *"There's a school council handbook. And in the handbook, it tells you sort of what the school council was all about and what was expected of you"* *(Parent 4)*. Others in this group were not aware of this handbook when it was mentioned. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of the school council; however, the parents agreed that most of their training seemed to come from "on the job training." *"And then committee work, well that becomes sort of self-explanatory when you join a committee or run a committee" (Parent 3)*. Although there were an upsurge of volunteer training sessions when the high school first adopted a parent volunteer program, it was described as not being as active anymore. *"[The training is] just basically hand you a piece of paper, and this is what you do and everybody says, 'This is really easy. You can do this.'" (Parent 7)*. It was believed that the volunteer co-ordinator attempted to send out parent involvement packages outlining roles and responsibilities for parents who seem interested in making a regular commitment; however, one of the volunteer co-ordinators expressed some concern:

> *And when I took up the…volunteer co-ordinator here, I still didn't feel comfortable. And still to this day, I find that some days I don't feel comfortable with it because in the middle school the volunteer co-ordinator always got a big package to look through what they had been doing. And here, I didn't get that. And so basically… I have been doing…it on my own. (Parent 1)*

At no point did any of these parents mention that it might be optimal for this volunteer co-ordinator to be a paid position. Having a paid "parent-community liaison" to co-ordinate parental involvement is being done and is being found to be a wonderful solution in many places in Canada and the States according to Ross (1994).

The dominant form of training indicated by this parent group seemed to be

mentoring by other parents involved on the council or in other roles with the school, or

mentoring by teachers as parents found projects to work with the teachers primarily in

extra-curricular roles within the school. One of the parents alluded to her involvement in a

particularly well-organised teacher led graduation committee:

> *You know, it was scary until you went to the meetings. And then you're talking with all these parents and some of them have already gone through it and they tell you what's going to happen. And all the parents that are involved right from the very beginning, picking a place for the kids, picking how they're going to get there, and all the rules laid out for the kids, and how well it all works. (Parent 5)*

This teacher had formalised the volunteer process more than others had and these roles

were also in writing and easily communicated to parents. And yet, this teacher describes

that the "hands-on" experience of working on the projects seemed to serve as the

dominant training for the parents. The years of experience from the elementary to the

present resounded in confident parent volunteer voices in this particular group.

It was mentioned that more training in the following areas might help the

volunteering program: school orientation of school routines, policies and systems;

responsibilities of assisting in the classroom; conflict resolution; school council roles and

outlined responsibilities; homework and study support. Ross suggests the following

training forums for parents in his document, "What Parental Involvement Means to

Students' Learning" (1994): "parent workshops and meetings; parent-teacher

conferences; specific information for parents; frequent visits to the school and classroom;

and encouragement of parent participation in decision-making and evaluation" (p. 11). As

indicated in Ross's (1994) Principles for Parent Involvement and supported in some of

these dialogues: "Parental involvement is a process of development that changes over

time as parents and teachers acquire better skills" (p. 8). However, these parents indicated

throughout their interview text and sub-text another one of his principles: "When

requesting involvement, teachers must seek to understand what is involved from the

parent's standpoint." It seemed evident that a stronger teacher-parent connection was the

dominant desire of these parents in response to this question. As Hoover-Dempsey and

Sandler's (1997) third construct indicates, "[G]eneral invitations, demands, and

opportunities for involvement refer to parents' perception that the adolescent and school

want them to be involved" (p. 3). These parent participants felt that this expressed need

by the school was important for them and other parents to consider their initial or

continued involvement effective and necessary.

Supportive Roles In and Out of the Classroom

Motivational

What types of supportive roles have you performed in or out of the classroom that

have supported your child's performance and/or curriculum?

These parents describe having some supportive home routines in place that helped

their children succeed at school in their curricular and extra-curricular programs. There

seems to be a common view of having "high expectations" of their children.

> *[W]e really communicate expectations avidly at our house…we expect them to do the best that they possibly can… [If] I had to do it over again, and we've actually talked about this, is that perhaps we set our standards too low. Because we've always set, communicated that eighty percent as this kind of minimum expectation and we've kind of backed off and not really pushed for anything more than that. And I know that our kids are probably capable of more than that, but that has kind of become the accepted standard in our house and everyone, to our good*

fortune, has kind of complied. (Parent 6)

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) find "that parents' estimates of their children's ability to do schoolwork (assessed through comparisons of one's own child's ability relative to other children's abilities) were positively linked to their expectations for children and [their] grades" (p. 23).

Motivation seemed to be a key role these parents believe they are playing with their children, although they're not always sure that their children appreciated it. *"Do they appreciate it? Do they realise that that's not happening in all homes?" (Parent 4).* They try to motivate their children without "nagging." *"I can't be holding his hand when he goes to high school…And I don't want to be like, the nagging mom. I know he needs to do this for himself" (Parent 4).* When the "nagging" didn't seem to be paying off, two mothers indicated that they had backed off and allowed their children to experience natural consequences. *"One of the biggest thing I think I've done to help with his grades is allowed him to fail…That shook him up a bit and he needed that" (Parent 4). He had a peer group that we … weren't in favour of …but we kind of stood our ground, you know stood back, let him do his thing. And you'd say the odd little thing to him, now and again, but we let him do his thing and eventually he left that group and went back with his old group. (Parent 2)*

Supportive Home Routines and Activities

These parents have made the priority of schoolwork at home an obvious part of their children's home routine. *"I think that structure is really important. I think it's*

important for them to have priorities. So, when they come home from school its not like,

sit in front of the TV or go play hockey or whatever first. Let's get homework done first"

(Parent 4). "He has a bedtime. That's a really unpopular thing at that age [Grade 10]"

(Parent 5). "He'll come in and have a snack when he gets home. Then he'll sit down at

the kitchen table and attend to his homework…And then he might go out for an hour or

so…But then, he'll come home and have dinner and spend the rest of the evening doing

his homework" (Parent 2). "We have a family gathering every day in our house. Like,

our main meal of the day, our suppertime, and everybody recaps, highlights, your

disappointments [of]…what happened to them during the day" (Parent 5). In all cases,

the parents describe having little or no television. *"We have set times in the home for*

homework, where the TV is off and it's a quiet time. It's an overall quiet time to get

homework done" (Parent 3). "If there's homework, it's a priority, And so, there's no TV

at all during the week" (Parent 6).   These parents seem aware of some of the pitfalls of

television. "[I]t appears that television may, in fact, stunt the neural basis for learning,

especially in young children. The passive reception of information, without discernment

or thinking, requires no particular response and seriously undermines the ability to learn

about and interact with the environment" (Parry and Gregory, 2003, p. 37).

These parents also facilitated further mentorship opportunities with others such as

tutors, friends and master students when they did not understand the course content.

They generally defined their home environments as being encouraging and supportive.

There was no reference made by any of the participants for the need to have specific

instructions as indicated in Rothwell's (1994) findings "that parents want more precise

instructions and suggestions from the teacher on how to assist their child with schoolwork" (p. 8). Unlike the parents in Rothwell's findings who "reported that they did not help their children because they did not know how to help" (Loucks, 1992 as cited by Rothwell, p. 8), these parents seemed to be comfortable helping their children with their homework or finding suitable alternatives as they made no mention of this being a struggle for them.

Making time for their children and having the children make time for themselves was also indicated by a couple of the parents. *"Homework first, yeah…Well, maybe a snack first. He's a big boy. He's back to two-hour feedings, you know" (Parent 4). "So, once they're home I don't make them do their homework. They kind of relax, have their snacks and right after supper they have to do their homework" (Parent 1).* Although there was some element of routine in place in each of these participants' families and the order of this routine varied from family to family, all of the parents indicated that having some wind down time was important for balancing their children's lives. Finding time to spend with their friends and also with their families were key considerations that these parents made with their children. *"But at home our door's open to all his friends, and he knows that. They seem to hang out at our house. I don't know if it's because we hand out chips … but a lot of his friends are at our house…It's kind of nice having the boys there…you see them grow up…and you're kind of their friend and you know what's going on" (Parent 2).* These parents tried to find time to talk and answer their children's questions when the need arose. *"They still need that sounding board [from me] even at the high school level" (Parent 5). "So, when he'd come home, I was there to help him*

out if he had any issues. If he had issues regarding peers or homework…" (Parent 2).

Capturing and enriching their children's interests and having them find some success within these interest areas was very important to these mothers. *"[I]f we can identify the kinds of passion areas …as far as travelling or reading or opportunities to see films or Imax and books and literature and tapes, as much hands on as we can give them…I bring enrichment opportunities to the kids because I just find that the school can't do it"* (Parent 6). Many of them described doing double time helping with both curricular and extra-curricular programs with sports and the fine arts. These parents had become familiar and visible faces in the community for their participation and in some case leadership in these extra-curricular programs such as church, 4H Club, dance classes, riding classes, and other various community sports leagues. They believed that this presence made the students more comfortable with them in general. Being present in the classroom and at home had been deemed valuable by these parents to the degree that all of children, except for one, seem to be comfortable with their presence in the school. *"It…makes you visible as well because they're used to having you walk through the door of the high school…It isn't just the school community. It's all…nested in other communities"* (Parent 3).

Specific Volunteering Experiences

Positive and Negative Experiences

What have your experiences been as an involved parent with specific examples of

either positive or negative experiences?

The majority of the memories discussed by the parents were very positive and filled with positive stories that they expressed with fondness.

> *I sat on the grad committee last year because [my child] was graduating. And being at the table selling tickets for the grad and having kids come up who you had at the elementary level, volunteered with, and they're buying tickets for their grad. And that was just an amazing like, I got goose bumps sitting there selling them their graduation ticket because it was just an amazing feeling to know that you had seen them as little tiny ones in the elementary level and now they're coming out as adults. (Parent 3)*

Other stories were memorable because they believed that they had played an important role in someone's life. *"This little boy got to know me and personally I feel we got along and we had a great time together and what not. One day he told me that he thought of killing himself…So, then I became a confidant…and I had to bring it to the teacher and the administration…to make sure it was followed up and all that"* (Parent 4).

Other positive senior high experiences that were mentioned revolved around opportunities such as the hot lunch program. *"[Hot lunch is] a wonderful vehicle for a lot of people that, parents I'm speaking of now, who don't have the confidence to be involved in any other way, but it allows them to come into the school and experience the school and develop some feelings about…the school environment"* (Parent 6). *"[I]still like the hot lunch area. [It] gives you the opportunity to still see the kids and they can see you…"* (Parent 5). Other positive senior high volunteering experiences mentioned were field trips. *"I did a lot of field trips with the kids…And the kids love it when you're there. And you get to…know your kids that are in your kid's classroom. So, you can talk to them and they know who you are. It makes a difference"* (Parent 2).

Not all of the recollections of their involvement with the school were positive.

One parent mentions a negative experience of volunteering:

> *I came into scribe one day for a young man in an English paper for grade ten and it was the first time that I had scribed…So, I had to have someone tell me what was expected of me and I sat beside this young man and it was just like pulling teeth…we were doing a critical essay, and I knew I was comfortable with the format of a critical essay and how it should be…but trying to pull some idea out of him on what we could start with and …I was concerned about me fabricating things because he was so unresponsive…I felt like I was formulating ideas and he would just verbalise them back to me…At one point he got out his lunch and started to eat it and I just about lost it on him…I need to accept that maybe this isn't something that I should be doing. (Parent 6)*

Many of these volunteering memories explained involvement in the school in their children's younger years. The parents spoke of being comfortable in these earlier roles helping in various capacities in and out of the classroom. The discussions of involvement in the high school were also positive, but were filled with more description of tentativeness and reservation about their involvement.

School Support

Some projects such as the school fashion show and the graduation committee were described as annual projects for this high school that parents had become involved in on a regular basis and in one case even after their child had graduated. Because these projects relied so heavily on parent involvement, the teachers had established some roles and systems that parents had become familiar with over the years, and in turn trained new parents who were becoming involved in these projects. The school council was also credited for making generous donations to various groups and projects in the school, and

the initiatives to combat some negative school issues seem to be attracting more participation in the past couple of years than in years previously.

Some parent volunteers were not considered favourably by all of the participants in this group who had acted in various roles on the school council when parents were perceived as helping for the sake of their child—"individual help" and not for the sake of the entire program, project or school—"collective help" (Rothwell, 1994). Ironically, all of these mothers mention in a variety of ways that their predominant reasons for helping is motivated by the concern they have for their children and to insure that their own children have the best schooling and school environment possible. However, it is fair to say that these parents have the strong ideal that in helping their own children, they desire to be helping for the common good of the students in the school. They are critical of those who are more overt about their intentions for involvement solely for the good of their own children:

> *There's some parents who are very forceful and feel that it's sort of their way or the highway. I don't feel that it's as much of a team, for the good of all, or let's start with the systems and change things…basically, it's more about their child…I think that if you are on student council, you can't be looking out for a child. You need to be looking out for the whole of the school body…(Parent 4)*

This observation fits the description of a parent roadblock role the "Club-Waving-Advocate Role" as defined by Berger (1995) and seemed to be a familiar one to these ladies on the school council as they mentioned this type of person without naming anyone in particular. Berger explains that "[s]ometimes parents get carried away with their devotion to their children, and they exhibit this through a power play. These advocates often become abrasive in their desire to protect their children…" (p. 173). This parent

style and purpose for parent involvement was not appreciated by these parent participants.

There was also a mention of the school being classified into music parent volunteers and jock parent volunteer categories, which sometimes posed problems for the school as these parents rivalled for attention, time and money from the school council and the school administration. *"[T]he band parents get money then the jock parents think that the athletic associations should get money" (Parent 4).*

Parent Five indicated another difficulty, which was a lack of school administrative support regardless of the formal process, and procedure of the school council and other parent rallied groups. She felt a lack of understanding and as a result a lack of action to initiate and actualise some of the parent plans and proposals. *"There seemed to be a lot of dissension between [the school council and administrators] because we'd get to meet with one administrator one time and then another administrator the next time and they would not have communicated to pass forward what we talked about the time before" (Parent 6).* She believed that the school council held more power than most of the parents realised and that "capacity building" was necessary for their school council. She explained that the school councils do have the potential for being leaders in the educational communities across the province and have a larger say in policy development and decision making at the school level. She felt that it was important to attend the Alberta Home and Council Association Conference and observe other model school councils identified through out the province.

Parent Four contradicted this idea about the potential strength of the school council: *"some parents…feel that parents have the right to run the school and that's not*

true…they really need to get their head around the fact that council is simply an advisory body." Parent Four also unknowingly contradicted the point made by Parent Six about the lack of administrative support and declared the absolute support she felt from the school administration. She explained that she had attended the Alberta Home and Council Association Conference put on by the Minister of Learning, and believed that their school was leaps and bounds ahead of other school councils from across the province. *"I've been to the Home and School Council Conferences in Edmonton with the Minister of Learning…it gives us a chance to dialogue directly with the Minister of Learning and ask questions on behalf of the council…and we realise how lucky we are. There's people…who have really crappy administration" (Parent 4).* Rothwell (1994) describes the broad and narrow abilities of school councils across the country in Canada:

> Parent advisory councils operate in various jurisdictions across the country, either mandated by the provincial government or initiated by the school board. The results of these efforts are mixed. Depending upon a variety of factors, a key one being commitment from the school principal, an advisory council can assist in helping to shape a school improvement plan and/or increase communication between teachers and parents. On the other hand, some councils do little more than fulfil perfunctory roles that have little impact on the quality of education in their local school. (p. 9)

It was apparent that the parents' role construction and the "range of activities that parents construe as important, necessary, and permissible for their own actions with and on behalf of adolescents" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, p. 3) was still being explored by these parent participants acting in various parent involvement roles and on the school council with assistance from its administration.

Correlation to Student Performance

How has your child responded academically, socially or otherwise knowing that you have been involved?

All of these parents believed that there was a positive correlation between their involvement and their children's academic and social behaviour/performance of their children. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's second construct of parent efficacy is demonstrated clearly in these interviews because these parents did believe that "they can exert positive influences on their adolescents' educational outcomes" (p. 3) and as a result believed their involvement was effective and necessary. Some observations are more pronounced, and other observations are subtler reactions to their involvement, but they did agree that involvement was important and had helped their children succeed in the school environment. *"I am definitely a resource. Things like his English are very weak. English was my very strong point in high school. So, he'll come to me for suggestions…"* (Parent 4). *"[My son] is very academic and I'm sure that the input, or what myself and my husband have done for him over the years has made a difference"* (Parent 2).

They acknowledged that their children are more secure having their parents in their "court" so to speak and it had helped them socially to become mature and responsible students.

> *[I]f I'm in the school and he catches me out of the corner of his eye, he makes a point of coming over and saying, "Hey!"…And it's a very small thing, but I guess it shows that he's not embarrassed that I'm there…I guess it just gives him a message that I care and I think everybody needs to know that there's somebody out there that cares. (Parent 4)*

"I think they feel more secure in that setting knowing that there is parental support and that we will go if there's a problem or a need" (Parent 7). *"He's kind of a quiet,*

passive, just blend into the background kind of guy, but because of that, he went through

a period of teasing and I was able to help him advocate for himself" (Parent 4). "[T]hey

know that…I'm there and that as a parent, I'm not scared to phone the school and talk to

the teacher. I don't have a fear of that" (Parent 3). "[I'm] an internal check that

happens, that may not necessarily be there otherwise" (Parent 3).

What these parents were doing for these children was linked to their parenting

styles and in the cases of these seven parents, their styles seemed remarkably similar.

These parents were both monitoring and nurturing their children in an authoritative style

(Moore, 1992) as evidenced in their attempt to offer support and structure with an

abundance of empowering opportunities. They seemed to aspire to having their children

develop into strong, motivated and independent thinkers. "Stronger academic

performance…has been linked to parents' beliefs in independent thinking, personal

responsibility, and valuing children's development of self-respect" (Hoover-Dempsey and

Sandler, 1997, pp. 12 and 13).

The parents talked about instilling values about education and the worth of

education and that is something that is being demonstrated in the attitudes of their children

in response to their schooling experience. These parents also spoke of having relationships

with their children and with their children's peer groups and that this connection was an

important one for their children and the friends of their children in order for them to be

satisfied and well-rounded adolescents. They felt that there was a certain level of

accountability and maturity that arose in their children from their involvement in their

children's lives in school and the community that was greater than if they were just simply

parenting.

> *I think if you were to take out all of the involvement, like…the 4-H…the church…take these contacts away, like Friday Night live within the community…I don't know where they'd be as individuals because that's helped to create where they're at now at the high school. Whether they would be able to feel comfortable approaching adults without the public speaking? Would they be as comfortable in a group situation?…I think they become a little more mature a little quicker. That would be my experience with each of them. (Parent 3)*

It became evident from these parents' perspective that "[p]arents can contribute much more to their adolescents' schooling" and "parents can learn new parenting techniques, thus expanding the quality of [our] involvement" (Ross, 1994, p. 8) at the adolescent stage of schooling.

Review of Chapter

It became clear that parents want to be a credible and recognizable force in the school. There were apparent tensions between the parents' motivation for involvement whether it be to help the collective student body or to help their own children. It is evident in the data that these parents were very interested in the school for their own children as they discuss their reasons to understand the school, coursework, and teachers in order to better their children's opportunities and educational experiences in the school. However, there were examples in their interviews of the ideal of being involved for more than just their own children as they comment on other parents who fall short of this collective principle for involvement. They clearly desired in these dialogues to be able to offer support to other students as well as their own children in the context of their involvement efforts with the school.

Parents also want to be recognized by the teachers for what they can contribute directly to the school experience. However, there was some inconsistency in these interviews in their beliefs about whether teachers truly benefited by having them or needed them directly in the classroom. Parents seemed to understand that having teachers integrate them into the classroom would require extra time and organization on the teachers' parts and this could be considered problematic in light of the teachers' heavy teaching loads. However, they could see a tremendous advantage of direct classroom involvement in the instance that parents had particular expertise and skill working in a specific subject area or confidence and experience working with children in this age category.

They saw more clearly how important their roles were indirectly in the school and as support at home. They recognized that their ability to motivate and have clear and in some cases high expectations of their children in support of the school programs was invaluable. The mention of truly understanding course content in order to support their children at home seemed to be less important than their presence of expectations and disciplined home routines as well as the ability to extend and develop their children's interest areas in extra-curricular programs. In the few instances where parents mentioned that course content might be too difficult to support at home, the facilitation of mentorship or tutor support was offered as the solution.

The comfort level of being involved as volunteers in a secondary program had shifted considerably for these parents who have been long standing volunteers with their children since kindergarten. They seemed interested in finding out how to stay involved

with the school experience for their children as these children were identifying and expressing their adolescent autonomy. The understanding of their parent roles and the range of these roles to be included in the school and school council were a bit unclear, although their willingness to develop a better understanding of how they might benefit and better fit into the school program seemed evident. They believed that although informal training and experiential training seemed to be the most prevalent form of training at this school, they recognize that formal training would assist parents to a greater degree to feel welcomed and better equipped to be involved in the high school experience. In order to increase parent efficacy, it seemed that having more opportunity to discuss the potential and the realities of their involvement with the school educators would be welcomed. They indicated that it would of greatest benefit to have this welcome extended by the teachers themselves directly or through a parent volunteer coordinator as that is presently where these parents felt the greatest gap or resistance.

Chapter Four

The Student Perspective

Motivation for Involvement

Why do you think that your parent became involved with the school?

The students appreciated and understood why their parents had chosen to be involved in their education. *"She wanted to make her presence more known [in case] we ever were having problems with any of the teachers again. Her opinion or her say would be deemed important"* (Student 3). They seemed to know that their parents' involvement helped the mothers know and understand more about their schooling. *"It's really helped [her] to get more of an understanding of what's happening at school"* (Student 1).

All of the students identified that their mothers wanted to get more involved with their schooling right from their younger years, and Students Three and Six also stated in other parts of their interviews that their mothers wanted to make it a better experience for the entire community. All of the students acknowledged because they had this in common that their mothers had a bit more time than their fathers because they worked less, part time or other and had time to devote to volunteering. *"[S]he doesn't work. My dad works…and so she has a bit more time. I'm not saying that she's lazy because she's not at all…she does a lot of stuff for us…"* (Student 2).

Issues in the school were a common theme that arose from the interviews. It was apparent that all of the students were aware that the school was experiencing difficulties in a number of areas. Specific references to teacher injustice, discipline policy, smoking rules and boundaries and drug and vandalism problems were topics that they felt that their

parents wanted to understand (Student 3). Another student mentioned that academic streaming was an issue of importance to his mother (Student 6). These issues seemed to be the catalyst for community involvement to the degree that sitting and acting for the school council held an even greater importance than in years previously. The students also mentioned that "even their fathers" (Student 2) were participating in a part time capacity on the school council to express their views about the community issues.

The students were not always certain of the details or the extent of their involvement. I had to assist them on a few occasions with these details to afford them some commentary. There were hesitations in the interviews about exactly what their mothers' titles were in the school council or any specific activities that their mothers were performing in those roles for them or the school community. As well, only a couple of them understood what the school council did for the school (Students 1 and 5). *"I'm not quite sure what position she's in, but she's in the school council… [S]he's a trustee…I'm not quite sure" (Student 3). "She doesn't do hot lunch, but I think she does some volunteering days. Like I remember getting envelopes and stuff for like schedules for her to come in. I don't really know what she did" (Student 2). "Well, I don't really know what she does…I just know that she's the volunteer coordinator" (Student 1).*

Four of the students overtly expressed pride at having an involved parent in their schooling, while the others seemed happy with the involvement, but were not as directly appreciative. *"[S]he's good in the high school. She's been in the school forever.. (Student 5). "She helped with Downs Syndrome [kids] a lot. I noticed…it was just good to see her do that" (Student 7).   "I think she became involved with the school*

because…just to volunteer…help out. A lot of people don't volunteer for those things and it's a nice thing to do for your community" (Student 2). "[S]he's very popular with the kids" (Student 1).

None of the students described any recent involvement of their parents directly in their classrooms, although two of them said that they had parents involved in other classrooms in the past for units where their parents had specific expertise (Students 2 and 6). As well, there seemed to be very little reference to direct contact with the parents at the school other than in the hallways or during the hot lunch program.

Parent Recruitment and Training

Do you feel that your parent was prepared for being involved in your school and do you think they were adequately trained or prepared for their involvement?

In a couple of instances the knowledge of their parents' training and involvement was very limited (Students 1 and 6). A couple of the children recognized the academic training of their parents if it involved formal training or a formal career. Otherwise, they did not know about their parent's training. For example, one student knew his mother had taken some courses, but seemed unsure of which courses those were that might have assisted her with this role in his school (Student 4).

It was also identified that work experience was a form of training that had helped their parents become successful volunteers (Students 5 and 6). The time that they had spent over the years had given them a special expertise in relating to the teachers and the students. *"I'm pretty sure she's a lot more confident now than when she first started with*

[her first daughter] just because she had four kids to work out all the glitches" (Student

6). As well, the positive attributes of their parents were recognized as being important for

the success of their parents' involvement. *"[S]he seems to be able to connect with*

[students] on a more personal level. So, I think that even without any formal education,

she's able to do her job…" (Student 3). "She's very naturally good with children,

especially children with disabilities, and now she's taking courses in child psychology"

(Student 3).

Supportive Roles In and Out of the Classroom

Advantages of Involvement

How have they helped you? How has their involvement not helped you? And how

comfortable do you feel with the various types of involvement they take part in or might

take part in with the school?

The students appeared to perceive that the advantages of the involvement of their

parents were the following: First, they agreed that having parents involved in school

council afforded them more information about the school. This insider information

seemed to give them a bit more confidence about what was happening with school goals

and directions in response to curricular and extracurricular initiatives as well as community

issues.

Secondly, the students acknowledged that parents who knew the school and the

teachers gave them additional confidence and security in dealing with the school in various

capacities. They related experiences where their mothers helped them with problems that they would not have been able to handle as well on their own. The parents provided them a sense of having an "ally." *"I don't know…she'll like help me once and a while with my homework or a friend. Or, if I need something with a teacher or something like that"* (Student 4). One student recognized that he found it important that his mother talked to the teachers and connected with them because he believed that his teachers' familiarity with his mother carried over into the relationship that they had with him. *"It's nice to know she's actually connecting with the people that are teaching me so they know a little bit… more about me"* (Student 6).

The third point was that students realized that their parents motivated them to become better learners. Because of their parents, they had internalized a need to study and have a regular homework routine. *"Right after suppertime we do the dishes and we do the washing up and then if we even start our homework, we start it after supper"* (Student 3). *"[M]y mom is always nagging on us to get our homework done…as soon as we get home from school"* (Student 4). *"[T]hey've kind of guided me and told me like in a course this is what you need to do if you want to succeed in something, and they've told me what to do"* (Student 2). The parents seemed to provide a second look at assignments editing and in turn reminding students to review their homework to a greater degree than these students might have on their own. They described that their parents' support made a difference in their homework and this is in congruence with research which suggests "that parental involvement with homework can enable and enhance its positive effect…parents who are involved in school-related activities such as homework can enable

and enhance their child's education in three ways: a) modeling, b) reinforcement, and c) direct instruction (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995 as cited by Balli, 1998, p. 142).

> [W]hen parents help children with homework they model their belief that educational pursuits are worthy of their time and effort. Further, when parents praise children for correctly completing homework they reinforce the goals of education. Finally, when parents provide direct instruction by drilling their children on homework problems and asking open-ended questions they promote factual learning and cognitive ability. (Balli, 1998, p. 142)

Student Four elaborates: *"Yeah, she's been proofreading some English and stuff and actually I'm terrible at English." "I'll get her to run through something with me… [and] help me study if I have something written down on a sheet, like notes" (Student 2).* The students were easily able to identify how their parents had helped them out at home.

Adolescent Reactions to Involvement

At the outset of the interview, students described feeling moderately comfortable with their mothers' involvement provided that they were not directly involved in their classrooms. *"I think any parent doesn't really necessarily need to be in the classroom in grade twelve." (Student 5)* This response seems supported by the research of Lewis (2003) when he talks about the psychological development of the adolescent:

> When they reach the ages of fourteen and fifteen (the period known as mid-adolescence), adolescents strive to loosen their ties to their parents and their emotions and intellectual capacities increase. The adolescent becomes adventuresome, and experiments with different ideas. This plays an important role in finding one's relationship to oneself, groups, and opposite sex. During this time, the adolescent battles over his own set of values versus the set established by parents and other adult figures. The adolescent also begins to take on more control of educational and vocational pursuits and advantages. It is during this time that adolescents' self-dependence and a sense of responsibility become apparent, along with their quest to contribute to society and find their place in it. (p. 5)

As Campbell and Gollick (1988) explain, "In the past, parents were accustomed to providing most of the support and guidance needed by their children. The teenagers now question their authority. Many issues lead to conflict. While adolescents desire more freedom in controlling their own time and whereabouts, parents seek to know as much as possible about their teenagers' activities" (p. 79).

However, the resistant response that students had to parent volunteerism at the outset of the interviews evolved for a few of the students after we clarified a few details of what direct involvement meant. It wasn't until we speculated about the various types of direct involvement and the rationale for this participation, as well as examining what they would and would not be comfortable with, that some of them relaxed and could see the possibilities of direct classroom involvement. I had a sense that many of them had not given the topic of parent involvement much thought. It seemed that students needed to really examine what it was that they were resistant to if their parents were involved, and how they would benefit if their or other parents came in to assist in various capacities. They agreed that having parents involved could make a difference, but this acknowledgement was made after much discussion on this topic. This supports some of the work by Kohlberg as cited by Lewis (2003):

> According to Kohlberg's theory, adolescence should be provided with hypothetical dilemmas where students can explore their feelings and openly discuss their viewpoints in choosing between conflictual situations. Through their discussions, adolescents become more aware of their power to make choices and decisions about their lives. (p. 6)

Four of the seven student participants seemed to have come to terms with the potential tension between themselves and their parents should they be involved and the reasons why

this tension might exist. However, regardless of some of this type of conversation during the research interviews, the other three students were not as understanding of their parents continued direct involvement.

They all remained relatively consistent about the fact that they preferred not having their mothers in the classroom (specifically Students 3 and 4). These two students in particular demonstrated discomfort because they felt that the involvement infringed on their independence and would be meddlesome. As Eccles and Harold (1993) indicate: "Adolescents' emergent focus on independence and autonomy usually depresses active interest in overt parent involvement" (p. 28). These students confirmed this research: *"If she was like in my classrooms and stuff, I would feel [as if she was being] very intrusive or whatever" (Student 4).*

> *It would just make me very uncomfortable because I love my mom and ...we have a very good relationship, but when we were in middle school and she was in some of my classes, it hindered our relationship a lot because we were seeing way too much of each other... [M]y mom has a very big problem with letting me grow up and I know that...that's part of the reason why she moved from the elementary school to the middle school. So, if she came here, I would again feel that she was trying to trap me under her wing and not let me be my own person. (Student 3)*

In this instance, she explained that her mother had agreed to perform a less direct role in her involvement than she had in previous grades. Campbell and Gollick (1988) explain this tension and confusion about both wanting their parents support and rejecting it simultaneously. "[P]arental behaviour expectations and adolescent desire for independence may conflict…The intensity and duration of conflicts vary from family to family and from one period of time to another" (p. 79). Some of these student participants appeared to be at different stages of acceptance and rejection of their parents' influence in their lives.

Other students also seemed more comfortable with the indirect and behind the scene roles that their parents were playing with them at the high school level than the direct forms of involvement that we discussed. For example, the hot lunch program was described unanimously by the students as being a significant form of involvement where the students got to interact with their parents and had a satisfying benefit from their involvement. It was not perceived to be the type of direct involvement that they found intrusive. For example, Student five responded to my question "[Can] you think of where your mom made a difference to you somewhere?" *"It's the hot lunch…Really, if there were not parents to do hot lunch, there would be no hot lunch."*

Conditions of Acceptance

It seemed that students were more comfortable with their parents' involvement directly in the school if the parents themselves had a strong sense of efficacy as indicated by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997). Ross confirms that parent behaviour can encourage competence and achievement in children if the "parents view themselves as teachers and engage in effective strategies to help the child and they use more advanced levels and styles of thought and language in their interactions with the child…" (Ross, 1994, p. 7). If the parent had been a familiar presence in the school in previous years in other capacities and had a certain level of familiarity with the school and teachers, the students seemed to agree that this was desirable when they wanted to be in the school helping in the daily functioning of the high school. This observation by students supports Henderson's (1987) findings that "parent involvement is more effective if it is…long

lasting" (p. 4). The students described that parents had already proven their competence as a parent volunteer earlier on in their schooling and the chance of embarrassment was minimal. *"She knows…everybody in my grade because I've been here since like grade three. So, I know like, everybody from English she knows. And then when I moved up to middle school then she got to know everybody in Conrich. And so, she has really gotten to know all the kids and they've gotten to know her."*

Those students who were most comfortable even considering having their mothers come directly in their classrooms would only agree if they knew that their parents had a certain level of skill with the course content and high level of competence dealing with the students. A couple of the students did not feel that their parents should be the main instructors because that was what the teachers were there for and this was who was to be respected in this role. *"I don't know…a lot of times when you have like a special speaker…you don't really…accept what they're telling you as much as you do your teacher" (Student 1).* Two of the students seemed far more comfortable with the suggestion that their parents take an assistant role with the teacher or help by pulling specific students outside of the classroom for assistance instead of having them as classroom instructors or acting in similar capacities (Students 5 and 7).

However, Students Two and Six agreed that it would be helpful if the parent had a specific area of expertise in a curriculum area and were acting as a specialist or a visiting expert. *"I think if my mom knew a lot about what she was talking about it and if she came into a Bio 30 class…I think it would be good … if you ask someone that actually does it for a living or something…" (Student 2).* The participants mentioned specific

examples of parents with expertise that had instructed them in their option classes more frequently and with more enthusiasm than those who had assisted in core subject areas.

They alluded to the fact that if the parents and the teachers got along well and supported each other while in this direct instruction scenario, this was also desirable. One student in particular (Student 2) indicated that if the teacher actively supported and assessed the efforts of the students with parent instruction in the classroom, it would hold more credibility in the eyes of the students. Balli (1998) indicates that the involvement needs to feel right for students. "[W]hen the involvement feels appropriate, the involvement will likely be more useful. In addition, children respond to expectations from both their teachers and parents. If there is a good match between the expectations and requests of teachers and parents, children can focus on the task at hand… (p. 143). Student Six commented that his criteria for parents being involved would be that *"they would definitely need to be passionate and they [have to] ...want to do it. Not kind of, 'Okay, I guess, I should go do this because....'"*

There was also some criticism that some parents only wanted to help in order to help their individual child and not help all of the children in the classroom or school. Student Five described that many parents didn't think that it was important to help *"They just assume that somebody else is going to do it so they don't need to bother. They just don't love their daughter as much as my mom loves me (laughter)"* (Student 5). Most of the students alluded to the fact that parents have to want to do it for the right reasons in order for it to be really successful. There was not a lot of outside research that considered the student perspective supporting or denying these claims; however, these students had

consensus on many of these topics.

Finally, they described needing a high level of professionalism from their parents in order to feel comfortable with them directly in the classroom. For example, students described feeling very uncomfortable with their parents' involvement for the following reasons or in the following circumstances when they were not acting professionally. The dominant aggravation was if they found that the parents were smothering, "snoopy" (Students 3 and 4) or overly attentive and embarrassing to the students, or if they felt that the parents were there to observe or monitor them. They believed that this was a highly inappropriate form of involvement. *"[E]verytime they see [us] in the hallway they want to run up and give [us] a hug and kiss and see how [our] day's going…" (Student 3)*.. *"[I don't mind their help] as long as they're helping and not just badgering…[Y]ou don't want a parent coming out and asking if they can help you and distracting you" (Student 1)*. The second point viewed problematic was if the parents were perceived as nervous, uncomfortable or unconfident being in the classroom. Falling in line with this point was the third where the parents were perceived as unskilled or incompetent in a classroom situation socially or academically. *"Some parents are more of a hinderer than a help to some schools" (Student 6)*. Finally, a point that they agreed would be difficult with parent volunteering in general, although it was not true of any of them, was to have a parent involved if the parents had not been involved with the school before and were not a familiar presence in the classroom or in the school. These barriers are conducive with some of the findings of Rothwell (1994), Ross (1994) and Kaplan and Kaplan (2000).

Regardless of this negative feedback, they all contended that some support and

involvement is necessary. *"Yeah, I think there should be, like more parents should be involved. Not very many people help, not very many parents help…that are resourceful or that are involved with things and I think it could change students" (Student 7).* It was just the type of involvement and the degree to which they believed parents should be involved that varied from one participant to another.

Specific Volunteering Experiences

How has it been to have your parent involved in your program with specific positive or negative examples?

The students' recollections of their parents' involvement were all positive and they acknowledged their parents' support as helpful even if the situations instigating the support were negative. For example, Student Three described how she had an issue in the school with a male teacher who she believed was physically and emotionally abusing students. Even though the students had mentioned it to the administration, nothing seemed to be done about the problem. *"[W]henever we'd bring it up, either to him or another teacher or to a counsellor, they wouldn't take us seriously. So, finally, we told my mom about it and she got them to take us seriously and do something about it."*

Other student recollections of their parents' involvement were memories from younger grades where the parents were directly involved in the classroom helping them or other students. *"I remember that [w]hen I was in elementary school, when it was my first year, she made me feel more comfortable and more confident" (Student 3). "[S]he did exams, like the finals for the kids that don't read as well…actually reading them to them*

and helping them write down their answers and stuff. So, that was cool" (Student 5).

The students were able to recognize the difference that their parents were making in other students' lives and some of the examples of this were related to when their parents helped physically or academically challenged students. *"Whenever she was in class and I would walk by, I could see that she was helping, like teaching them how to count or whatever and helping [a disabled boy] walk through the hallways, like holding them up all the time and stuff" (Student 7).* As a result of this compassionate involvement, the students were able to see that their parents had formed significant relationships with the students in the school. *"Well, I guess they like it because everyone knows her and they're very friendly with her, and especially when they need their lunch" (Student 1).* As a result of this sense of relationship, all of the students described feeling supported and that this was a good feeling.

Correlation to Student Performance

Have you felt a difference in your performance at school, interaction with your peers or anything else since your parent has been involved?

In all cases the students were able to identify that their parents had helped them perform better in their school programs or make decisions that resulted in a better program school experience. *"I remember last year, when I was in English and I started…she was able to get me into a modified course for English 23" (Student 4).* The strong message that came across again in response to this question was that their parents had served as motivators to these students to perform to the best of their abilities in a

timely and constructive manner. *"I'd probably be a little slacker. I wouldn't always be like, 'Oh, I need 80's'...I'd probably be like, 'Oh, I'll do it tomorrow"* (Student 5). *"Yeah, she pushes me at home. Helping me...making sure my work gets done. She does that a lot"* (Student 7).

They assisted these children by providing regular homework routines and developing a family structure to incorporate curricular and extracurricular activities. There was a sense of expectation on the parents' parts and these students were very aware of these expectations. They were attempting to rise to these levels of expectation as the parents had also mentioned in some of their interviews. *"I think [they've] made me try harder and because we have high, very high expectations [at home]"* (Student 6). There appeared to be a level of initiative that the students acknowledge they made more now at the senior high level than in their younger grades; however, they acknowledged that their parents had and do make a difference.

A couple of the students were also able to see the assistance that their mothers had afforded them socially (Students 2 and 6). Although there were references to the parents assisting with peer relationship to a small degree, the majority of the students felt that socially they were responsible for their own friendships and social interactions, especially at this level of their social development. *"I don't think she helped me like socially as much as she seems to help me with other stuff"* (Student 4). However, two of the students realized that connecting with other peers in the community had been enhanced by their parents' involvement (Students 1 and 2).

Chapter Review

A clear desire for independence is mentioned by these students in response to the question of whether they appreciated direct parent involvement. Although the value of direct involvement in the instance of certain types of parent expertise or skill was noted as valuable by many of the student participants, they still had reservations about this form of direct involvement noting specific drawbacks with assessment and parent credibility. It seemed that the students were more appreciative and comfortable with the idea of direct parent involvement as the interviews progressed making it possible to believe that students can be trained to understand the value of community involvement.

The student reticence about parent involvement varied by degree, but for the most part, the students believed that the classroom was a place for them independent of their parents and respected the teachers' authority and ability to run their own classrooms. They also commented on how they found parents who were overly interested in helping only their individual children rather than their children in the context of the full classroom. They were also critical of those parents who were helping only to monitor their children too closely and smothering them.   They were able to identify the differences between this negative type of involvement and what they perceived to be appropriate positive and supportive parent involvement.

The students did appear to appreciate the more indirect forms of involvement that were occurring with their parents in and out of the school, although they were not always clear about the details and the background of their parents' present involvement. They all remembered very clearly whether their parents had volunteered for the hot lunch program,

and they expressed very explicit appreciation for this program. They seemed to accept this type of involvement as non-threatening and supportive of making their school experience more satisfying. They enjoyed the social contact that they had with their parents during this time as it was clearly an acceptable form of involvement to the entire student body in the school and there was no stigma attached to this form of visible involvement because it involved warm food.

They were also able to identify the advantages of their parents' involvement both academically and to some extent, socially. Having a parent advocate gave them insight into and confidence regarding their school situation. They described the distinct advantages, as annoying as they admitted that it could be, to have their parents' home and extracurricular support, through motivation and routine. They acknowledged that although it had evolved from younger years, this type of out of school support was still clearly part of their educational success. It was apparent that the longstanding relationship that these parents had formed with their children and their children's peers made the experience of involvement easier for these students than if these parents were entering their high school for the first time. Most of them described feeling relatively comfortable with their parents' presence in their education because they had simply always been there.

Chapter Five

The Teacher Response

The Question of Parent Involvement

Curricular Involvement

How and why have parents become involved in your classroom and why are they not involved as well?

Teachers indicated in their interviews that parents tend to be more involved in senior high school from a distance or in an extracurricular capacity rather than directly in their curricular programs. However, Teacher Two who is a content area teacher acknowledged that she has grown accustomed to assistance from parents especially in the English 33 [less advanced stream] route, and occasionally they have come on board as experts for certain topics. However, she discovered that students often have contempt for parents coming in to teach just as they do for substitute teachers. Therefore, the skill of classroom management on the part of the parent is of key consideration to their involvement. Students value experience and expertise at this adolescent age. *"They no longer want babysitters" (Teacher 2).*

Teachers acknowledged that individual student academic and/or behaviour problems often drew the parents who were not typically involved into dialogue with them about the curriculum.

Why they have been involved is…mostly concerning their class performance. I

don't have any parent come in and volunteer with me. I've never had parents call up and offer to volunteer nor have I asked them either. So… the parent and I will have a meeting, sit down, develop a plan, [and decide] how we help this student be more successful. (Teacher 6)

The teachers described that some parents often wanted to know about their struggling students' academic and behaviour progress and they also wanted to develop connections with the teachers as a result of this interest. However, these interactions were not always described as being positive and encouraging of parents being involved in other capacities within their school programs.

Teacher Two mentioned that occasionally she found that there were interested parents who felt that they should be involved because they had children in common with the teacher. She also mentioned that some parents who were interested in a specific subject area or were confident and well educated were the types of parents coming into the school to offer involvement. The teachers seemed to agree that these pockets of parents were familiar and regular faces in the school, whereas other parents tended to stay away from the school. Questions about how to engage the other part of the parent population were raised.

The teachers who teach band, fashion design and home economics (Teachers 1, 4 and 5) recognized that parent experts had been an extremely beneficial part of their curricular programs at some time or other demonstrating expertise or an interest in the program. *"I think the [students] appreciate their moms coming in and all the students do [too]. They see the difference it makes because there's usually a long list on the board and I'm just going down the list helping each individually"* (Teacher 1).

I'm going to [mention]… the cake decorating because she's …done it and she's baked and she did a Black Forest cake. She brought in whip cream and

...stabilizer and she brought in all...and she put the cherries in it...[T]hen the kids each did their own and she whipped the whip cream up...because she was so good at what she was doing they couldn't help but have a positive experience. (Teacher 4)

Other Types of Involvement

Trips and special events that were complementary to coursework were also considered to be a big component for getting parents involved with the school in a variety of ways: fund raising, advertising, and planning (Teacher 5). Teachers acknowledged that parents made many of the special events traditional to this high school such as the graduation ceremonies, band trips, French exchange trips and the school fashion show happen successfully (Teachers 1, 2, 5 and 6). The teachers appreciated the school council and it appeared in large part because this school council contributed financially to their programs. The hot lunch program and school store were also referenced several times and noted as valuable programs.

There was some uncertainty with the teachers whether the school had a parent volunteer coordinator. Those teachers who had been at the school for awhile, remembered a coordinator in the past, but they did not seem to know if there was a parent volunteer coordinator in the school in this particular school year or even in the last school year. *"Oh, at one time the school had a parent volunteer committee that we could put our names in with...That's fallen by the way, but I do think it helped"* (Teacher 1). This lack of awareness about the efforts of the parent community confirmed what Parent One said in her interview, *"[W]hen I tell teachers that I am the volunteer coordinator, they can phone me for stuff, they don't even know that I'm the volunteer coordinator..."*

Contradictions

Contradictions came up in the interviews even within each independent interview as teachers grappled with the topic of parent involvement. At times in the interview they were hesitant about parent involvement and at other times, they indicated the importance of parent involvement and questioned or seemed embarrassed that they were not doing more of it. *"Like parents, I meant it's wonderful, and now this has really made me think about it. Why don't I have them involved more?" (Teacher 6).* There was an indication that there is presently a shortage of teacher aids and parental aids and therefore parent help would be valuable (Teacher 6). Some of the teachers had tried to independently recruit help from the parents of their students. *"I've sent a note home with the course outline with a little addendum on the bottom asking them if anyone was interested in parent volunteering in the class in the Fashion Studies…I actually haven't had any help now for two years" (Teacher 1).* Suggestions of recruitment at career days or through collaborative book talks were given, although they acknowledged that they did not presently have a career day or anything related to this type of event. A couple of them mentioned that there had been such events in the past. A suggestion was made that the career counselor in the school might involve parents around the needs of the students (Teacher 3) in such a career day activity.

Then, contrary to their recognition of the "ideal value" of parent involvement, within the same interviews, teachers indicated that students at this level of education did

not require this type of immediate attention, and these teachers did not see that it was practical to involve parents directly into their programs. They felt that it was natural for parents to separate a bit from their children at this age. *"I think…that parents detach from their kids more when the kids are in high school, and I can even see that in interviews. Parent-teacher interviews I have a lot more parents of grade ten students than I have with grade twelve students. The grade twelve parents that come, half of them come to talk about grad…" (Teacher 2). "I think by the time you get to high school…parents are ready to wash their hands" (Teacher 3)*.

A few of them expressed that they wouldn't know what to do with parent volunteers if they did have them. *"Honestly, I don't know what they'd do. I want to point out, I don't know. Especially with the French because a lot of parents wouldn't have that background…I don't feel that at this age level I need to have the parents in my classroom…I think at this grade…I can handle them myself…" (Teacher 6)*. The consensus of this group was that they were not certain how to involve parents directly into their classroom programs and seemed more comfortable engaging them outside of the classroom in supportive roles with projects, extracurricular initiatives or home support in the instance of difficulties. *"I don't think parents should be in the classroom at this age, but I think that they should certainly be involved and I think that the parent should definitely …know [that] the door should be open" (Teacher 5). "I couldn't have made it without my parent volunteers [coaching]…to drive, to take care of meals, to help supervise the tournaments…the athletic program can't make it without parents. Whereas the classroom seems to be functioning" (Teacher 4)*.

Teacher Barriers

There were hindrances to parent involvement described by the teachers that were compatible with the findings of Ross (1994), Rothwell (1994) and Kaplan (1992); however, these interviews gave a very detailed sense of these teachers' reservations for involving parents. The major comment was that a few of the teachers had a sense of being over-accountable and were uncomfortable with the added focus on the program when parents were involved. However, it was mentioned by Teacher Five that this accountability is not always a bad thing. *"You have to be right on top of things. That's a good thing."* He explains that accountability is a positive and necessary part of his profession because he agrees that parent "clients" should be aware of his practice. However, he does admit that it puts additional pressure on him as a teacher.

> *I can't see on a daily basis having parents in my classroom and I don't know, maybe I'm a bit nervous about having parents in my classroom, to be honest…[Y]ou'd feel like you have to be on guard a little bit more…It's almost like being supervised by the principal or something. You know, you need to put in that extra little [to] make sure everything is really tight. (Teacher 6).*

Simon (2001) mentions that

> parents may question how helpful they can be in the classroom; teachers may not want to be monitored by parents in the classroom; and students may not want their parents at the school, keeping tabs on them during the school day. These and other reasons may explain why, even though a third of high school reportedly had a formal program to recruit and train volunteers, only about one in eight parents volunteered. (p. 10)

It was also indicated that it would require more time and energy to involve parents than to teach the program alone (Teachers 6 and 7). The matter of organizational difficulties and preparing for the additional "help" was questioned by the teachers as they considered the value involvement from a practical time and effort perspective.

> *I find I don't have time to get a hold of these parents. Like this semester, I have no preps. I have the half-hour at lunchtime…I don't have the time…I don't call parents from my home at night. I stay after school and call them, but I hate calling from home because I feel that's my home time. That's my family's time with me and I don't want to have to do that…I know it's important to call, but sometimes when you're faced with it, you think, "Well, I'll call the ones that got below 40 [percent]. (Teacher 6)*

She resembles the "Busy-Teacher Role" as defined by Berger (1995) because of her mention of her being too busy to take on the responsibilities of parent volunteers. This same teacher mentioned that the "crowd control" of having even more bodies in the classroom would prove to be a management problem. This point was supported by Teacher Seven in his interview when he indicated that involvement in his mind was time consuming and it was difficult for teachers and parents to make more time for this type of collaboration.

The teachers raised the matter of whether parents were competent or had the appropriate amount of expertise. Teacher One teacher mentioned that it was wonderful when parents wanted to help her with her program, but they are not always skilled or capable and often became an encumbrance to the program rather than an asset. *"[Y]ou need someone very skilled at the high school level, and unfortunately, I've had people volunteer who are not" (Teacher 1).* As Elliot and Williams (2000) found in their study: "While adult volunteers would appear, at least on the surface, to ease the class teacher's

load, inexperienced helpers are likely to require substantial guidance and support that will place significant demands upon their mentors. Where the turnover of volunteers is high, teachers guidance may become minimal and the initiative may ultimately prove counterproductive" (p. 12). "Teachers need a more elaborate set of skills in assistance…" (Edwards and Warin, 1999) to make the experience self-sustaining and attractive enough to teachers to repeat in the future.

Parent Barriers

Many of the teachers focussed on why parents were not involved and raised the matter of parent barriers many times during the interview focussing on the barriers researched by Ross (1994), Rothwell (1994), Kaplan (1992) and Epstein (2001). The key barrier that was mentioned was the intimidation of the curriculum and that they believed that parents did not feel qualified to teach or assist with the general curriculum (Teachers 2 and 4). Another was the intimidation of the mature students and that parents didn't like coming into the school because of the teenagers in the hallways (Teacher 4). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) reference several studies that indicate:

> Efforts to explain declines in involvement often associated with child age usually point to changes in the level of academic work required across the span of school years, changes in parents' beliefs about their ability to help when their children are having problems, and specific developmental changes in children…adolescents' emergent focus on independence and autonomy usually depresses active interest in overt parental involvement. (p. 28)

Another obstacle perceived by teachers of the parents' unwillingness to be involved was the negative historical experiences that the parents themselves or their children had experienced in school. *"I think that it goes back to the [fact] that parents hate school"*

(Teacher 5). Teacher Two spoke eloquently about the fact that parents approach a school as they approach a bank, with their hat in their hands based on their own past experiences.

The matter of feeling unwelcome was also indicated as some teachers mentioned that they had heard that the parents did not like the greeting that they received at the office by the secretarial support staff. As well, teachers commented that they felt that many parents were kept at arm's length because they were perceived to be interfering or difficult by various staff members. Feuerstein's (2000) study indicates after much analysis of secondary students across the United States, one major finding. If parents feel welcome, they will become involved.

The barrier of the dual working families in the Chestermere community, was expressed as being a significant obstacle to parent involvement. Many parents from this relatively affluent community were described as being too tired to be involved and not capable of being committed to ongoing and regular involvement with the school (Teacher 4). Teacher Seven seemed sensitive to the possibility that those parents who are involved in his teaching program might offend those who can not be involved. His comment raised the recognition of social and cultural barriers that might be occurring in this school, although racially, the students seem to be predominantly Caucasian from a middle to upper class background. It seemed unfair to him that some parents are able to be involved and other parents could not be involved due to family socio-economic status or other situations that might prevent involvement.

Parent Background and Training

Parent Training

Did you feel that the parents were adequately prepared for the roles that you requested of them or that they hoped to undertake?

Burke (2001) mentions in her review of some of the research done on the topic of parent involvement that

> [e]ffective middle and high school recruitment and training programs should (a) design volunteer development strategies that will capitalize on a volunteer's skills to support student achievement; (b) create culturally sensitive recruitment and training strategies that promote a school's culture of caring; and (c) view volunteers as part of a comprehensive partnership program that involves all six types [Epstein's model 1997] of parent and community involvement. (p. 50)

The teachers at this school discussed more of the informal training that occurred at their school. They described how parents were often trained on the job in their previous experiences as volunteers in the earlier grades. It was also felt that internal volunteer mentorship was an obvious form of training where other experienced parents on committees or involved in other volunteer activities would mentor newer volunteers. *"[E]very year, two or three parents emerge as leaders in grad and they become the person upon whom I rely and we develop this really close relationship…an intense relationship through a short period of time"* (Teacher 2).

It was noted that most of the parents involved on this same graduation committee were women, although there were some other special events where the fathers also became involved. *"Yeah, and its mostly women. I get very few men...But you know the dynamic with men. When men come into a group of women, all the women stop talking and the men will say something and if the women don't agree with him they don't say*

anything" (Teacher 2, p. 341). They spoke highly of parents who became involved because these parents were genuinely interested in helping not only their own "independent" child but for the "collective" (Rothwell, 1994) group in the extra-curricular programs.

Levels of Commitment

It was acknowledged that all parents had a different level of commitment to the school and to their children based on their abilities and confidences with the school and the curriculum (Teacher 7). *"[I]t always seems to be that parent-teacher interviews, you get the kids with the 90's. Their parents are there" (Teacher 3).* This parent involvement was also based on their availability. The perception was that skilled people necessary for direct involvement were often working at their vocation and were hard to find to come into the classrooms as mentors (Teacher 1).

Parent support at home was deemed valuable by the respondents, and they felt that the parents were quite competent in assisting or facilitating support for their children's home studies. This observation seemed ironic in light of the fact that these teachers did not feel these same parents were competent or skilled enough to assist them in the classroom. This group of parents referenced by these teachers was not indicative of parent groups outlined by Balli (1998) suggesting that few parents had the confidence to help in any great capacity with the advanced homework of the high school programs. Balli (1998) indicates as a result of his study that "educators should explore ways to support more parents as they make an effort to understand homework concepts and select

developmentally appropriate strategies for helping their children with homework" (p. 146). This type of support from the schools might boost the confidence of a wider parent community to ensure a greater participation from parents to help their children with their schoolwork.

Teacher Training

Again it was mentioned by the teachers that there did not appear to be an active parent volunteer program recruiting and training parents (Teacher 7), although there had been in the past. This ran very contrary to what was indicated to me by parents and the school administrator about what they perceived to be an active volunteer program. It was evident that these teachers had not been informed or engaged enough with the parent recruitment program to give me information about its functioning. Very few of the ideas that Ross (1994) references as a means to revitalize school-parent connections were made by these teachers:

- Home visits, including "coffee klatches"
- A positive phone program to identify progress and appreciation
- School videos to show children at work loaned through the school or public library
- Parent education programs on community cable TV
- Parent education programs and call-in shows on local radio
- Planned neighborhood walks by teachers to talk informally with parents
- Housing project outreach to get information to parents
- Education weekends that encourage the community to emphasize education
- Linkage with public library services to reach its users
- Links with services in community child-care agencies
- Continuing education courses on parental involvement
- Translation service centres for parents
- Parent resource rooms in school
- Parent liaisons to co-ordinate parental involvement

- Participation in school decision-making (p. 10)

The absence of the mention of these suggestions could suggest that teacher training to incorporate and collaborate with the community might be beneficial. "Before starting a program for parental involvement, boards must consider training for teachers and principals. This training sets the standards for what is possible; hence they must come to value the participation…If they are not consulted and supported, teachers may undermine any possible success through their lack of understanding, apathy or resentment" (Ross, 1994, p. 10).

Supportive Roles In and Out of the Classroom

Home Support

What types of supportive roles have parents undertaken in your program to support students and curriculum?

This question was answered and went into many different directions for three of the teachers while the remaining group felt that they had already answered the question in the previous discussion and were comfortable to move to Question Four. Home routines and expectations of work being completed at home were considered to be essential to the success of a student's performance at school. Even though a couple of teachers indicated that these supportive routines were probably put in place when the students were younger, they felt that if these routines were maintained at home at the high school level it made a difference for the students in the classroom. Simon (2001) indicates that this ongoing

home support is beneficial to secondary students as well as younger students:

> By their senior year of high school, teenagers have some entrenched study habits, attitudes, and behaviour patterns related to school. Nevertheless, this study shows that even through the last year of high school, and regardless of teenagers' background or achievement, families influence teenagers' school success. When parents support teenagers as learners in various ways, teenagers are more likely to succeed in school. (p. 4)

Teacher Two mentioned that parents who exerted their influence by discouraging their children from working at a job outside of school time or staying out too late were helping their children succeed in her program. *"How can a kid do homework or do anything, have any kind of a regular homework schedule if he or she is working that much? Or going to the bar every night?"* Comments were made that students were taking on more and more adult responsibilities outside of the classroom with jobs that distract them from their responsibilities at school. *"I think students are taking on what are adult responsibilities. Like they're cooking and they're cleaning and they're babysitting and a lot of them have jobs" (Teacher 4).* These teachers felt that parents who are able to give their children monetary support or incentives not to work so that they will continue working hard at school seemed to be giving the significant kind of support that makes a distinct difference in student performance at the high school level.

> *I have 33's [Grade 12 Lower Academic Route] one or two classes a year and those kids say things like, "We go to the bar every night…or I work every night…I have a girl this year. She's in grade eleven…and she said, "[I] get money for marks," because her mother says to her, "School is your job. I am going to pay you for your marks so that you don't have to work." …[O]ther kids say that too. "School is my job. I'm going to work really hard so I can get scholarship money so that I don't have to work [on the side]. (Teacher 2)*

Her perception was that the children who work at part time jobs do not excel in their school studies especially now when the competition for post-secondary entry is even

greater than it has been in the past. She believed that these parents directly or indirectly offered opportunities for their children by monitoring the amount that they do in and out of the home so it doesn't interfere with their schooling.

Positive Relationships

Those parents who had a good relationship with their children had different volunteering experiences with the school than those parents who were involved only to monitor their children's behaviour and discipline issues. *"Kids who get along well with…their parents…work like a team. The parents provide opportunity and support for the kids to excel" (Teacher 2).* There seemed to be a strong voice that parents should not be directly "in the faces" (Teacher 2) of the students, but instead should give them some independence and an opportunity to be themselves. These positive relationships also promoted the amount of involvement that parents contribute to their children's education. "Positive relationships are likely to encourage involvement…while more conflicted relationships seem likely to discourage involvement" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, p. 29). *"I guess the kids I see that are the most successful are the ones that have supportive parents who don't make excuses for them…and a team approach…they talk to each other like they're adults" (Teacher 2).* Many of the teachers admitted that it is desirable to have a strong relationship with the families they were teaching.

Regular Support

Regular and familiar involvement was indicated as being superior to sporadic

involvement. Teachers Five and Seven believed strongly that those parents who were able to make a regular time commitment and become a familiar presence to the students were offering the most valuable form of parental support. *"One parent…[is] my accompanist for the choir and I think she did that last year because I…so..desperately needed her help…[W]e had such a good time last year that she agreed to do it this year…she said not to worry, she'd definitely be interested, even though her kid was graduating"* (Teacher 5). *"I actually had a parent come in and take over as the yearbook advisor because I needed a parent supervisor…[S]he did an absolutely wonderful job and I greatly appreciate what she did"* (Teacher 6). This type of consistent involvement seemed to be where teachers were most comfortable having parent participation.

The teacher felt that the parents were very beneficial to the school when they provided the following types of support: motivation for completing homework as well as helping with homework, inspiring effective scholarship application, being involved in sports and other extracurriculars, and showing support at special events. All of the following comments were made in reference to the need for parent support in these indirect capacities mentioned above: *"I don't think a school will ever function totally without parents coming in"* (Teacher 4). *"I mean the parents have to be supportive…have to or else it's not going to work"* (Teacher 6).

> *But I mean extra-curricular wise too, with the yearbook, I would like to see more parents come and say, "You know what, why don't [I] come in and you can have the day off on Tuesday after school. You can go home." Or, "Anytime you need coverage…we'll cover for you." I'd like to hear that, especially in the extra-curricular things where you're rearranging your whole personal schedule so you can fit in this volunteering. That's about it.* (Teacher 6)

Specific Volunteering Experiences

Positive Experiences

What specific experiences have you had with parents involved in your program?

Five of the seven teachers had positive experiences and these specific stories described parents involved in an extra-curricular capacity. These experiences tended to be longer-term projects, which established some significant relationships, based on trust and commitment. *"[With] the Alberta-Quebec French student exchanges…I get fairly involved with families who take the students and I've just had some wonderful, wonderful families who take these kids. I mean, I would trust them [and] have full faith that things are just going so well"* (Teacher 6).

> *I've had fabulous help extra-curricular. I was doing a fashion show every second year and involved over a hundred kids…and that was easily 500 hours work…so…I had two kids from my Fashion 30 class heading it and their parents were always so helpful. I mean, they were helping us all the time. You know, they helped pick out clothes…and the food…I couldn't have done it without the parents. (Teacher 1).*

The teachers who mentioned these types of situations described having developed strong relationships with these families in the community. Teacher Two remembers one family in particular whose daughter was the valedictorian at one of the graduation ceremonies. She clarifies that she was never sure whether the daughter was successful because of her parents' involvement or whether they were involved because she was successful. After some reflection during the interview, she felt that it was the involvement that was the determiner of the student's success and not the other way around. She found that this family was involved not only for their child, but also for the group. In this particular

graduation project, the parents knew each other and their children. There was a sense of camaraderie. *"I went out with the grad parents committee and they were talking about how much they were going to miss each other because they had been together since kindergarten" (Teacher 2).*

Negative Experiences

Two of the teachers had negative experiences referencing their concerns about how parents became over-empowered and took over. These parents were described as often pressing the teacher for more out of the program or out of the grades for their children. This type of parent described resembled the "Club-Waving-Advocate Role" Berger (1995) mentions who engage in power plays with teachers out of devotion for their children. Teacher Five had an experience where he felt that the parent was redefining "success" for her child by putting pressure on the child and the teacher for high grades and optimal performance. Teacher Five believed that this pressure was preventing this student from experiencing the true pleasure of the school and his program. He shared a document resembling a resume that the parent had sent to support a promotion for the child to move to the next level of his program without participating in the pre-requisite course.

Teacher Six had a different type of negative experience. She described feeling that the parents in general viewed their children's education as the school's responsibility. *"I've had a few situations where I will contact the parent and say, 'Look, Johnny's not doing well in math. What are we going to do?' And they turn it around and say, 'It's not our problem. It's yours. What are you going to do about it?'"* This "Avoidance [Parent]

Role" (Berger, 1995) was a familiar one that she had experienced with parents many times. She described that the parents also believed that it was the school's responsibility to communicate with them and not the other way around. She believed that even the communication that parents did get from the school did not rectify this situation. *"I [got] a phone call when the school report card went out and she just tore a strip off me. Why didn't I have contact with the home…I said, 'Well, I sent this home three weeks ago and I sent one before that and so forth.' And she, her quote was, 'Oh, come on now...It's high school. You know kids forge their parents' signatures.'"* In Teacher Six's opinion parents should call in and check periodically. There should be more initiative from the parents for involvement than she was seeing demonstrated.

Communication

These teachers felt that most school-parent communication was initiated by issues or problems perceived by either the parents or the teachers. Therefore, phone calls from the school and communication in other forms might prove to be a threat instead of an invitation and this type of communication was not perceived as effective for welcoming parents into the school community. Berger (1995) mentions that there are various one-way and two-way types of communication that are useful for improving communication between school and home in early as well as secondary grades. She lists several one-way communications, which are the following: simple newsletters, notes, newspapers, district newsletters, media, suggestion boxes, handbooks, specialized handbooks and summer handbooks. The types of two-way communications that she recommended are: homework hotline, telephone calls, home visits, visits to the classrooms, participation

visits, visits by invitation, student-parent exchange day, student-parent-school exchange

and community and school breakfasts (pp. 163-172).

The types of communication that were being used in this school were described as

being most often one-way rather than two-way such as: school newsletters, notes or

letters home, phone calls, parent-teacher interviews, and other special events interactions.

It seemed apparent through these discussions that communication that starts with a

problem initiated by either the parent or teachers was not something that would encourage

greater levels of parent participation; however, successful ongoing communication in a

variety of forms seemed to be more desirable and in the eyes of these teachers capable of

promoting greater involvement.

The teachers had differing opinions about who was responsible for communication.

Simon (2001) confirms the problem of communication between home and school and

school and home in her study of more that 11,000 parents of high school seniors and

1,000 high school principals:

> Overall, activities involving school-to-home and home-to-school communication
> were intermittent or infrequent. Parents and high school staff members rarely
> communicated about teenagers' academic performance (not including report
> cards), attendance, and behaviour. For example, approximately two out of three
> parents were never contacted by the school about their child's attendance, and
> about three out of four parents never contacted the school about their child's
> attendance. (p. 10)

Teacher Three felt that some parents were willing to put the time in after school if the

teachers were willing to contact and involve them. He believed that the initiative needed

to come from the school. Simon (2001) had the following conclusions about the benefits

of school initiated communication in the research she had done on high school outreach

programs:

- When school staff members contacted parents about teenagers' post-secondary plans, parents were more likely to attend post-secondary planning workshops and talked more frequently with teenagers about college and employment.
- When school staff members contacted parents about volunteering, parents were more likely to volunteer as audience members at school activities.
- When school staff members informed parents about how to help teenagers study, parents worked more often with their teenagers on homework.
- When school staff members contacted parents about a range of school-related issues, including their teen's academic program, course selection, and plans after high school, parents talked with teenagers more often about school. (pp. 15 and 16)

Teacher Two mentioned that both the school and the parents need to initiate communication. She emphasized the importance of a variety of types of communication from the school: calendars, report cards, web sites, newsletters etc. However, she believed that the parents needed to stop blaming the school and be involved in the dates set out on the calendar. Both parties needed to accept responsibility and "partner in a range of ways through teenagers' last years of high school" (Simon, 2001, p. 16).

Correlation to Student Performance

How do students respond academically, socially or otherwise knowing that their parents are involved?

All of the teachers agreed that there was a definite correlation between parent involvement and student performance in all areas. Simon (2001) also found that "[r]egardless of teenagers' achievement or background, high school and family partnerships positively influence teenagers' grades, course credits completed, attendance, behaviour and school preparedness" (p. 16). The teacher participants emphasized that

"active" involvement by the parents was the true measure of the impact that it had on their children.

> [T]he parents who seem more involved [and] who want to jump right in and help me and help the students…sometimes their kids…mimic that attitude as well. "Okay, we're going to fix this problem. We're going to do better in math, and you know, I'm going to turn this around."…I see the parents' attitudes reflected in the kids and vice versa as far as getting involved. (Teacher 6)

The key adjectives used by these teachers to describe effective parent involvement were the following: caring, disciplined, active, interested, and supportive. "Positive relationships" was the essential answer that came out of this question by the teachers. They felt that it was these good relationships in the families that determined the success of their children in the school (Teachers 1 and 2).

Teachers mentioned that the students seemed more accountable for their behaviour and performance if they knew that the teacher was communicating with the parents and that there was a familiar relationship between home and the school (Teacher Two). Involvement with the parents creates a different dynamic between the teacher and the student.

> [Those] relationships [with parents] are good and I think that they're helping and it allows you…it gives you that opportunity to…have an even closer relationship with their kids because there's that trust around and you don't feel [as though] you need to detach yourself…Whereas…if you don't have a parent who knows you than I think you're, well I know I'm a little more inclined to step back a little bit. (Teacher 5)

He continued by describing that he had noticed a change in the student after he had interacted with the parents. "[E]very parent that comes and sees me for parent/teacher interviews I see a definite change within their kids' behaviour, and not necessarily huge but you know it's [there]." He described learning pieces of information at these meetings

that make his teaching more sensible. *"K]nowing her background…it makes total sense why this kid's not doing well or why she's …really timid and very nervous and not willing to [try]."* However he expressed dismay that very few parents went to parent teacher interviews which is one of the few face to face forums set up in this school to discuss curriculum. *"We had the parent-intro night last week, and oh, I don't know, maybe twenty-five parents [came]."*

Teacher Three believed that the more successfully involved parents were in the earlier grades the minimal the resistance on the part of the student and the maximum acceptance of the involvement of the parent was achieved. He also felt that the students gained security from their parents and it impacted them socially: *"I think that socially the students really need to be secure knowing that their parents are around and their peers can see mom and dad in the hallways or the ball game or whatever."* He described his experience that these involved parents can also provide security for other students in an experience he had with a student who reached out for another student's parent in a difficult time:

> *I went around the corner, one of the little nooks in the back and he was smoking a pipe…and I hauled him down to the office and he didn't want to phone his father. He phoned the father of his buddy [instead]. Now, I'm not sure how that all works and the legalities of it and what not, but I do know that that same student has also had a fistfight with his natural father. So, the cool dad in all of this will look after his kids and his kid's sort of social clique. (Teacher 3)*

He believed that these certain parents have a level of relationship with these students and could relate to them at their level. This afforded students a social strength that they might not be able to have otherwise.

Chapter Review

The teachers interviewed for this study described feeling more comfortable with the type of parent involvement that is indirect rather than direct. They also expressed a greater value for indirect involvement as they believed that they saw little need for parents to be directly involved in their classrooms at this level of student development. Their experiences with direct involvement suggested the need for more qualified and more experienced parents who have specific specialties suited to their programs. Although these teachers recognized that the parent community was not meeting the standards that they believed necessary for direct parent involvement in their classrooms, they did not spend much time discussing the need for greater parent training to empower parents to feel and be more active in this regard. They did indicate that this was the principal's responsibility or their responsibility when they felt it was important or had the time to do so. They seemed quite comfortable that the present informal and experiential training was just "what happens" at this school when the instances of parent involvement occurred even though they acknowledged that sometimes this involvement was minimal.

Long term and regular support was deemed the most valuable type of support because these parents were then familiar with their classroom routines, students and role expectations without repeated training. The teachers also recognized how beneficial parents could be to their students' schooling if the parents were active and had positive relationships with the students. These types of parents were identified as being the same core group of parents from year to year and were the backbone of this school's parent network. These teachers also commented on how important it was for parents to

volunteer for the collective good of the school and not specifically for the good of their own children. They were critical of those parents who were acting solely to benefit their own children and complimentary of the familiar core parent group who seemed to grasp the concept of helping the broader program.

Tremendous appreciation was paid to parent involvement in the school's extracurricular programs or school council initiatives where the teachers clearly benefited from this help. However, direct and indirect parent involvement in general did not seem highly profiled in this school. Teachers did not seem aware of how parents were involved in many parts of the school that were not directly related to them. The teachers were also uncertain about whether they presently had a parent volunteer coordinator and what the specific functions of this role presently involved. As well, they seemed uncertain of what other parent groups in the school seemed to be attempting.

Teachers were able to see that parent involvement made a difference in their students' successes both academically and socially. However, many of these same teachers were not actively pursuing involving parents regardless of this belief due to the many obstacles and factors that they believed blocked their abilities to do so easily. Many of them described difficulties with school-home communication, inexperienced parent help, reluctant parents, negative past parent involvement experiences, reluctant students, recruitment and training difficulties, time constraints etc. These teachers and parent barriers comprised much of these teacher dialogues. This tension between recognizing the value of greater community involvement and yet not participating in fostering a greater involvement was present in all of the teacher interviews.

Chapter Six

Other Educational Voices

Experience with Parents

Background

What has been your experience with parents at the secondary level?

The administrators openly expressed the advantages of having an active

community involvement. *"I believe in parental involvement. It's everything"*

(Superintendent). "My personal view is that I value parent involvement at all levels"

(Associate Superintendent). However, they indicated that it took a truly effective and well-

orchestrated school initiative to bring about a successful parental involvement program.

Parent involvement was not something that just happened by itself regardless of the

openness and dedication of both the parent and school communities.

> *[F]rom a historical perspective, in terms of looking at the relationships that parents have specifically with their high school where their kids are attending, what has usually been evident from my view in working at the high school level is that it has been a distant relationship except for sports related or performing arts related activities. Additional engagement of parents, with respect with what's going on within the schools specifically as it may be related to teaching and learning, has been minimal. I would say that the years that I have observed, approximately twenty odd years that that type of relationship has not substantively changed except in some key schools that have targeted parent involvement in the broader community…that they have consciously and purposely planned that it is a goal or a priority in how their school will operate. (Associate Superintendent)*

The high school principal described himself as being very motivated to involve

parents and create an environment in his school that is open and demonstrates a desire for

parent involvement. Parent Two confirmed the positive work that this principle performed

at the middle school when he was the school principal at that location. *"[W]e found that middle school was awesome with him there. He's made that whole atmosphere wonderful and I think this place is changing too. He's made a huge difference, I think, in the system… [T]hat's why we came into the school, [and] sat on council…"* In his experience as an elementary, middle and high school principal in the same community, it was easy to get parents involved at the elementary and middle school levels because it was not viewed as intrusive by the students or teachers. However, at the high school level he felt that there was a hands-off approach. The program and the maturity of the students intimidated the parents.

The school counsellor agreed that many students appeared resistant to the involvement. *"[P]arents working in the school have caused some anxiety for some kids. [Parents will then] know who they're hanging out with. They know when they're kicked down to the office. They know if they're fooling around in the hallways and they've expressed anger towards that… [W]hy are they here? Why are they butting into my life?"* Despite these most obvious barriers, the principal felt that it was important to listen and not miss an opportunity to involve parents. He stated several times in the interview that teachers like to work in isolation and that there needs to be a full school approach to volunteerism. By doing so, the educational community becomes an advocate for the students.

The school counsellor also mentioned that she believed that students benefit by seeing adults volunteering and mentoring.

> *It's sad that kids become embarrassed when there are parents at school. You know, what has happened to society where it's a bad thing if the parent's volunteering. One of the things for developing resiliency is…called active*

participation…and that's one of the keys to resiliency. How do kids learn [this] if they don't see it? …I guess just volunteering your time for something that you believe in…[K]ids get credits for helping a teacher out and that bothers me… [You] [should] do it because it helps somebody out and because you like spending time with the person…not how many credits am I going to get. That really bothers me…

Welcoming Parents

All of the administrators agreed that it was the school's responsibility to initiate involving parents into the school in every communication and at every opportunity. Burke (2001) indicates that "a welcoming school environment that respects this community diversity includes orderly facilities, friendly staff members, adequate two-way communication strategies and support services, and a comprehensive volunteer development program" (p. 48). Feuerstein's (2000) findings were that

> increased school contact with parents typically resulted in reciprocal parent contact with the school. However, that effect was not even across all forms of school contact…These findings initially may seem inconsequential, but their implications are far-reaching. Schools can and do influence the level of parent participation in their children's education The scope of the influence may be limited and may not affect the degree to which parents discuss school related issues with their children or the degree to which they structure their home environments for learning. However, the link between increased contact with parents and improved parent volunteerism and PTO [Parent-Teacher Operations such as school councils] participation holds promise for those interested in helping parents to become more engaged with their schools and communities. (pp. 10 and 11)

The administrators explained that the way that educators and support staffs communicate with the community could either engage or turn parents off. It was described that identifying the appropriate forms of communication to enroll involvement was critical. "Parents want to know what is going on at school—and will find out one way or another. If the school doesn't communicate with them, they gather information

from their own observations, their children, rumors, or other parents" (Kershaw and

Blank, 1999, p. 2). Even though the public indicated in the 2001/2002 Learner, Parent

and Public Satisfaction Survey Summary Report that "the most useful sources of

information about Alberta's elementary, junior, and senior high schools are the schools,

newspapers, and school newspapers/newsletters" which are consistent with the previous

year's findings (p. 19), "[f]requent face-to-face communication also fosters an information

sharing network that is critical to fully functioning partnerships. Open lines of

communication help break down "we-they" barriers since everyone has an opportunity for

input" (Kershaw and Blank, 1999, p. 2).

The Associate Superintendent stated that the parents need to feel a sense of

belonging and schools should plan and highlight the energies that they require from the

parent community. There needs to be a welcoming atmosphere. He also acknowledged

that a parent coordinator is helpful on an ongoing basis to recruit parents. However, he

concurred that there needs to be a greater celebration of these efforts for there to be

sustainability within that learning community. There needs to be consistent message being

given to the community that the parents are valued. Every single message needs to profile

a welcome. Parents need to know that their contributions are "meaningful."

Parent Five indicated in her interview that she did not always feel welcomed when

she entered the school. *"You would come in and stand at the counter and you would*

wait, and you wouldn't be acknowledged. Or you'd phone and you'd be put on hold and

you'd think you were left in left field and you've got to phone back again…[Y]ou didn't

feel like you were being invited." The superintendent stated how important it is not to

alienate parents.

> *[Y]ou…need to be consistently sending very clear indications of why you value [parents]…every single time you're engaging in conversation and dialogue …your secretaries are sending that message. Your teachers are sending that message. You, the principal are sending that message. Every staff member, including the caretakers is critical in the contact that they have. I mean, parents talk to whoever is around. They can't always identify what role you are. They're not asked. Which means that whatever you're saying sets an image. Then ultimately sets this welcoming attitude because if you can't get parents to believe they can have true access, and I use the word access in its broadest [terms], they will never feel that they are welcome.*

He continued to explain that the expectations that schools send out are not always clear.

Schools should not send mixed messages and treat parents as if they are a threat. It is

simply too easy to block parents, and some of these are unconscious blocks.

> *If you want somebody in your school, you're going to make every effort to get them in and you're going to take no other answer but [that]. But if you don't want them there, it's very simple as educators to block them…You have to sign in at the office. When you come in, somebody has to escort you down to the room. When you get to the room, here's fifteen other things you can or cannot do…Trust builds trust.*

In general, the consensus was that if parents feel that there is anything hidden, they feel

insecure and unwelcome. The school needs to make sure that parents feel comfortable

enough to be part of the school/community relationship.

Teacher Competency

The principal felt that teachers need to know how to welcome parents and handle

parents once they are involved in the programs. His impression was that teachers do not

like to engage in conflict and in his opinion avoided contact with the community to

prevent conflict and needed conflict management skills to feel confident working with the

parent community. *"Do you know how many teachers and people are afraid to make phone calls? Train them how to make the damn phone call!... [E]verybody should take a mediation course before they get into the classroom."* They all agreed that teacher training was required to instruct teachers how to utilize the community and sustain this involvement. At present, they believed that teachers are reluctant to involve parents in the program and generate an interactive approach with the parent community. It is interesting to note that some of the teachers' responses support this belief when they indicated reluctance to involve parents; however, the teachers themselves had not identified that "teacher" training or other professional development might assist them with the inclusion of parents.

Thoughts and Feelings about Parent Involvement

School Councils

What do you think and feel about parent involvement at the secondary level?

The response was that parent involvement is often perpetuated by policy and by the school council, election and consensus procedures (Principal). The superintendent stated that there was initially a hope for greater parent involvement with the advent of school councils and the government changes to adopt this practice in its educational communities. He stated that it had been an awkward time for parents and schools as they tried to figure out what this new relationship would look like. Alberta had put into place in the early 1990's formal policy and procedures with regards to the involvement of

parents in the decision making process in our school systems. Premier Ralph Klein

afforded the communities a considerable amount of input. As a result, this bottom-up

structure shifted some of the authority and decision making to the people closest to the

schools—the parents.

> The issue of community involvement in schools received unprecedented attention
> in 1994 and 1995 during a yearlong public consultation process. This consultation
> found widely varying opinions on many issues, but agreement on at least one thing
> –Educating our young is so important to society, that everyone—government,
> parents, teachers, students and other community members—must share the
> responsibility by taking an active role. (School Council Resource Manual, 1995, p.
> A1).

However, many school councils are not achieving their optimal potential without

administrative support (Principal). Two of the parents (Parent 5 and 4) indicated in their

observations at provincial Home and School Conferences that they had attended, many

school councils are functioning merely in a token advisory capacity. The decisions about

school spending seemed to still be left primarily to school administrators and not

communicated effectively to the community as indicated in the provincial 2001/2002

Learner, Parent and Public Satisfaction Survey Summary Report. In this report there are

"low levels of satisfaction…expressed with respect to parents' and the public's access to

information and the information received concerning educational spending" (p. 18).

Although, according to the province "[t]he school principal has the primary decision-

making responsibility. However, the principal is expected to base decisions in consultation

with the school community and is accountable for seeing decisions meet community

expectations. School boards are expected to develop local policy on school-based

decision making which meets provincial requirements" (School Council Resource Manual,

p. A2).

School Satisfaction Survey

The school principal in Chestermere believed that parent involvement is a bigger topic than the school council is presently addressing. He felt that he needed to create his own support for parent volunteerism and did so because he was interested in it and considered himself to be a pioneer in this area. He explained that he works hard to build an enthusiasm in the teaching staff for including parents. His new position in the high school poses a formidable task in light of the 2000/01 Satisfaction Survey School Report taken at the end of the year of his administrative predecessor which he shared during his interview (see Appendix A). The key responses from parents, students and teachers gave an indication of some concerns in a representative group from this learning community about the school programs, environment and the school relationship with community. Responses from clerical assistants and assistant teachers, which were also included in this study, can be found in Appendix A.

Although interpreting this quantitative data could be a research project in itself, an interpretation of selected data relevant to my research project with some input from the principal was insightful at this stage of the interviewing process. It confirmed some of the comments arising in the interviews and qualified why certain responses might be happening in light of the responses in this survey from the greater community. It was interesting to compare the parent, student and teacher responses from my study with the larger parent, student and teacher community surveyed in this school satisfaction survey in

related and sometimes broader questions and contexts. It was also valuable to consider

the principal's input and perception of these comparisons.

Parent Responses

(30 Questions: 98 Respondents)

Question: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied:	Satisfied	School	Division
1. with the way you are welcomed when you visit the school?	Satisfied	73%	92%
2. with the way the school keeps you informed about your child's progress and achievement?	Satisfied	61%	80%
3. with the opportunities you have to be involved in school decision-making?	Satisfied	74%	82%
4. with the opportunities the school offers for your involvement in school activities?	Satisfied	87%	90%
10. with the communications you receive from the school?	Satisfied	70%	85%
12. that educational dollars are well spent in this school?	Satisfied	53%	79%
13. that the School Council plays a meaningful role in the school?	Satisfied	83%	86%
14. with the school's partnerships with businesses, organizations, and other community members?	Satisfied	84%	89%
15. with the overall quality of education your child receives?	Satisfied	61%	81%

These surveyed parents seemed very satisfied with the parent and business roles

that the parents are performing in conjunction with the school, although they were

dissatisfied with the way educational dollars were being spent. These parents appeared to

feel that there are good opportunities to participate in school activities and seemed

moderately satisfied with the kinds of welcome and communications that it receives from

the school, but were somewhat more dissatisfied by the way the school communicates

actual student performance. Although the focus of this study was broader and has a

different research methodology, this survey aligned for the most part with the interview

responses of the seven parent participants in my study when examining similar questions. However, my parent participants expressed in their interviews that although they felt that there was sufficient opportunity to participate with the school, they did not always feel welcomed, nor did they feel that the opportunities that were presented to parents were substantial enough to be considered truly "meaningful" involvement. They all believed that their involvement in the school council makes a difference to the school and this belief is supported by this school survey as well.

Student Responses
(27 Questions: 64 Respondents
Grades 10 and 12)

Question	Satisfied	School	Division
1. I feel welcome at school.	Satisfied	89%	91%
4. The staff at my school care about their students.	Satisfied	72%	86%
18. I am satisfied that the needs of all learners are met at this school.	Satisfied	60%	74%
19. I am satisfied with the overall quality of education I receive in this school.	Satisfied	77%	84%
25. I am proud of my school	Satisfied	65%	72%

The students appeared to feel very welcome at this school, and yet were clearly dissatisfied with the school to the degree that some did not feel proud of it nor did they feel that the needs of the learners were being met. They seemed moderately convinced that they were cared about and were receiving a quality educational experience. The participants in my study expressed moderate satisfaction to the question of their overall experience at Chestermere High School, but did not go into the detail that was requested in this satisfaction survey to describe their moderate response other than to say that that the school was "okay."

Teacher Responses
(30 Questions: 20 Respondents)

Question: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied:	Satisfied	School	Division
1. with the overall communication between the school and the home. (e.g. notices, newsletters, telephone calls)?	Satisfied	90%	97%
2. with the overall communication between the jurisdiction and the school?	Satisfied	90%	87%
3. with the opportunities you have to be involved in school decision-making?	Satisfied	47%	77%
8. with the school's discipline policy?	Satisfied	16%	72%
9. with the behaviour of students in the school?	Satisfied	21%	74%
10. with the opportunities for you to have input into how money is spent by the school?	Satisfied	55%	78%
16. with the involvement of parents within the school community?	Satisfied	60%	87%
17. with the school's partnerships with businesses, organizations, and other community members?	Satisfied	40%	77%
18. that the School Council plays a meaningful role in your school?	Satisfied	80%	87%
19. with the recognition you receive at the school level for your contributions?	Satisfied	37%	76%
27. that your school is a good place to work?	Satisfied	32%	88%
29. that the needs of all learners are met at this school?	Satisfied	63%	77%

Teachers indicated in this survey some concerns about student behaviour and discipline. A low morale and a feeling of not being included in decision making seemed more evident in this survey than it appeared in the interviews of teachers in my study. Teachers in my interviews did express some discontentment at the amount of work that they had to perform in the school which prevented them from taking on more responsibility to include parents directly into their programs. However, there was no mention of the fact that they were not recognized for their efforts by the school as appeared in this survey. Teachers in this survey obviously felt that the school was making a good effort to communicate with the home through traditional correspondence and this

belief was confirmed as well in the interviews.

There appeared to be consensus from the parents, students and teachers on this survey that there were issues that made the school climate and the programs within the school less successful than they could be. In his interview, the new principal recognized the changes that need to be made to address these survey responses, and he believed that community involvement was imperative to improving some of these educational matters. His initiative, like the Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) which identified nineteen consistently mentioned issues from across the province, identified "[t]he importance of building strong partnerships among schools, parents and communities" (Status Report, p. 2).

School-Community Relationships

The principal acknowledged that often the educators in this particular school view the community as a threat and the community views the actions of the school as threatening. The Superintendent supported this view when he stated

> *I struggled for many years as an administrator trying to get people involved at the high school level, and they were always reluctant because their kids didn't want them there. They didn't feel they had the expertise to contribute, [and] teachers were reluctant to have them…[M]y experience with parents…has been that they want to be involved, but they don't know how to be involved.*

He continued to say that people are looking for a connection, but people often have a judgement about teaching. The principal agreed: "*I get evaluated every day. Every set of eyes that walk into this building [place] a value judgement…for me at the school.*" He believed that the parents want to have meaningful involvement that is non-threatening.

The counsellor indicated that parents are even threatened by her phone calls home: *"I think with parents, it's like when the counsellor calls it's, 'Oh, what's wrong?'"*

The Associate Superintendent suggested that in his administrative experience, elementary schools welcome parent involvement and the involvement is diverse. The middle schools see the involvement diminish and the high schools rationalize why there is no involvement. He values parent involvement at the secondary level. The school counsellor confirmed that there was a shortage of teacher aids in the school. *"I do know there's a shortage of one on one aids in the classrooms so parents you know, would be useful."*

The Superintendent stated that he is developing a close connection to schools with his school visits in his second year as the superintendent of this school division. He would like to see the schools filled with parents. He knows that parents only have a limited amount of time to contribute and the decision for the involvement is up to the parent.

> *I visit every classroom in the system twice a year, so I see a significant difference in the students and in the classrooms in the schools where parental involvement is very high. I don't want to name the school, but there is one when I go in, it is filled with parents and when I talk to these parents I'm always shocked because I find out they're high end professionals. They're the doctors and lawyers, and I say, "How do you spend time away from your own profession, your own clinic?" They way, "We make it our priority. We will spend a half a day to a day a week in our child's classroom, no matter what."...*

> *And when I talk to the teachers, they say that's why this school is so successful...and it's so evident. And then you go into other classrooms at other schools that are struggling and don't have the real core relationship because the parents themselves don't want to commit...Everybody wants maximum results from their school, but very few people want to put in the time to assist that school to succeed.*

He believed that there needs to be a good rapport with the school and the school

community. All of the administrators indicated that there needs to be a clear focus on the part of the school to involve parents and train everyone involved accordingly.

Building Community Relationships

Parent Efficacy

What do you think is necessary to build adequate and supportive school and community relationships?

There was indication that parents do not feel welcomed and as a result are not utilizing school resources and opportunities. *"I'm noticing…parents aren't utilizing resources at the school as a support system because they're not recognizing what we do have [to offer]" (Counsellor).* The estimation given by these respondents of the parents involved in the program indicates that fewer parents are actively and directly involved with the school than those who are not. The principal indicated in his interview that he believed that the parents who do get involved are self-actualized with positive experiences in the school. Once again, this comment about confidence ties into what Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) talk about when they discuss parent efficacy:

> [P]arent efficacy [is defined] as parents' beliefs about their general ability to influence their child's developmental and educational outcomes, about their specific effectiveness in influencing the child's school learning, and about their own influence relative to that of peers and the child's teacher. Results revealed positive linkages between parents' sense of efficacy and involvement with children in educational activities at home and volunteering time at the school.

In the principal's opinion, confident parents are able to see beyond the mess that often happens with the home-school connection and stay involved.

So, I talk about the club. Statistics have shown that people who sit on your school councils are part of your club. They are the twenty percent of the self actualized, self-motivated individuals who aren't afraid to come into the school. They've had positive experiences, but when you look at the rest of the population, my challenge is [to] say "How do [I] mobilize and how do I get the opinions of what's going on with the other eighty percent?"

His concern was that if he recruits reluctant parents, he might be engaging reluctant behaviours. In other words, their attitudes and behaviours might be half-hearted and not in the best interests of the students and school. He was optimistic that there are teachable moments when his school can educate parents about parent volunteerism. The administrators agreed that the schools should identify interests and expertise specific to the school community so that there would be a good "fit" between the school and community. This need to survey the school community to identify skills and potential expertise was also identified by the parent participants.

The Superintendent noted a different statistic.

I think about seventy percent of…people in Alberta don't have kids in school at any one time. Thirty percent then are struggling to find out how they can get involved in the school. The other seventy percent [say] 'It's too hard. There's too many hoops…[W]hy bother?"…[However], [p]arental involvement isn't [always] indicated by the numbers. That's a poor indicator.

School and Divisional Frameworks

The Associate Superintendent mentioned that very structured and intentional school and divisional initiatives needed to be enacted to develop positive involvement. He explained that there needs to be a framework and standards developed to indicate what effective partnerships between the community and the school would look like. It is not sufficient just to be welcoming.

A successful descriptive case study in Southern California was reported by

Chrispeels (1997) who studies the various policy documents establishing professional

standards. His study indicates some standards as well as some frameworks supporting the

implementation and sustaining of parent involvement. He finds that "both state and

national levels reflect changing views about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions [of]

teachers…" In his study "Evaluating Teachers' Relationships with Families: A Case

Study of One District", he attempts to demonstrate an effective school-family policy

system that includes evaluation of teachers' relations with families. He concludes that

teachers should be able to

1. Know the communities from which their students come (the experienced professional will acquire a deep understanding of students and their communities);
2. Acknowledge and value the diversity of students and their families;
3. Use their knowledge of students' cultures and experiences to enrich the curriculum and connect instruction to students' experience, families and culture;
4. Be able to communicate performance expectations to students and parents;
5. Be able to solicit and use information about students' experiences, learning behaviour, needs, and progress from parents, other colleagues, and students themselves;
6. Maintain useful records and be able to communicate with students, parents, and other audiences about student progress (experienced teachers will be able to provide constructive feedback, encourage student self-assessment, and be willing to solicit feedback about their own teaching from student and parents);
7. Know about community resources and be able to integrate them into the curriculum (the experienced teacher will know how to mobilize students to tutor their peers and how to engage aides and volunteers as teaching assistants). (p. 188)

The framework developed for the Santa Cruz Beginning Teacher Support and

Assistance Project summarizes the developmental stages of the teachers' abilities related

to working with the parents and community with the above standards (see Appendix B).

There are five descriptors to rate the successful partnership between the teacher and the community: beginning, emerging, developing, integrating and innovating. The response by participants to the South Bay Union School District's 1995 mandated and evaluated five part state policy on parent involvement was positive.

> The four principals agreed that without the previous mandates a comprehensive communication system probably would not have been put in place. The principals also indicated that as a result of all of the communicating with parents and the greater presence of parents at schools, teachers felt more positively toward low-income students and their families… (Chrispeels, 1997, p. 191)

They believed that the evaluating of the project was critical because the "[f]ailure to address policy goals in the evaluation system may send a mixed message to teachers about the importance the district places on parent involvement" (p. 195). The broad categories of this very detailed initiative were the following:

1. Help parents develop parenting skills
2. Promote two-way communication about school programs and students' progress.
3. Provide parents with strategies for assisting their children with learning activities at home.
4. Prepare parents to assist in school decision making, leadership, and governance.
5. Provide parents with skills to access community services.

None of the administrators that I interviewed for this study discussed mandating such an initiative at a divisional level, nor mentioned any Alberta school divisions that they were aware of that were initiating such a mandated project; however, they did indicate the necessity of the leaders of either the school or divisional community making it a matter of great importance. They believed that it would be an initiative that would come about with much dialogue and collaboration with the community:

> *How do we develop a sense of belonging with the community at large? …We need to plan and we need to highlight and we need to focus our energies on how staffs operate and how staffs communicate…And then secondly that actually moves to formalize the process of powerization which means it actually becomes a goal*

*that we will work on as…an individual school or as a division…[T]he planning
needs to be purposeful and needs to be very specific…[I]t needs to be clearly
outlined in terms of what we're hoping to accomplish and how we're going to get
there…and everyone has to engage in a degree of ownership…[Y]ou are getting
people not only to understand why this might be very helpful and beneficial, but
how this actually impacts them as an individual… (Associate Superintendent)*

The Superintendent felt that the public education system could learn from charter

school initiatives and learn how to attend to its clientele. He mentioned that the basic

concept of charter schools is to engage the school community in a common educational

philosophy, language and purpose, attending to the desires of the community. Although

he did not seem to be suggesting some of the mandating of parental involvement

happening in some of the Alberta charter schools as well as one indicated in the California

study done by Becker et al. (1997) where

> in many of these schools, parent involvement is much more than simply a
> requirement to volunteer assistance or to help with their children's homework.
> Parents are seen as central adults in a more inclusive school
> community—participants who share time and expertise with the school's students
> as a whole. For example, a majority of the first chartered schools were planning to
> have parents and other community members as instructors in the school building,
> and several expected to sponsor training in tutoring methods and parenting
> techniques for use at home. In fact, a survey of thirty-four of the first forty-four
> schools chartered by the state found that in more that 50 percent parents are
> required to sign contracts and to participate in certain activities. One recently
> approved charter school, for example, intends to require parents to volunteer a
> minimum of three hours per month at the school…and will understand if the
> contract is broken, said agreement will be revoked and the student will be
> disenrolled" (Becker, et al. 1997, p. 514).

Ironically, this study found that

> Charter schools were not any more likely than their comparison schools to engage
> in a variety of activities to incorporate parents into school-related activities. They
> were less likely to have a drop-in center for parents, slightly less likely to have
> classes for parents, slightly less likely to assign a staff person to work on parent
> involvement, and less likely to have a family support professional who makes home
> visits. (p. 521)

Other Community Partnerships

The Supervisor of Collaborative Services indicated that more often than not these divisional and school parent involvement initiatives are not successful which is why there are organizations such as the Calgary Mentorship Foundation, the Calgary Volunteer Association and the Calgary Foundation that "fill in the community gaps." Epstein (1993) refers to collaboration with community organizations as being very important. "This component…consists of schools helping families gain access to support services offered by community agencies. Schools that do this expand the circle of educational responsibility to include groups and organizations outside the school" (Rothwell, 1994, p. 10).

Educational Needs

The Professional Responsibility

What education is required for students, parents and teachers to integrate efforts for positive schooling experiences?

And what does an ideal parental involvement model look like to you? The Supervisor of Collaborative Services indicated very strongly that teachers have not been trained around the benefits of school-community collaboration or how to do it. None of the administrators for this specific question cited the university as being responsible for training teachers to involve parents. Most of the suggestions revolved around the teacher having a professional responsibility for this type of training that might involve specifically focussed workshops and coursework. Other suggestions encouraged mentorship where

teachers learn from one another about building programs that involve the community. The

principal stated that there needs to be mentorship initiatives, but this takes professional

initiative on his part to get the school started in this direction. *"I create my own support.*

I write articles that have been published on school council development…Those kinds of

things motivate me to think about how I can do my job as a facilitator for school

council." Typically,

> …administrators may desire parent involvement, [but] they usually do not provide
> training and time for teachers to create activities for parents. Teachers are heavily
> burdened with many teaching duties, and some understandably feel that they do
> not have time to work with parents. Administrators need to provide teachers with
> the time to plan and work with parents in order to increase parent participation
> (Pena, 2000, p. 52).

Research indicates that strong and educated leadership is of tremendous benefit to

those schools wanting to increase parent involvement. "[T]he ability of a principal to

identify necessary organizational structures, set goals, assign responsibilities, and

efficiently manage the school's resources may be influential in creating a sense of

community at the school" (Epstein, 2001). Perhaps researching some of these critical

attributes and significant leadership styles would be of great advantage contributing to the

foundation of understanding in the matters of community and school relationships.

Administrators need to know how to train their teachers. "Besides providing teachers

with volunteer policies and procedures, teachers should also receive training on how to

recruit and interview volunteers; train volunteers in appropriate classroom support

behaviour and academic support strategies; and manage difficult volunteers" (Burke,

2001, p. 7). *"You need to begin to lay a foundation in terms of using common language,*

common understanding, common perspectives and all that. And I would say that…the

capacity for teachers, the capacity for school administrators is probably not at a level it

needs to be at [to do so]" (Associate Superintendent).

Other Community Models

The Supervisor of Collaborative Services indicated that there needs to be attention

for how a school recruits its parents. She specifically mentioned the Calgary Mentorship

Foundation and the Calgary Volunteer Association that have protocols and models for this

type of recruitment. She felt that these models might be an effective starting point for

schools because she stated that schools need to be trained how to recruit its parent

population effectively so that parents are wanting to and feel capable of participating in the

program.

She also mentioned that finding other mentor schools within the district or

province are good places to learn more about the potential for parent groups/committees

and school advocacy. She referenced the Alberta Federation of School Councils that

hosts the Alberta Home and School Conference. This is a symposium for parents on

school councils across Alberta where parents can learn about what they can do in their

own educational community. Various school councils share and recommend ideas for

other councils on various topics. Her belief is that parents need to develop skills to think

beyond the status quo and for capacity building within their communities. Parents need to

recognize their influence because they are "one of the most powerful determinants of the

educational achievement of the child, outweighing in their impact and influence…all the

inputs which a school and teachers can provide" (Shields, 1994, p. 16). The Supervisor

believed that there needs to be a core of parent mentors, although her concern is that these

key parents in the community get over-utilized and burn out. In light of this suggestion, it

might also be beneficial for schools and school divisions to look at examples of what

school divisions are doing from other countries and in other cultures.

The Individual Versus the Collective Good

The Supervisor of Collaborative Services believed that parents need to be trained

to move beyond viewing involvement as a means of serving their own children and their

own needs. Parents need to be advocates for all students. An example of this was given

by the school counsellor. She said that a parent group in the school was determined to

change a school smoking policy. This community-school initiative was tense because the

solutions generated by the community were diverse as some parents had smoking children

and some did not. She believed that they needed to be involved in the greater good of the

school and not on the specific intention they have for their individual child. The principal

stated that parents need to be able to *"differentiate between individual, personal and*

global educational issues… [However], parents always advocate for their kids." The

principal points out what becomes apparent through out the research project: Realistic

positive parent involvement includes parents who help to benefit their children, but aspire

to think beyond their children for the greater good of the student population.

The Collaborative Experience

The Associate Superintendent focussed on the necessity of asking questions and

collaborating on building partnerships and training programs. The administrators'

interviews uncovered the importance of a reciprocal and collaborative community-school

experience. This collaboration was extremely important to these administrators and

acknowledgement of an eventual joint responsibility in the process of building a school-

community partnership was articulated. The student, parent and teacher respondents were

still disputing whose responsibility it should be initially when developing a school-

community partnership and did not speak to the long range goal of having a collaborative

experience. Where as, the administrators spoke of the necessity of the school initiation,

but the eventual joint responsibility of parents, students and the school in an ideal

collaborative relationship. *"How do we do something to encourage parent involvement at*

the high school level? I suppose you have to come back to what is it the parents

themselves want? Do they want more training? Do they want more workshops?...What

is it [they] need?" (Associate Superintendent). He mentioned that students also need to

be educated about the importance of parent involvement so that they welcome or

understand its place in their education.

> *[H]igh school kids deserve to know why we do what we do, right?...Some*
> *preparatory work needs to be done with kids...[Y]ou need to build a comfort level*
> *around this [topic with them]... My experience has been students adapt to new*
> *people coming in different roles, much more quickly. They're also, quite frankly,*
> *more welcoming. In fact, it's our students who send to me the most powerful*
> *cultural message in the school and even the staff...*

The Associate Superintendent indicated that the school needs to provide an

opportunity for a dialogue between the community and the school so that a goal can be

set, followed by a framework that supports a strategic plan. The strategies and

mechanisms for achieving the outcomes might be unique; however, the intention needs to

be purposeful and planned. Gettinger and Guetschow (1998) mention that "[a]lthough developing home-school partnerships is a reciprocal and interactive process, not simply a set of prescribed activities, understanding individual role preferences is a necessary step toward establishing collaborative relationships between schools and families" (p. 48). Everyone--students, parents and educators-- needs to engage in the ownership of such an initiative. They need to understand the impact of such a project (Associate Superintendent):

> *It is a process where one teacher has to say, "I'm going to model it and I believe in it." Or the principal says, I believe in it, and I'm going to model it and I'm going to hopefully have my staff follow it." Maybe one superintendent just says "We believe in it. We're going to encourage it!"*

Correlations to School Performance

Do you think that there are significant correlations between academic, social and other student behaviours?

All of the administrators believed very strongly that there is a strong correlation between attentive and active parenting and student performance. *"There's a correlation to actively engaged parents with kids being more attentive to their learning...but I think actively engaged means a variety of things..." (Superintendent).* Simons study indicates the positive correlation between active parent involvement and student success:

> Reports from more than 11, 000 parent of high school seniors and 1,000 high school principals were analyzed to learn about high school, family, and community partnerships. Analyses revealed that regardless of students' background and prior achievement, various parenting, volunteering and home learning activities, positively influenced student grades, course credits completed, attendance,

behaviour, and school preparedness. When educators guided parents and solicited their participation, parents responded with increased involvement to support student success. (p. 8)

The Supervisor of Collaborative Services mentioned that achievement results are not the only measurement of success with parent as educational partners. She believed that how parents are involved influences the child's perception of education and embeds a value system about education that can strengthen or weaken their overall performance. The counsellor confirmed that *"the studies have shown that kids who are resilient and have all the facets of resiliency, feel supported, they do better, and they learn."*

The Associate Superintendent indicated that parent involvement from the community provides students with adult connections to their community. Family is often the vital link with the adult world. This establishes many spheres of belonging. There becomes the sense of a common thread with many connections and this forms an educational community. Students and parents then strive to "fit" in a meaningful way.

> *I don't think there's anything you could argue that's more critical for adolescents [than] a sense of belonging. I mean sense of belonging with peers of course, a sense of belonging with the community, a sense of that common thread. It's that the more connections you have both at an emotional level as well as an intellectual level that are based on mutual respect…the healthier someone is and the better learner they are. (Associate Superintendent)*

The key word that he emphasized was "relationships" and the big question he raised was: How do we build these relationships? These relationships help them to navigate from being children to competent members of society in their community and in the greater adult community of society. Balli (1998) indicates that the "late adolescents are more likely to achieve and develop optimally in the context of close family ties…the common notion that adolescents' independence from parents produces maturity is

misguided" (p. 232). The Associate Superintendent concluded his thoughts on this matter by saying that learning becomes a priority for the student if it is a priority for the parents. This common value of education establishes an emotional tenor for these child-adult relationships.

Chapter Review

The administrators indicated that there is a shift in the amount and type of parent involvement in the high school from previous school years. There is a more distant connection between the parent and the school as the students get more autonomous and the parents become less confident in their abilities to be involved. The administrators put the responsibility squarely on the school's shoulders for initiating and orchestrating school involvement to overcome some of the parent and teacher difficulties of involvement. However, these administrators also indicated that it would be ideal to strive for collaborative and reciprocal models that are empowering and inclusive where all educational stakeholders can feel a sense of efficacy in their contribution to educational best practice.

Developing trusting and meaningful relationships with all people involved through clearly articulated and implemented initiatives was indicated as necessary for the success of a strong school-community program. These administrators did not see a need for divisional top-down mandating of such initiatives despite some of the research that supports this type of divisional policy and framework. Instead, they recommended initiatives that are formed and supported at the school and community level. However,

there was a sense that strong school leadership was necessary in guiding these parent involvement initiatives in the right direction.

They mentioned the need for ongoing professional development for teachers. In their minds, teachers need to shift from being *"indoctrinated isolationists" (Principal)* to pedagogues who see the benefit of multiple mentors in their programs. However, the training that was indicated as being most valuable was the type that teachers sought on their own once they were in the profession and had identified their own professional needs, rather than at the university level that might prepare teachers for community involvement at the outset of their careers. They also acknowledged that training for parents was necessary in order for them to feel welcomed into the school and effective in supporting the school programs. The administrators indicated that the principals need to accept some of the responsibility for facilitating this training for parents and teachers, but also acknowledged that the teachers and the parents themselves must provide or find this type of in servicing for themselves with the assistance of a parent volunteer coordinator.

Although there is confirmation in these interviews that there is a need for mentorship and parent involvement at the high school level, there needs to be a focussed initiative to recruit and train people so that there are strong and educated teacher-parent matches to support the students; otherwise, the administrators agree that parents never get involved to the degree that they are effectively "helping" teachers and the students. The administrators believe that capacity building within the educational community is necessary. They identify a small percentage of confident and self actualized parents who are presently supporting the school directly and indirectly in positive ways, but

acknowledge that there is a larger group of parents in the community that are not involved or who are involved in less definite and defined ways. These people sit on the periphery and could be identified and welcomed to offer valuable assistance to the larger educational community, especially a community such as Chestermere grappling with new educational topics and difficult social and community issues.

Chapter Seven

Realizing Directions for Parent Involvement:

Interpretation and Conclusion

Inside the Dialogues

This study gives the interested reader the opportunity to glimpse into the thoughts of the educational stakeholders expressing themselves in authentic and meaningful ways about the topic of parent involvement. The findings of this study strongly support other research that "parental involvement in child and adolescent education generally benefits children's learning and school success" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997; Simon, 2001; Epstein, 1986, 1994 and 2001; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). However, the larger opportunity in these dialogues has been to better understand the subtler texts being communicated by the participants about what involvement truly means to them and how it is perceived as both rewarding and frustrating. Profiling parent involvement in a positive and reflective light holds the potential for this school and other secondary schools to learn more about this topic in the context of similar educational communities.

This study demonstrates that there are not always clearly delineated right and wrong solutions for what "appropriate parent involvement" is at the senior high school level, nor does it find only one best way to build educational community capacity. There are differing perspectives about this topic that are not always aligned even with the same

people in the same interviews, although many commonalties are present.

Emerging Themes

Many themes emerge in these interviews about this specific educational community that resonate from one group of participants to another, although they are not in order of priority. They emerged under the following broader topic areas: parent involvement, student response, educational community and school-community communication.

Parent Involvement

- Parents are involved to help their own children. However, involved parents are appreciated by the participants in this study and themselves when school support and involvement also focuses on the collective good of the students and school.

- There are a variety of types of parent involvement as indicated by Epstein et. al. (1997) that are occurring in this educational community and all are deemed as valuable to the school and the students impacted by this involvement.

- The responses in this study vary most dramatically when the participants talk about direct versus indirect parent involvement, although both types are deemed as important forms of "active" parent involvement by both the participants and researchers (Epstein, 2001).

- The parent principles of Ross (1994) "What Parental Involvement Means to Student's Learning" are supported by the findings in this study indicating that parents care and do make a difference in their adolescents schooling when they work in conjunction with the school.

- Talented and skilled parents are greatly appreciated by these educational stake holders, otherwise sideline support seems to be the preference for everyone involved when they recognize that this parent expertise is lacking at this level.

- The need for parents with a strong sense of commitment and efficacy is important and the question of how to increase the level of commitment and efficacy and who is responsible for raising the standards in this area of development comes into question.

- There appears to be the same core group of parents driving and involved in the parent involvement program and these same parents have been involved with their children since primary school.

- Parents want to feel welcomed and appreciated by the school and continue to be involved when they believe that their participation makes a difference to the school. Therefore, the involvement needs to feel meaningful and be recognized as important to the parents, and perceived by the parents as important to the school to successfully sustain the interest of most parents.

Student Response

- In light of the psychological development of adolescent students, relationships between these students and their parents or mentors are significantly different than they were for these same students in their past schooling.

- Students appreciate the involvement of their parents and seem to understand the benefit of this involvement especially where they feel confident with the parents' abilities and their relationship with these parents; however they are not always

clear about the details or the background of the parent involvement.

- Students are more accepting of parent involvement if they are familiar with the parents who are involved, and trust their ability to be involved as credible and skilled parent participants in their educational programs.

- There is a positive correlation between the various types of active parent involvement (Epstein et. al., 1997) and positive student academic and social performance.

Educational Community

- Community empowerment can increase the strength of the school potential as greater community awareness, academic support initiatives, extracurricular support and coaching, mentorship projects, financial support from school councils and other community initiatives greatly expand the educational opportunities for children.

- The topic of school-community partnerships is understood to be about how to connect, develop and sustain relationships with parents, students, and educators.

- There is not a strong feeling of consensus and understanding about the role construction, the range and the power of these roles, and the interconnectedness of these roles with these parents and educators.

- The existing parent involvement program is recognized as effective, but not sufficient and could be improved to further maximize the effects of community support and involvement.

- The types of involvement are not highly profiled in this school and community to

the degree that everyone is made aware of this involvement even when it doesn't

directly involve the participants.

- Positive parent involvement feels good for everyone involved: parents, students

  and educators and helps to sustain the desire for ongoing involvement.

- The ideal of a joint and collaborative school-community partnership was discussed

  by the administrators, but not alluded to by the other participants.

- There is no consensus about who should initiate the school-community partnership

  in this educational community.

School-Community Communication

- There are many barriers that prevent students, parents and teachers from realizing

  the full potential of a strong parent involvement program. These obstacles seem

  greatest where there is the least effort to have effective two-way conversations

  about the possibilities for parent involvement in the educational community and in

  the absence of a strong parent volunteer coordinator or program.

- Effective two-way communication is important to stimulate and sustain a strong

  parent involvement program; however, the educational stakeholders in this study,

  predominantly the teachers and parents, acknowledge the difficulties in maintaining

  this type of communication and do not always agree on who is responsible for this

  type of communication.

- Two-way communication happens frequently about school or student problems

  rather than about the topic of promoting school-community relationships;

  however, one-way communication and school surveys are presently implemented

by the school and parent volunteer coordinator to involve parents in the school.

The need for more and a greater variety of communication types is deemed

necessary, although again it is not clear who would be responsible for this

increased communication other than a "volunteer school-community co-ordinator".

Direct Involvement

This research question not only accommodates the question of the participants'

thoughts about this topic, but how they felt as well. It was interesting to note that there

were some discrepancies within the same interviews when they discussed their thoughts

and feelings as these logical and emotional sentiments were not always aligned. Parents,

students, and educators in the context of direct parental involvement where parents are

working directly with the teachers and students for specific educational outcomes seem to

concur that this type of parent involvement does not always *feel* comfortable. There are

some formidable obstacles identified in these interviews that appeared to prevent all

parties from feeling satisfied with their experiences. Parents talk about not feeling

welcomed in the school or being intimidated by the school climate, students and

curriculum. Students talk about needing space and independence. Teachers talk about

not having time and viewing the parents as agents of accountability and as an extra set of

eyes judging their classroom experiences. All of these feelings seem to dominate the

dialogues and overshadow some of the very productive conversations being generated in

the same interviews about parent inclusion. As well, it seems to be preventing some

further growth of active direct school involvement in this particular school. Parents are

either being put or putting themselves on the sidelines or in the backbenches of school involvement. *"[Parents are] afraid to come in unless there's a problem with their child"* *(Parent 3).*

Despite some of the obvious barriers, it is apparent in this study that direct volunteerism in some successful examples in this study, makes people *feel* good about the experiences that involved parties have at the school. In some cases it builds inclusive community sustainability because of these positive outcomes. *"I find that we do help teachers more than just in the classroom…They actually ask [us our] opinions which is really nice. I felt more a part of the setting in the school. I felt welcomed. Once [I] got into the classroom it was great…" (Parent 3). "[I]f I'm in the school and [my child] catches me out of the corner of his eye, he makes a point of coming over and saying, 'Hey!'…[I]t's a very small thing, but I guess it shows that he's not embarrassed that I'm there" (Parent 2).* "[A]dults receive benefits as great as the students from the experience of meaningful involvement in the life of a young child…[A]dults actively involved in the education of those children… gain a better understanding of school life and, as they watch their students become better readers… emerge from the experience with a sense of real accomplishment" (Baker et al., 2000, p. 1). As well, "researchers have noted improved parent-staff relationship as a function of parent participation" (Gettinger and Guetschow, 1998, p. 38). Therefore, both parent and educator participants suggested that it is important for the community and the school to raise the awareness of these obstacles and deconstruct them to the degree that people *feel* capable and welcome. The participants agree that if there are some conditions put in place to more effectively accommodate

parent involvement and eliminate some of the emotional impediments, they can see its significant role in education.

Indirect Involvement

Parent, student and teacher participants seem much more comfortable with the idea of parents being involved in various capacities that indirectly influence or help the school and are not part of the direct instruction of the students in the classrooms: homework, homework routine, extra-curricular activities, school council and school sub-committees, hot lunch program, school store, and special events. All of these roles seem less threatening than direct involvement, but parents still describe obstacles they experience when working with the school in this capacity. However, in some cases where involvement has been established as a tradition, for example the Chestermere Graduation Committee, the involvement is deemed absolutely necessary. Therefore, once a volunteer initiative is put into place and formalized in this school to the degree that people understand their roles and the goals of these school-community initiatives, it becomes the cornerstone of the school program.

Participants indicate that indirect involvement is easier to recruit for and coordinate than direct involvement because it happens predominantly before or after school hours or in the context of the students' homes and activities. Extra-curricular involvement holds a lot of weight with these participants as they mention that it impacts

the values and motivation of the students and as a result promotes a positive attitude towards the school and community. It is clear that parent involvement in these supportive roles motivates these students to perform their best in their school and extra-curricular programs as well as giving them confidence in their social interactions with their peers and other adults.

Implications and Recommendations

Roles and Recruitment

In response to the latter part of the research question: What can be deemed to be the essence of a home and school relationship that most effectively supports students and curriculum?; an emerging question comes to light because of this research: How does the community build these school-home relationships to sustain ongoing parent involvement that 'fits' and feels right for everyone involved? It is important to build an "'interconnected' view of the home and school…[so that parents] see themselves as having an integral role, together with the school, in educating children" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, p. 15). To do this, the participants need to establish the roles that all people will have in the educational picture. It is vital to come to "consensus on appropriate role expectations and behaviours, clarity and agreement on member roles…[in order to] increase all members' successful and satisfying performance of their own roles" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997).

The identification of who initiates the contact and establishes the appropriate "fit"

between community and school support needs to be addressed when establishing these

roles.   For example, the participant teachers suggest that parent involvement is valuable

provided that a volunteer co-ordinator assists with finding appropriate parent matches and

that parents would step forward indicating their desire and aptitude to fit into the school

programs. However, the majority of the voices in these dialogues with participant parents,

administrators and researchers (Feuerstein, 2000; Simon, 2001; Burke, 2001; Hoover-

Dempsey and Sandler, 1997) agree that there are places for parents to help that are

meaningful and necessary in the school provided that they are invited and welcomed into

the school environment by both the educators and the students. *The school needs to*

make it hugely visible that parent volunteers are welcome and essential to the operation

of the school" (Parent 2). They believe that if the teachers initiate this involvement, there

would be a greater response from the community and a more effective association with the

classrooms.

There is also mention by administrators about the tremendous power of the student-

initiated welcome:

> The overall value of multiple invitations, opportunities, and requests presented by
> children and their schools appears to lie in the welcoming and proactive demand
> they create for parents' involvement. The extent to which parents believe
> themselves to be invited to participate actively in the educational process
> will…exert important influence on their basic decision about involvement. This
> influence may be particularly important if a parent's role construction or sense of
> efficacy for helping children succeed in school does not encourage involvement.
> The considerable evidence on teacher practices intended to support parental
> involvement, and parents' sensitivity to teacher attitudes about their involvement,
> underscores the importance of school-generated invitations and opportunities for
> positive parental decisions about involvement. (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler,
> 1997, p. 31*)*

It appears in this school that the matter of who initiates and stands responsible for the

recruitment of parent help lies in questions with these adult participants. This confusion impedes the development of a strong school-parent initiative in this school and needs to be addressed in light of this and other research.

Burke's (2001) recommendations are that schools should "a) recruit widely to increase the number of volunteers, involve diverse families and extend the skills and talents available to assist the school and students" (p. 2). Parent participants suggest that there needs to be a system for surveying the community effectively to identify parent or mentor strengths and willingness within the community. They also believe that there is untapped talent in the community. Epstein (2001) mentions how important is to reach "all families, including those from diverse backgrounds and with special needs" (p. 2). "Effective partnerships…prize diversity and inclusiveness, realising that everyone brings their own unique talents, resources and energy to the collaboration" (Kershaw and Blank, 1999, p. 4). There is a special energy that comes across when people talk about educational relationships and it is this energy that is also captured in these dialogues. These talks highlight these real people and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the educational process of parent involvement in and out of the classrooms.

These parents agree that they do not want to fill meaningless roles in the school and come away thinking that their involvement is not making a difference.

> *[I]t does require some time and thought to be organised enough to effectively utilise a parent volunteer. From my personal experience, there were classrooms that I just adored going into because I knew that there was going to be satisfying things to do…interesting things to do… a lot to do. I wasn't going to feel like I was wasting my time because I had fourteen things at home that I could have been doing instead of not doing anything useful here or there or wherever…They could hand me a piece of paper like this and I'd know my job and that also communicated that they recognised that I had an ability to self determine and priorize and that kind of thing. (Parent 6)*

It seems evident that these parents want to be appreciated for their unique capabilities.

Also, these parents believe that the teachers need to *"identify where they [feel] that they need some support [in the classroom]…[H]aving a professional staff identify specific skill sets that would enrich their curriculum…"* (Parent 6) …would increase the chances for success of matching community talent with classroom need. These experiences are found to be even more successful if the commitment is *"as regular as possible…and really utilising time well"* (Parent 6).

Training

In conjunction with this thoughtful response to recruitment practice, the parent and educator participants agree that there needs to be adequate training for everyone involved to understand the dynamics of working together and the needs of the students and their psychological development as well as the curricular demands of the classroom.

> An important…goal for strong partnerships is increasing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of parents and community members. For example, many adults are unaware of the new research on brain development. Access to new research and information is important to parents who are faced with the increasingly difficult challenge of raising children. (Blank and Kershaw, 1999, p. 3)

Burke (2001) concludes that schools should "b) prepare volunteers with targeted training so that their efforts are effective and c) prepare teachers to work well with volunteers" (p. 2). The parents indicated that they want to take part in training new parents as they have in previous programs where they ran orientation programs for new recruits. *"I think that if we did the in service with teachers and parents, especially the ones who really want to get in there, [it] would help out"* (Parent 7). The teachers want very competent and

educationally trained parent support if they are to be working with parents directly in their programs. They believe that inappropriate support is even less helpful to them than no support from the community.

The dominant comment from teachers was the matter of *time* to train community members for involvement. They believe that the administrators need to take a larger role in training the parents so that they would not need as much attention in their own day to day involvement.

> Although administrators may desire parent involvement, they usually do not provide training and time for teachers to create activities for parents. Teachers are heavily burdened with many teaching duties, and some understandable feel that they do not have time to work with parents. Administrators need to provide teachers with time to plan and work with parents in order to increase parent participation. (Pena, 2000, p. 52)

This administrative responsibility is also a final recommendation made by Burke (2001): "Principals of middle and high schools should support the organisation, training, and purposeful assignment of volunteers as part of a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships" (p. 2). Again, regular and reliable volunteering is valuable so that training and re-training new faces is not too heavy a responsibility, although if a true recruitment of the magnitude suggested in this study takes place, ongoing and intensive training will be a reality of such a program.

The school and divisional administrators interviewed believe that teachers need to take on the professional duty of understanding how to involve parents and incorporate parents into their programs. They acknowledge that this is an enormous educational shift that requires training for teachers. They state that the school as a whole with their support, but with teacher involvement, needs to prepare a solid initiative with directives

outlined for achieving community involvement outcomes. They believe that in order for there to be an effective change to accept the community into the school, all parties which include parents, students and educators, need to actively engage in this process and the communication of these plans. This undertaking requires facilitation and training. This disagreement of who is responsible for initiating, designing, building, training, assessing and reviewing an effective parent involvement program appears to be the biggest difference of opinion in this study. It seems that unless someone takes the responsibility to develop a fully functioning program, the status quo will continue.

Once students got past their initial trepidation of considering direct parent involvement, they made some important recommendations. They believe that if their own parents and other parents are qualified, confident and proven capable to be experts or assistants in the context of a particular program, they would support and even see the benefit of having parents working with them directly. They express these qualities of mentoring competency more at an innate level where parents are either naturally "cool" or they are not; or that parents are either "familiar" because they had helped forever or they are "strangers." They do not delve into the matters of whether training is of benefit to parents engaging in their programs probably because of their lack of knowledge and experience of the impact and thus the need for training in this regard. It is apparent in all cases that the students perceive the teachers to be the real academic mentors and experts as well as the controllers of their grades. Therefore, they need to be trained to see the merit of parent involvement in their academic programs. In other words, they want to see credible parent involvement that has practical pedagogical and assessment value in their

programs or they will not take the direct classroom involvement seriously.

Creating Climate

As a result of such a study where thoughts and feelings are obviously conflicting, it is important to ask the question, "Is promoting the idea of all types of parent involvement as defined by Epstein (2001) for the positive principles outlined by Ross (1994) worth it if it makes people uncomfortable?" In my estimation, for the reasons discussed by the participants and the extensive quantitative and qualitative data on parental involvement from kindergarten to senior high, the answer is "yes." However, these uncomfortable feelings that block the potential of parental participation are very powerful and can not be ignored. Addressing the affective domains described in this study would fall in line with how all people best think and learn in some of the newest brain research. In order for true learning to happen, feelings need to be honoured to the degree that learners are capable of being receptive to new information. "There is an emotional component to all learning and it seems to work like this: Emotion focuses our attention, and attention sets the stage for learning" (Parry and Gregory, 2003, p. 15). Therefore, coming together as a community and identifying key obstacles and collaboratively generating solutions to break down these barriers that are evoking negative emotional responses, is essential.

Brain research suggests that creating comfortable community climates involves establishing agreements about how to 1) behave as a group, 2) interact as a group, and 3) govern the day-to-day and week-to-week operation of the learning community (Parry and Gregory, 2003). Once these measures, which need to be collaboratively identified as they

pertain to this particular school, are enacted, the matter of building comfortable and

effective school-community partnership can begin. Gettinger and Guetschow (1998)

substantiate and elaborate on these ideas in their research about building community

partnerships with the following suggestions:

> [A] critical step toward developing effective home-school partnerships is obtaining information needed to guide efforts toward involving parents, including: a) knowledge of role preferences among teachers and parents for parent-involvement activities, b) understanding of perceptions of efficacy through parent-involvement activities, and c) identification of significant barriers to parental involvement. (Gettinger and Guetschow, 1998, p. 40)

Considering Cultural Differences

Every educational community culture is different and consideration of the diversity

of the people in the partnerships needs to be considered. As Jesse (1996) reports, "there

is no one best way for schools to effectively engage parents in the achievement of their

children. Each school and its community will have to develop, test, and refine their own

strategies" (p. 3).

> But in using parent participation to build community and increase achievement, an unintended consequence is that schools may sometimes alienate or penalise parents who are unable to meet the expectations for involvement. Such alienation may exacerbate social-class and ethnic differences in schooling by eliminating or excluding less-involved families from attending schools where expectations for involvement become codified, such as in charter schools. (Becker et al., 1997, p. 513)

> Interpretations of parent actions probably differ according to cultural context…Those differences make it necessary to analyse the definitions of cultural groups. Education policy interventions that address systematic racial-ethnic, income, and social class differences need to explore the limitations and meaning of such categorisations. (Desimone, 1999, p. 25)

Therefore, the educational community vision needs to be inclusive to the degree that

everyone is touched by potential recruitment strategies and has an opportunity to find a

place or have input into the partnership. This sense of inclusion is extremely important

especially in high school settings where there is a large diversity of cultural, SES and other

backgrounds.

Second Order Change

In order to support a full scale parental involvement program to the degree that it

is envisioned by the participants in these interviews, "second order change" would be

necessary in the context of this school and the school division:

> *First order change* begins with the assumption that "existing goals and structures
> are both adequate and desirable" (p. 15) and that modifications such as improved
> teacher qualifications, better teaching strategies, or increased resources will
> suffice. On the other hand, *second order change* "seeks to fundamentally alter
> organisations because of major dissatisfaction with the present arrangements" (p.
> 15). It seeks to redesign organisations themselves, to transform their structures as
> well as the "four R's": rules, roles, relationships, and results. (Cuban, 1988 as
> cited by Shields, 1994, p. 16)

"Designing productive partnerships requires a definite plan where each component is a

priority with specific goals and strategies. It also requires strong building-level leadership

to initiate partnership activities, maintain control, and sustain the momentum" (Kershaw

and Blank, 1999, p. 4). It might also prove to be beneficial to have a part time or full time

paid educational liaison (Chrispeels, 1997) to support any plans enacted by such a

partnership to enable both the school and community to have more time to do what they

do best and overcome some of the issues of determining who initiates and accepts

responsibilities for various parts of a school-community partnership.

Divisional support would definitely strengthen the "second order change"

necessary for this school as well as other schools within the division finding a similar value

in this type of parent partnership program.   Ross (1994) emphasizes the absolute

importance of a strong divisional initiative:

> To provide direction to the system, the board must approve a formal, written
> policy that outlines its commitment to parental involvement. It has been found that
> "written policies encouraging parental involvement is related to increased parent
> activity at a variety of levels in schools. The policy should be
> comprehensive—addressing the many roles that families play, the variety of ways
> parents might be invited to participate, the inclusion of all families, and the
> consideration of the community with its many agencies as a site for this
> involvement. The policy should allow principals the flexibility to implement the
> policy in different communities, while holding them accountable for its success.
>
> The process of writing a policy is just as critical as the substance of the policy itself
> since its signals the board's sincerity in approaching parents and teachers as
> partners. There should be consultation with parents and teachers—the two groups
> that must implement the policy. Parents of lower socio-economic status should be
> approached for their comments. The final policy should be accompanied by
> guidelines for implementation that contain deadlines and results. Moreover, the
> guidelines should identify who is responsible for co-ordinating the efforts to
> increase parent involvement. (Ross, 1994, p. 9)

This collaborative process of building a policy and determining its implementation process

would be an extremely beneficial practice for any school division in order to bring

educational best practice into the classroom for our students.   This central support would

also need to encourage the positive independence and accountability of each educational

community as it takes on its own school-community initiative because each educational

community culture is unique and the group processing required for each community would

be unique.

Student Focus

In all of this research, it is important not to forget the importance of including student input in this process of building school partnerships because it is for them that we are recruiting as many mentors and adult contacts as possible for the enrichment of their educational experience. Students have tremendous value in what it is they can offer to such a parent involvement program; as well, by including students in these dialogues, we teach them the importance of letting other very knowledgeable people into their educational experience. Whitham talks about empowering the youth of today to get involved in their community and invite the community into their worlds:

> Youth empowerment is the process by which young people learn, through active participation in the relationships, events, and institutions that affect their lives, to develop and apply their capacity to transform themselves and the world in which they live (Whitham, 1987 as cited by Shields, 1994).

Students do appreciate the attention of adult mentors and with a well-informed understanding of how mentors can make a difference in their programs, students can raise the level of meaningful parent involvement in their own learning experiences.

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