

**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND PARENTS
AS PERCEIVED BY PARENTS**

by

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Communication Between Teachers and Parents as Perceived by Parents

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ABSTRACT

Recent research indicates that parent involvement contributes to student achievement. Some barriers, however, may exist to hamper the development of partnerships between teachers and parents. Quantitative studies of teacher-parent communication have helped to further our understanding of collaborative relationships and how to foster positive partnerships. Descriptive studies of the content of teacher-parent communication have not yet been reported.

This study investigates teacher-parent communication with the intention of answering five questions. When teachers and parents communicate with one another, what do they talk about? How do parents perceive communication with teachers that parents initiate? How do parents perceive the communication they receive from teachers? When teachers and parents communicate, which topics of conversation influence parent perceptions of teacher-parent communication in a positive way? How are teacher-parent communication, parent perceptions of communication with teachers, and teacher-parent relationships related?

Parents from 12 elementary schools in two districts were chosen to form the study sample. Families in the study were from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and resided in both rural and urban neighbourhoods. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect and analyze the survey and interview data for this thesis in conjunction with other researchers in "The Co-Production of Learning Project"--a multi-year, multi-site project to investigate the co-production of student learning outcomes by parents and teachers. This researcher then analyzed the general comments made by parents about communication between teachers and parents. The results of the quantitative analysis--parent perceptions of communication were related to

parent perceptions of teacher concern about parent involvement--provided a conceptual framework for a secondary qualitative analysis of parents whose comments about communication were mostly negative and parents whose comments were mostly positive.

The results of this study demonstrate that parents perceive that communication they initiate as more negative than positive; parents see themselves communicating with teachers to solve problems. By contrast, parents perceive communication initiated by teachers to be more positive than negative; teachers communicate to parents about academic ability, curriculum, homework, student behaviour and attitude, teacher behaviour, and instruction at home. Some parents are satisfied with the information they receive from teachers, others desire more communication from teachers about the student's individual progress. Some parents want information about how to help their children with school work; and many parents believe that parents and students would benefit from such information.

Parents derive their perceptions of communication from the information they receive about the individual progress of their children and by the manner in which the concerns they raise to teachers are resolved. Not all parents perceive the relationship between teachers and parents to be a partnership. The relationship between teachers and parents is a fragile one--an unsatisfactory response from a teacher can thwart a relationship and build mistrust which seems to influence perceptions of communication with other teachers and with future teachers.

DEDICATION

To my children, Adam and Annika

For helping me to understand the many facets of communication,
and
For inspiring me to learn more about
communication between teachers and parents.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Problem

BACKGROUND:

A recent trend in education is to involve parents as partners in the education of their children. This trend is supported by a growing research base which concludes that parent involvement in education contributes to student achievement (Epstein, 1987; Walberg, 1984; Henderson, 1988; Moles, 1987). The benefits of parent involvement to student learning have not been celebrated without some acknowledgement that there are problems associated with parent involvement. Researchers have identified barriers to collaboration between educators and parents, such as lack of training, time, lack of confidence, and the general reluctance of teachers and parents to collaborate with one another (Lietch and Tangri, 1988; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Walberg, 1984, Henderson, 1988, Lightfoot, 1979). The benefits of parent involvement, however, exceed the barriers. Walberg contends that "syntheses of 2,575 empirical studies of learning show that parents directly or indirectly" influence the eight chief determinants of learning--student ability, student motivation, the quality of instruction, the amount of instruction, the climate of a classroom, a home environment that is academically stimulating, an academically oriented peer group, and a minimum exposure to low-grade television programs (Walberg, 1994, p.398).

The "parent involvement movement" includes studies emphasizing the importance of school to home communication (Epstein, 1987; Haynes et al., 1989). Fostering home-school collaboration and cooperation assists in connecting the many learning environments of the child (Comer, 1984). To improve school to home communication, studies have investigated methods of communication between the school and home, such as progress reports,

activity calendars, phone calls reporting good news, home visits, parent-teacher conferences, monthly newsletters, parent handbooks and parent workshops to overcome the obstacles to collaboration between teachers and parents (D'Angelo and Adler 1991). Although the importance of school to home communication and methods of communication have been acknowledged, relatively little attention has been given to the content of communication between teachers and parents. The intent of this thesis is to add to the growing research on school-home communication by examining the topics discussed by teachers and parents and the tone of the conversations between them. For successful implementation of parent involvement programs, more information is needed regarding the nature of teacher-parent communication.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

This thesis is organized in terms of five research questions that subsume the three purposes of the study. The first purpose of this study is to examine the content of communication between teachers and parents: (1) When teachers and parents communicate with one another, what do they talk about?

The second purpose of this study is to describe parent perceptions of communication between teachers and parents: (2) How do parents perceive communication with teachers that parents initiate? (3) How do parents perceive the communication they receive from teachers?

A third purpose of this study is to identify the communication practices between teachers and parents that help to establish collaborative relationships between teachers and parents: (4) When teachers and parents communicate, which topics of conversation influence parent perceptions of

teacher-parent communication in a positive way? (5) How are teacher-parent communication, parent perceptions of communication with teachers, and teacher-parent relationships related?

RATIONALE:

With reformers urging more parent involvement, an investigation of current teacher-parent communication is relevant for several reasons. First, a study describing current conversations between teachers and parents will benefit educators who attempt to foster or improve school-home communication. Teacher-parent communication may be interpreted by educators and parents to have a variety of meanings. An investigation of the content of teacher-parent communication will help to enhance the meaning of the term for reformers of teacher-parent communication.

Second, almost all parents help their children with learning activities at home, however, they would spend more time helping if strategies for helping were explained to them (Epstein, 1987, p.127). "The research shows that many parents help their children with or without instructions from teachers and many more would benefit from directions from the teacher on how to help with skills needed for the child's success and progress in school" (Epstein, 1987, p.128). The content of the types of teacher-parent communication suggested in the literature--progress reports, activity calendars, phone calls reporting good news, home visits, parent-teacher conferences, monthly newsletters, parent handbooks and parent workshops--must meet the needs of parents. By investigating parents' comments about communication, a study describing the content of teacher-parent communication will provide information to determine whether or not current teacher-parent communication practices help parents to assist their children with school work.

Third, communication goals should be established between teachers and the parents of the students they teach. Chavkin and Williams (1987) maintain that involving parents in goal setting will assist in building commitment regarding public schools. The type of involvement that parents want most is "how to work with their own child at home in ways that help the student succeed and that keep the parents as partners in their children's education across the grades" (Epstein in Brandt, 1989, p.25). If teachers are expected to take the time to provide parents with information on how to help at home, they will desire some assurance that parents will be committed to follow through with the activities. Describing the content of teacher-parent communication will help to determine realistic goals for collaboration between teachers and parents to promote student learning. The initial step in any improvement plan is to establish the nature of current practices.

Fourth, teachers have traditionally been reluctant to invest time in programs and practices that do not directly involve children (Blase, 1986; Lightfoot, 1979; Chavkin and Williams, 1987; Eisenhart et al., 1988; Fullan, 1982). Educators must be made aware that parent involvement programs contribute to student learning. Then careful consideration must be given to time management concerns. Communication between teachers and parents must be focussed and productive, given the time constraints of both parties. A careful examination of current communication will help to describe the collaborative relationships that can be expected, given the amount of time that teachers and parents have to devote to such involvement.

Fifth, "whenever human beings try to communicate with one another, natural barriers exist..." (D'Angelo & Adler, 1991, p. 350). The worlds of school and family are distinct: misunderstanding and mistrust of one another build barriers between parents and educators (Lightfoot, 1978; Walberg, 1984).

Misconceptions on the part of educators and parents of each others roles and abilities hinder collaborative communication (Chavkin and Williams, 1987). Many educators view parent involvement as a threat to their decision making authority (Haynes et al., 1989; Lightfoot, 1979). Teachers view interactions with other adults as obstacles that keep them from teaching children in the classroom (Eisenhart et al., 1988). Haynes et al. advise that administrators must "work with teachers to improve their attitudes towards parents" (1989, p.90). A recent report by Epstein (1991), however reveals there are more similarities than differences between parents and educators. A study of the content of teacher-parent communication will help to describe the possibilities for collaboration between teachers and parents to promote student learning.

Finally, parents and teachers may believe that collaboration is important, but in actual fact, the communication between them may not necessarily be collaborative (Cutright, 1984, in Hoover-Demsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987). Epstein reports, "although most teachers (over 95%) reported that they communicate with the parents of their students, most parents are not involved in deep, detailed, or frequent communications with teachers about their child's program or progress" (1987, p.124). Zeldin (In Epstein, 1991, p.398) mentions teachers who allocate time for collaboration, but Zeldin does not describe the activities which teachers become engaged in to promote collaboration. A closer look at teacher-parent communication will help to further establish the nature of communication between teachers and parents.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS:

Parent perceptions of parent efficacy refers to parent perceptions of their ability to effect their child's learning.

Parent perceptions of school climate refers to parent perceptions of the atmosphere for learning in the environment of the school.

Parent involvement is the global term to describe parent participation in any of the following activities: school governance, volunteer work in the school, learning activities at home, school-home communication and home-school communication.

School-home communication is a term which encompasses a variety of methods of communicating to parents such as progress reports, activity calendars, phone calls reporting good news, home visits, parent-teacher conferences, monthly newsletters, parent handbooks and parent workshops.

Home-school communication refers to communication from parents to educators and may include telephone calls, written notices, and visits to the school.

Teacher-parent communication is the conveying of information between teachers and parents. It may be initiated by either party.

Collaboration between teachers and parents means teachers and parents working together in partnership towards a common goal. The goal in this instance is student learning. The role that each partner takes in any partnership may be quite diverse, however, partnership implies sharing with one another to "co-produce" (Davies, 1987) student learning.

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT:

This thesis is one study in a long term project; "The Co-Production of Learning Project", a multi-year, multi-site project to investigate the coproduction (Davies, 1987) of student learning outcomes by parents and teachers. I was a member of the Co-production research group and

participated in site selection, site liaison, development of measures, administration of surveys, the conducting of interviews, and interview analysis. Specifically, I helped to select suitable schools in Site Alpha for Time 1 and Time 2 data collection. I was the liaison for two classrooms in Site Alpha and distributed and collected surveys from three of the seven classrooms in Site Alpha for both Time 1 and Time 2. I was a member of the team that developed the survey items and the interview schedules for teachers, parents, and students. I conducted fourteen interviews with parents and students during Time 1 and Time 2. Finally, I coded twelve teacher and parent interviews for the initial establishment of a master list of codes for "The Co-production of Learning Project" and then coded eighteen parent interviews from Time 1 for this thesis. I actively participated in all aspects of the research procedures in Site Alpha with the exception of analyses of the quantitative data. The survey analyses for "The Co-Production of Learning Project" were conducted at S.F.U. Respondents' scores, correlation matrices, and the results of path analyses were made available to all members of the research team on disc. Throughout this thesis, the work of other members of the research team is acknowledged whenever appropriate.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

One of the limitations of this study is that the data collection for this thesis used survey and interview data collected from Time 1 of "The Co-Production of Learning Project". The data collected from Time 2 the following spring might have been more reliable. The data collected from Time 1 was in fact a pilot for "The Co-Production of Learning Project." Subsequent collections of data for the Co-production Project indicated, however, that the initial instruments were reliable.

A second limitation of this study of teacher-parent communication is the lack of data collected from teachers and students. To better meet the needs of a study such as this, teacher and student interview schedules would have to be designed to extract the particulars of teachers' communication with individual parents about individual students. The time required to conduct further interviews and to analyze a larger data bank with three data sources was beyond the scope of this thesis.

A third limitation of this study is that while the sample size of eighteen respondents for the initial analysis of the interview data was adequate, the sample size of ten respondents for the secondary analysis of parents with negative and positive perceptions was relatively small. The time constraints of coding, displaying, and analyzing interview data necessitated the selection of a smaller sample for the secondary analysis.

Finally, the sample of parents for the qualitative analysis was selected randomly from the large sample of parents who had responded to the survey instruments. The parents who were surveyed, however, were volunteers. This should be noted as a potential source of bias. "Volunteer groups are rarely representative, differing at least in motivation level from non-volunteers" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p.180). Ethical constraints required the researchers to obtain informed consent from the parent subjects in this study before involving them in the research project. The perceptions of parents who declined to participate in this study may have differed from the perceptions of parents reported in this thesis. A study of this nature requires the use of volunteers. It is pointless to reject all research that involves volunteers, "since in most instances the choice is either to use volunteers or not to do the research (Borg and Gall, 1989, p.180).

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS:

Chapter Two contains a review of the literature divided into five sections: The Importance of Parent Involvement, Studies of Parent Involvement, Studies of School-Home Relationships, Barriers to Building Collaborative School-Home Relationships, and Studies of Teacher-Parent Communication.

Chapter Three details the method of the study. The chapter begins with a background to the study, followed by descriptions of the sample and the instruments. The research procedures are reported in detail. The description of the quantitative data collection is followed by the quantitative data analysis; the description of the qualitative data collection is followed by the qualitative data analysis and includes the methods used for coding and cross-site analysis.

Chapter Four presents the results of the data analysis in three sections: Quantitative Results, Qualitative Results--General Findings, and Qualitative Results--A Secondary Analysis.

Chapter Five presents the answers to the five research questions posed in Chapter One as conclusions. The conclusions are summarized and related to the current literature. Finally, recommendations for educators and implications for further study are suggested.

CHAPTER TWO: A Review of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the research on parent involvement to determine the nature of teachers' relationships with parents and to describe the current literature on teacher-parent communication. First, the importance of parent involvement in education is discussed and important studies of parent involvement are reviewed. Second, the concept of collaboration as a characteristic of positive school-home relationships is examined. Third, barriers to establishing positive school-home relationships are identified. Finally, studies of teacher-parent communication are considered.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT:

Studies of parent involvement indicate that parent participation in education is related to school improvement (Epstein, 1987; Epstein and Dauber, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989). Some researchers have explored the relationship between parent involvement and school climate. In a review of studies of school climate, Anderson (1982) notes that more effective schools have more parent involvement. Coleman and Larocque (1990) discuss home-school relations in terms of "professional consideration of the client", a focus of school districts that are "struggling to be good enough". Haynes et al. contend, "one of the most effective ways to enhance the climate of schools is to involve parents at all levels of school life. Parents serve to enhance home-school relationships, student behaviour, and academic achievement" (1989, p.87). Rosenholtz (1989) claims that teachers in "stuck" schools are far more likely to assume that parents are unhelpful, while teachers in "moving" schools see parents as part of the solution to improving learning.

Second, research has been conducted to investigate the relationship between teacher efficacy and parent involvement. Hoover-Demsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) report,

While Ashton et al. (1983) suggested that parent-teacher interactions influence teacher efficacy, our results suggest that the influence may flow in the opposite direction as well. If the finding that teacher efficacy is an important contributor to parent involvement is replicated in other work, it would seem incumbent upon schools interested in increasing the productivity of home-school relations to encourage and build teachers' sense of efficacy (p.432).

Finally, researchers have investigated the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement. Barth (1979) in a review of 24 studies of "home-based reinforcement of school behaviour" reports significant improvement on even the most difficult problems when specific academic skills and reinforcement practices were targeted. The National Committee for Citizens in Education has now published two annotated bibliographies (1981,1986, in Henderson, 1988) describing more than fifty studies of parent involvement. In an intensive review of those studies, the majority of which appear to be causal, Henderson (1988) concludes that parent involvement in almost any form produces measurable gains in student achievement; parent involvement is more successful when parents are given the opportunity to play a variety of roles; and parent involvement must be well-planned and comprehensive to be long lasting. While Henderson's claims seem conclusive, this study considers as at least problematic the claim that parent involvement in almost any form produces measurable gains in student achievement; such a claim needs more comprehensive verification to be established. Epstein (1987) and Fullan (1982, 1991) acknowledge the importance of all forms of parent involvement, but conclude that parent involvement in learning activities

has the most effect upon student learning in school. Fullan (1991) describes the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement precisely when he states,

[E]merging from this [parent involvement] research is a message that is remarkable in its consistency: *The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement* (p.227).

In his review of the literature on parent involvement, Fullan (1991) concludes,

There are many, many more effective parent involvement programs in operation than was the case a few years ago. There has been a social movement beyond the rhetoric of general endorsement or rejection of community involvement, toward the development and use of specific programs involving parents in instructional activities in the classroom or at home (p.248).

In The New Meaning of Educational Change, Fullan (1991) has chosen not to discuss the barriers to parent involvement which he included in his earlier book, The Meaning of Educational Change (1982). This researcher is not as convinced of the acceptance of parent involvement practices as Fullan is and presents a discussion of the literature on the barriers to parent involvement later in this chapter.

Many studies investigated the various ways in which the types of parent involvement are related to school effectiveness, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. **The intent of this literature review is not to describe all studies of parent involvement, but rather to highlight theoretical reports and empirical studies of parent involvement that are relevant to a thesis designed to investigate teacher-parent communication.** This literature review examines noteworthy studies of parent involvement, studies that emphasize the importance of establishing positive school-home relationships, discussions of barriers to building

collaborative relationships between teachers and parents, and recent studies of teacher-parent communication.

STUDIES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT:

Parent involvement has been redefined in recent years to include many types of parent participation in schools. Parent involvement in the home, parent involvement in learning activities, parent involvement in school-home communication, parent involvement as volunteers, and parent involvement in school governance are examples of some of the ways in which parents can become involved in the education of their children (Epstein, 1987).

Researchers in this field often allude to societal changes that have made it necessary to change previous parent involvement practices in order to include many more parents (Comer, 1986; Walberg, 1984). "In most schools, activities that fit the old definitions of parent involvement engage only a relatively small number of parents, who are aware of the the advantages of such involvement to themselves and their own children" (Davies, 1991, p.378). New definitions of parent involvement not only include those parents who regularly respond to requests for assistance, but also the parents who have been considered in the past to be "hard to reach".

In his discussion of educational partnership, Seeley argues for the development of better home-school-community relationships. The past notion of reform, that improving schools will improve learning, is flawed (Seeley, 1984). In many schools the underlying problem is not the services provided, but the relationships between the services and the students. Seeley (1984) contends that school improvement must include changes to achieve productive learning relationships. Since students relate to schools not as isolated individuals, but as members of families, peer groups, and communities,

productive educational relationships must include the various relationships that students experience. In this partnership, education is the shared responsibility of the home, the school, and the community. The learning relationship involves interaction and loyalties between teachers and students, schools and families, and school systems and communities (Seeley, 1981).

Comer

James Comer (1986) explains why parent participation is a much needed adjustment in schools today. The relationship between home and school is not as it was before the Second World War when mutual respect and trust between school and home were the norm. "[S]chool people have lost much of the power they once had to significantly influence the social and psychological development of students as they address their intellectual development" (Comer, 1986, p.443). Comer cites the school management team--made up of the principal, a representative group of parents and teachers and a child development specialist or support staff member--as the "key to school improvement" (1986, p.445). In Comer's longitudinal study in New Haven, Connecticut, the school management team developed a "master plan" including objectives, goals, and strategies to improve school climate, academics, and staff development. Parents planned and implemented a school social calendar and developed workshops for themselves and other parents. By observing their parents and other adults interacting with teachers in a positive way, students became more responsive to the behavioural and academic expectations of the teachers in the school. Behaviour problems, school climate, and community acceptance were improved.

Epstein

In Epstein's study of 16 districts in Maryland, 3700 teachers, 600 administrators, and 1200 parents were surveyed and 82 teachers were interviewed to investigate the effects of parent involvement on student learning. Information on achievement and behaviour was obtained for 2100 students in

the first, third, and fifth grades. The results of the study indicated that parents are willing to help their children and would benefit from direction from teachers on how to help with the skills needed for success in school. Epstein identified five important types of parent involvement: the basic obligations of parents to provide health, safety, supervision, discipline, guidance, and learning at home, school-to-home communication, parent involvement at the school, parent involvement in learning activities at home, and parent involvement in school governance. Epstein concluded that when parents encourage and support school activities, children have an advantage in schools. Parent involvement in learning activities produced the most gain in student learning (Epstein, 1987). "With important characteristics statistically controlled, students whose teachers frequently used parent involvement made greater gains in reading achievement (but not in math achievement) than did other students from fall to the spring of their school year" (Epstein, 1987, p.128).

Don Davies (1991) describes the national project called Schools Reaching Out whose purpose is to redefine and expand the meaning of parent involvement in the U.S.A. Davies claims that the term "parent" should be changed to "family" to describe today's reality. With so many families requiring support and assistance, community agencies should also be included in discussions of parent involvement. Parent involvement goes beyond having family members in the school to activities and services that occur at home or in the neighbourhood. Parent involvement must reach all parents. As well as the priorities and agendas of teachers and administrators, the priorities of families must also be considered. A new paradigm is necessary; one that "emphasizes the inherent strengths of families" (Davies, 1991, p.378). Parent involvement practices successful in the Schools Reaching Out project are: a parent centre to attract family members to the school, home visitors to reach families who are

reluctant for whatever reason to visit the school, and "action research teams to involve teachers directly in studying home/school/community relations and in devising actions to improve their own practices" (Davies, 1991, p.380).

Throughout the literature on parent involvement, a common theme prevails: the social, emotional, physical, and academic development of the child is the shared responsibility of the school, the family, and the community.

STUDIES OF SCHOOL-HOME RELATIONSHIPS:

Several researchers emphasize the importance of collaboration to building positive school-home relationships. In a review of the research on the attitudes and actions of educators and parents regarding parent involvement, Moles concludes, "[we] need the support if not the active collaboration of parents" (1987, p.137). Don Davies (1991) surmises, "School/family/community partnerships will amount to little more than empty rhetoric unless teachers help design the partnerships, are devoted to making them work, and eventually find themselves benefiting from them" (Davies, 1991, p.380). In her review of studies of parent involvement, Henderson emphasizes:

The studies show clearly that parent involvement--whether based at home or at school and whether begun before or after a child starts school--has significant, longlasting effects. In fact, these effects vary directly with the duration and intensity of the parent involvement: the more, the better.

It is extremely important to remember that the converse is also true: if schools treat parents as unimportant, if they treat them as negative educational influences on their children, or if they discourage parents from becoming involved, then they promote the development of attitudes that inhibit achievement at school (Henderson, 1988, p.151).

Researchers agree theoretically that collaboration between educators and parents is necessary for healthy school-home relationships.

Educators and parents are beginning to conceptualize the meaning of the term 'collaboration'. Don Davies, reporting on the School Reaching Out program in the U.S.A., mentions that some schools are now considering including parents in the research teams which were established to assist teachers in building collaborative school-home-community relations. Davies cautions, "No school's outreach strategy will be complete--conceptually or politically--until educators and parents learn how shared decision making can help them 'put it all together' " (1991, p.382). Henderson states, "[P]arents must be intimately involved; public relations campaigns or dog-and-pony shows are not effective" (1988, p.151). Throughout the literature, researchers emphasize that involving parents as volunteers in the school has less influence upon student learning than does involving parents in the education of their children through collaboration between teachers and parents about student learning.

Even though there is general agreement among theorists that parent partnership in the educational process is important, the empirical evidence regarding school-home relationships suggests that the implementation of collaborative parent involvement projects is not as straightforward as it would seem.

After questioning parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members about parent involvement, Williams and Stallworth (1984, in Henderson, 1988) found that while they all agreed that parent involvement was vital to a child's success and that parents and teachers should communicate and cooperate with one another more frequently, they disagreed about the value of different types of parental roles. Parents thought that helping their child at home should have a higher priority than other roles, but they were eager to play a variety of roles and felt that all were important.

Teachers and principals favoured parent involvement in traditional ways and were less enthused about parent involvement in educational decisions.

Superintendents and board members, who had less day to day contact with parents, rated parent decision making at school more highly than did teachers and school administrators.

Chavkin and Williams (1987) surveyed administrators and parents to examine parent involvement practices. Although 75% of the parents surveyed expressed an interest in shared decision making roles such as advocate or co-learner, parents reported that they were rarely involved in decisions about curriculum and instruction. Parents believed that "they [the parents] should have the final word in decisions about their own children's education" (Chavkin and Williams, 1987, p.180).

Lietch and Tangri (1988) interviewed teachers, administrators and parent in a low income black junior high school to determine the relationship between school and home and the parents' and teachers' perceptions of obstacles to collaboration. The results of the study indicated that "teachers rely more on each other than on other groups for help" (p. 73). Parents and teachers contacted one another for behaviour and attendance problems, academic problems, and monitoring children's progress. "For the most part, parents and teachers did not map strategies together or re-evaluate situations following contact" (Lietch and Tangri, 1988, p.74). Even though parents mentioned work as an obstacle to collaboration, the data showed that employed parents may be more involved than unemployed parents. Lietch and Tangri concluded that it is lack of specific planning rather than misperceptions of one another that prevents parents and teachers from collaborating to assist student learning.

Lareau and Benson (1984) contend that as parents and teachers work together in school-home partnerships, parents assist in the development of other children in the community, teachers deal with students in a more individualized fashion, and the roles of the parents and teachers become less distinct and less distant. In fact, "the power inherent in both roles is enhanced" (Lareau and Benson, 1984, p.401). The authors studied families in two distinct neighbourhoods to compare the differences between the school-home interactions of middle-class families and working-class families. They found that the parents in middle-class families are more likely to enter into a school-home relationship that could be termed a partnership, than were parents in working-class families. Families in working-class neighbourhoods functioned independently from the process of schooling. Middle-class families were characterized by considerable interdependence between home and school.

This difference in the home/school relationship is not related to the amount of interest that parents have in their children's educational achievement. Rather, it appears to stem from social and cultural differences in family life and the ways in which schools respond to these differences (Lareau and Benson, 1984, p.402).

The authors caution that the social context of the school environment affects the nature of the school-home partnership. Educators must be sensitive to the social networks and socialization methods of the community, as well as parental beliefs about their role in the educational process, in order to build successful school-home partnerships. A variety of parent involvement activities should be provided to meet the needs of a variety of families (Lareau and Benson, 1984).

The conclusion one must make regarding school-home relationships is that while the theoretical argument for collaboration to promote student learning is strong, the empirical evidence suggests that barriers exist.

BARRIERS TO BUILDING COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL-HOME RELATIONSHIPS:

Several researchers have acknowledged barriers to collaboration between teachers and parents and many offer solutions to break down the communication barriers and build better collaborative school-home relationships (Fullan, 1982; Lightfoot, 1978; Lortie, 1975; Henderson, 1988; Davies, 1991; Comer, 1986). In his discussion of the barriers to parent involvement, Fullan describes two categories of barriers--phenomenological and logistical.

Phenomenological barriers relate to the lack of knowledge and understanding that administrators and parents have of each others' subjective worlds. Logistical or technical problems concern lack of time, opportunity, and know-how about what activities or forms of parent involvement would be most effective. The phenomenological barriers are the greatest, because they are more fundamental (thus reinforcing the logistical barriers) and because they often go unrecognized. Stereotyping is easier and more efficient than empathizing (1982, p.203).

Phenomenological Barriers

Lightfoot provides a comprehensive discussion of the phenomenological barriers to parent involvement in her well-known book about family-school relationships in black communities, Worlds Apart.

Parents' and teachers' perceptions of each other as uncaring about children and as devaluing the education process lead to distance and distrust and the need to blame one another. Misconceptions, rarely articulated and confronted, always nurtured by hostile stereotypes, lead to increasing disregard for each other's place in the lives of black children. Rather than search for the origins of conflict and find effective strategies for

real (rather than contrived) participation of parents and teachers in a collaborative task, schools develop more sophisticated methods of exclusion; parents draw farther and farther away from parental responsibilities in the schooling process, and children fail (1978, p.167).

Lightfoot makes the following claims. First, parents and teachers are involved in the same complementary educational tasks to help children learn, but in order to do so they must understand one another's worlds. Second, conflict is destructive if it is ignored, but is inevitable and necessary for improvement and change. Third, it is not easy and takes time for teachers and parents to learn about each other's "subjective worlds" (Lightfoot, 1978).

The differences between the worlds of teachers and parents can be attributed to the differences in the perspectives of parents and teachers. "Children in the family are treated as special persons, but pupils in school are necessarily treated as members of categories" (Lightfoot, 1978, p.22). Lightfoot explains the "individualistic" expectations of parents and the "universalistic" expectations of teachers by describing the meaning of "fair". When parents ask a teacher to "be fair" to their child, they want the teacher to give the child special attention. When teachers speak of "being fair" they mean, "giving equal amounts of attention, judging everyone by the same objective standards, using explicit and public criteria for making judgements. With fairness comes rationality, order, and detachment" (1978, p.22). Lortie refers to Waller's book The Sociology of Teaching (1961) and describes the difference in the way parents and teachers perceive the child with these words, "To the parents, he is a special, prized person; to the teacher, he is one member of the category 'student' " (1975, p.188). Lortie explains that when a parent asks a teacher for special treatment or even appears to do so by visiting the school frequently, the parent places the teacher in a conflict situation; the teacher may have to choose between his or her decision and the wishes of the

parent. Because of the nature of families and schools, the phenomenological barriers created by the individualistic expectations of parents and the universalistic expectations of teachers will endure.

Although sociologists make clear distinctions between the institutions of families and schools, Lightfoot presents that for teachers, parents, and student, the distinctions are not that obvious.

As a matter of fact, home and school more often appear as overlapping worlds with fuzzy boundaries, and much of the anxiety between parents and teachers seems to grow out of the ambiguities. The struggles for clarity and boundary setting are waged daily as parents and teachers argue (often silently and resentfully) about who should be in control of the child's life in school (Lightfoot, 1978, p.26).

One method teachers employ to retain some measure of autonomy and relief from parental scrutiny is to close the classroom door to parents (Lightfoot, 1978). Henderson (1988) suggests that educators worry that parents who are untrained may interfere with modern teaching techniques or disrupt the learning environment. Lightfoot's "need for boundary setting" and "territoriality" is enhanced by Lortie's explanation,

Perhaps they [teachers] feel that since they do not intervene in home affairs, parents ought not to intervene in theirs--the classroom. These teachers, then, seek to ensure both independence *and* support, the mechanisms they invoke are physical separation and teacher control over parents' access to the school (1975, p.191).

Lortie suggests that parents also have a need for boundary setting. Parents can feel threatened by teacher judgements of the child, especially when the parent has idealized the child's abilities. Teachers can be perceived by parents as competitors, particularly if the values the teachers emphasize do not coincide with the parents' values (Lortie, 1975). Lightfoot explains that the tensions between teachers and parents can be altered by "clarifying areas of

responsibility and competence between parents and teachers and providing effective modes for communicating distrust and relieving anxiety" (1978, p.27).

Teachers' perceptions of their competence as a teacher and parents' perceptions of their competence as a parent effects their willingness to communicate with one another. Rosenholtz (1989) reported that teachers who had low workplace commitment "held no goals for parent participation, perhaps because parents' negative attitudes protected their self esteem" (p.152). Davies (1991) described some parents as "hard to reach" because of their low self-confidence. Comer (1986) contends that parents whose own school experience was less than positive, parents with fewer social skills and parents with less education are often reluctant to become involved.

Teachers' and parents' beliefs about each other's competency may create barriers to parent involvement. Epstein (1987) claims that teachers and parents rate each other more positively when teachers use frequent parent involvement practices.

Parents rated these teachers higher in overall teaching ability and interpersonal skills. Teachers who used parent involvement frequently rated all parents high in helpfulness and follow-through activities at home, including parents with more or less education and single and married parents (Epstein, 1987, p.128).

Teachers who frequently used parent involvement practices involved parents with a college education, a high school degree, or less than a high school diploma in learning activities at home, and believed that all parents helped their children learn. These teachers made equal demands on single and married parents and rated them as equally helpful and responsible in helping their children at home. By contrast, other teachers did not involve parents in learning activities at home because they believed that "parents who had less than a high school education lacked the ability or willingness to help" (Epstein,

1987). These teachers made more demands on single parents and rated them as less able to assist their children at home. Epstein concludes that teachers who make frequent use of parent involvement get good results from all parents, not just those who are traditionally thought to be able to help.

Throughout the history of education, teachers' and parents' beliefs have not changed significantly. Fullan contends that the issue is not how to make the tension between teachers and parents disappear, "but to recognize that these phenomenological differences are among the most powerful barriers to and resources for change" (1982, p.205).

Logistical Barriers

In addition to the phenomenological barriers described above, researchers have identified logistical barriers to parent involvement such as lack of training and time.

At the practical level, Becker discovered that 75% of the teachers believed that parent involvement at home was necessary for achieving educational goals for students, but "many teachers do not know how to initiate and accomplish their programs of parent involvement that would help them most" (Fullan, 1982, p.206).

Teachers and administrators have not been taught how to work collaboratively with parents (Fullan, 1982; Comer, 1986; McAfee, 1987). Moles (1987) agrees, "For teachers to become involved in parent involvement practices, many will need specialized training" (p. 143). Lamm prescribes specific skills for improving parent involvement:

Prospective teachers and administrators should learn how to hold parent conferences, how to show parents ways to reinforce and extend classroom lessons, and how to involve parents in advisory and school-site management committees (1986, p.212).

Parents need training as well. Lazar & Darlington (1978; in Henderson, 1988) contend that younger children whose background places them at risk will

outperform their peers for years if their parents receive training in home teaching. Epstein claims, "Parents felt less capable of helping their older children in reading and math activities at home, although most wanted direction about how to help" (1987, p.129). In response to concerns such as these, "the National Education Association has embarked on a major effort to train teachers to work more closely with parents" (Henderson, 1988, p.149).

The time required to train parents in instructing students is viewed by many educators as a barrier to parent involvement. Training parents is too time consuming for teachers and administrators who believe they are already overworked and underpaid (Henderson, 1988). Eisenhart et al (1988) contend that teachers have an ambivalent attitude toward activities which depend upon support and cooperation from other adults, "support and cooperation that might not always be forthcoming" (p. 139). Parents, too, sometimes believe that they do not have the time or energy to become involved in the education of their children (Davies, 1991). For both educators and parents, "the daily grind and pressures to survive crowd out good intentions" (Fullan, 1982, p.206).

The logistical barriers to parent involvement might be diminished by the assignment of resources to train teachers and parents to assist one another to educate children. To be successful, however, programs to involve parents would have to include training for teachers and parents to make them aware of one another's environments (Lightfoot, 1978). "In order to effectively attend to children in one setting, the adult sponsors would have to be aware of life in the other, see the child's experience as continuous, and seek an integration of educational realms (Lightfoot, 1980, in Fullan, 1982, p.204). Even with this careful implementation of parent involvement programs, the phenomenological barriers to parent involvement will continue to exist. In fact,

Waller (1967, in Fullan, 1982) claims that it would be a sad day for childhood if teachers and parents ever really succeeded in agreeing on their objective. Conflict between families and schools is natural and can be constructive (Lightfoot, 1979). Lightfoot emphasizes that the choice is between building "boundaries and bridges" and that building bridges is the only way to proceed.

Difference and discontinuities between home and school are not necessarily signs of hostility and threat, and they can be potentially constructive in the teaching and learning process. Both teachers and parents should therefore, be socialized to anticipate and tolerate creative tension differences in perspective, and opposing value systems (Lightfoot, 1979, p.52).

STUDIES OF TEACHER-PARENT COMMUNICATION:

Studies of school-home communication have attempted to describe the effects of teacher-parent communication on student learning, perceptions of communication boundaries, methods of teacher-parent communication, and the frequency of teacher-parent communication.

Barth (1979) in a review of home based reinforcement of school behaviour concludes that older children whose performance has started to decline could improve their behaviour by home reinforcement, especially when parents provide positive feedback for good performance. Barth recommends that the strengths and weaknesses of methods of contacting and involving parents with different parent populations should be researched further. Barth also notes the need for teachers and parents to be aware of the minimal time required to use home-school programs for a maximum effect.

Lucas and Lusthaus (1977) conducted a study to investigate parent perceptions of the "communication boundaries" of their children's schools. The study was based on the assumption that schools might be regarded as

"open" or "closed" depending upon "the degree to which their communication boundaries were permeable to parental input" (Lucas & Lusthaus, 1977, p.1). Parents perceived schools to be "open", when they had many contacts with the school. In addition, the more satisfied parents were with the education received by their children, the more "open" they perceived the school to be. Lucas and Lusthaus conclude,

If perceived openness may be regarded as reflecting a positive orientation, the association between frequency of contact and a tendency to perceive the school as more open suggests that actual parental involvement is indeed a key consideration in building positive attitudes toward the school (1977, p.3).

Lucas and Lusthaus suggest the need for more detailed studies of the variations and components of teacher-parent communication.

D'Angelo and Adler (1991) suggest that schools and districts who seek to improve communication with parents should look to the successful methods of the Chapter 1 programs in the U.S.A. Strategies for communication between schools and home such as progress reports, activity calendars, phone calls reporting good news, home visits, parent-teacher conferences, monthly newsletters, parent handbooks and parent workshops help to overcome some of the barriers for communication between teachers and parents (D'Angelo & Adler, 1991).

Uhlenberg (1987) surveyed 376 educators in 21 North Dakota schools to determine the frequency of parent requests for help from educators, to describe the types of concerns for which parents sought help, and to determine the response of the educators to parent concerns. Educators reported that they were frequently asked for assistance with "stimulating intellectual development, developing effective discipline techniques, setting realistic expectations, recognizing deviant development and appropriate

sources of help, and building children's self-esteem" (Uhlenberg, 1987, p.23). More than 75% of educators perceived that they were able to assist parents. Educators who reported frequent requests for help were "willing to help parents, in private schools, assigned grades four through six, and had a special education assignment" (Uhlenberg, 1987, p.24). The results of the study indicated a relationship between the number of parent requests for help and the availability of parenting education classes in the community. "Classes may have made parents more aware of the acceptability of asking questions" (Uhlenberg, 1987, p.25).

Studies of the benefits, perceptions, types, and frequency of teacher-parent communication have helped to further our understanding of how teachers and parents might develop a collaborative relationship to help students learn.

CONCLUSIONS:

From this review of the literature on parent involvement, one can draw several conclusions. First, parent involvement in learning activities affects student learning. Second, the relationship between teachers and parents must be a partnership with shared responsibilities. Third, phenomenological and logistical barriers exist that hamper the development of partnerships between teachers and parents. Finally, while studies of teacher-parent communication have helped to further our understanding of how to build collaborative relationships, more information is needed. Descriptive studies to investigate the content of teacher-parent communication have not yet been explored.

Future studies to describe the relations and communication between teachers and parents will help to further our knowledge of parent involvement.

CHAPTER THREE: Method

BACKGROUND TO THE METHOD:

Despite the numerous studies which have determined that educators should involve parents and communicate to them about instructional issues to improve student learning outcomes, many teachers do not communicate with parents more than three or four times per year, and usually only by a formal report card. Phenomenological and logistical barriers to communication seem to be very real. The barriers identified in the literature should not be ignored. Parent involvement contributes to student achievement. However, a review of the literature leaves the following questions unanswered. As a researcher, I wonder what do parents and teachers communicate about in the newsletters, phone calls, and meetings that researchers name in studies of communication. As an educator who wants to use her valuable time efficiently, I wonder what information do parents want. Hence, this thesis was designed to answer the following questions.

First, when teachers and parents communicate with one another, what do they talk about? Second, how do parents perceive communication with teachers that parents initiate? Third, how do parents perceive the communication they receive from teachers? Fourth, when teachers and parents communicate, which topics of conversation influence parent perceptions of teacher-parent communication in a positive way? Finally, how do parent perceptions of communication with teachers affect teacher-parent relationships?

This thesis is one study in a long term project; "The Co-Production of Learning Project", a multi-year, multi-site project to investigate the co-

production (Davies, 1987) of student learning outcomes by parents and teachers.

The first purpose of the larger project is descriptive, to identify the critical attitudinal variables affecting collaboration between parent/teachers/students. The second is to develop, through a series of interventions, a more collaborative relationship between parent, teachers, and students such that all see themselves as involved in the production of learning. ...The third purpose of the large project, then, is to determine if students' sense of identity with the school can be heightened through collaboration between home and school; and whether this has any impact upon the transition to junior secondary school, and potentially upon the drop-out decision which is believed to be developmental over a period of years rather than short-term (Coleman and Tabin, 1992).

"The Co-Production of Learning Project" analyzes the general relationships within and between three reference groups (teachers, parents, and students) and the specific relationships between a teacher and a particular student and his or her family (the teacher/parent/student triad). The research design for "The Co-Production of Learning Project" combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. Members of the Co-production research group, several masters students, two doctoral students, and one academic, play a variety of roles in the larger project to investigate parent involvement including site selection, site liaison, development of measures, administration of surveys, conducting interviews, survey and interview analysis, and maintenance of the resulting data base. Each researcher then uses the common data bank to investigate one or some of the many aspects of parental contribution to the instructional program in schools.

My role as a member of the research team is described in Chapter One. The work of the other members of the team is acknowledged whenever it is cited in this thesis. Briefly, members of the research team, myself included, created the instruments used in this study. The distribution and collection of

the survey instruments and the interviews with parents were conducted by myself and other members of the research group. Finally, Tim Seifert, a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at S.F.U., assisted in the analyses of the survey data. The results of the analyses were made available to me on disc. I analyzed the interview data for this thesis after I had assisted the research team to develop a master code list.

A research method which analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data was developed to answer the questions posed in this thesis. It was anticipated that the quantitative data would provide basic research evidence of parent perceptions of teacher-parent communication and the variables influencing those perceptions. In addition, analyses of interview data would provide glimpses of teacher-parent communication and parent perceptions of such communication in the form of case studies, which would enhance a study of the content of teacher-parent communication. "Case study research, and in particular qualitative case study, is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena" (Merriam, 1989, p.2). Borg and Gall emphasize that a partial solution to understanding the complex reality of a research problem is "triangulation of methodology, that is, using several methods to study the same object" (1989, p.393). Collecting both survey and interview data from the subjects in this study should contribute to the readers' confidence in the research findings of this thesis. The intent here is not "to use qualitative data merely to 'illustrate' the on-the-surface 'hard' data of the survey" (Fielding and Fielding, 1986, p.17), but rather to conduct a quantitative analysis of communication and a qualitative analysis of communication and then to discuss if and how the results of the two analyses are mutually supportive.

SAMPLE:

"Research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (Merriam, 1989, p.3). Because this thesis intends to investigate one-to-one communication, it became apparent that parents would be the better target group for data collection. The assumption was made that teachers deal with a broad group of students and would give general statements about communication (Katz, 1964, in Coleman and Collinge, 1991) whereas parents would be a more reliable source for specific comments exchanged between teachers and parents. It was hoped that parents, because of personal interest in the topics, would be more likely to remember particular conversations and would therefore provide more detailed data.

On the basis of Finn's review (1989) of the literature on drop-outs, which suggests that dropping out is only the most severe form of withdrawal, "The Co-Production of Learning Project" chose to work with students in grades 6 and 7 and their parents and teachers to further investigate the importance of parent involvement during the transition years from elementary to secondary school.

Teachers, parents, and students from two school districts representing different regions of the province participated in "The Co-Production of Learning Project". Five elementary schools in a large district in the central interior of British Columbia (Site Alpha) and two elementary schools in the Fraser Valley of the province (Site Beta) were included in the study. The quantitative data for this thesis was collected from parents in Site Alpha and Site Beta. The qualitative data used in this thesis was limited to interviews with 18 parents in Site Alpha.

Schools within the districts varied by size and SES of families served. Urban, suburban, and rural populations were represented. Portraits of the districts and the schools are summarized here from a previous publication by Coleman & Tabin (1992) and are included to help the reader place the participants in a schooling context, to characterize in a general way the kinds of schools the teachers work in, students attend, and parents visit socially, on business, or for some other purpose. The data were not, however, analyzed school by school.

Site Alpha: Site Alpha covers a large district both in terms of geography and student population. Many of the district schools are clustered in and around the district's one main population centre; several elementary schools and three secondary schools are in three smaller communities at a considerable distance from the district administration office. There are also many small elementary schools throughout the district. The elementary schools chosen in Site Alpha for "The Co-Production of Learning Project" were from one catchment area for a large secondary school in a northern area of the main centre; "a microcosm of the larger district" (Coleman & Tabin, 1992, p.5). The neighbourhoods were both urban and rural; the socioeconomic level of participants ranged from low to high. The sample was representative of the larger district. Participants were from five elementary schools.

School A (Class 11, Class 12): Families from School A come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Many new homes surround the school, but low income dwellings are a part of the neighbourhood as well. The school houses the French Immersion Program for elementary children in the zone and some students are bussed to the school for this program.

School G (Class 13): Families in School G's catchment area range from low to high socioeconomic status. The neighbourhood is unusual in that

there are many streets of mobile homes, but there are also newly developed residential areas with middle class housing. The student population of 200 is said to be challenging.

School H (Class 14, Class 15): School H is nestled in a large middle/upper class neighbourhood which includes many exclusive, executive homes. The 350 students served by the school are involved in many extra curricular activities both at school and within the community. Parents in the community have a reputation for taking an active interest in the educational programs at the school. They do not hesitate to make their views known.

School N (Class 16): School N is located in a pretty rural setting dotted with lakes and farmland, approximately 25 kilometers from the secondary school. The families in the rural area farm, work in the forest industry, or commute to the city for employment. Most of the 200 students who attend this school are bussed. The school is one of the hubs of the rural community; an active community association and parent group are involved in organizing community events. Most of the teaching staff commutes to the school from the city.

School S (Class 17): The 220 students at School S come from both urban and rural homes. The school is just on the border of the city limits. Many of the students are bussed from small acreages or homes on large city lots. The school was built in 1983 to replace a four room building and it continues to have a growing enrollment as the city expands northward. Parents in the community are supportive.

Teachers, parents, and students from seven classrooms from these five schools participated in the study. Of these classes two were Grade 7, four were Grade 6, and one was a Grade 5/6.

Site Beta: Site Beta is a medium sized district in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area. The housing development in the area is booming as the city expands eastward. Residents in the area are employed in the city or in service industries in the town centre. Some families have acreage, but the area is mostly large subdivisions. Most of the schools in the district are located in the main population centre, but a few are scattered in the rural areas.

School A (Class 21, Class 22, Class 23): School A is a new school, built in the late 1980's in a new subdivision just two kilometers from the town centre. Construction of a new wing is planned for the coming year; several classes are now housed in portable classrooms. Most of the 320 students walk to school, but a few are bussed from rural areas north of the town centre. The school has a reputation for being progressive. The parent population is regarded as supportive.

School B (Class 24, Class 25): The neighbourhood surrounding School B is older; the school is approximately 30 years old. Students who attend School B come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Some live in a cluster of apartment building near the town centre. The student population is regarded as challenging and includes some students with special needs who are integrated into the regular classrooms.

Teachers, parents and students from five classrooms in these two schools in Site Beta participated in "The Co-Production of Learning Project".

INSTRUMENTS:

The parent survey used for this thesis was developed by the research team to reflect the research interests of the various members of the research group. Questions for the surveys were formulated after consulting the instrumentation of other researchers who had examined similar factors. The

personal and professional experiences of the members of the research team who, collectively, represented teachers, parents, and/or school administrators also guided the development of items intended to measure the attitudes and behaviours thought to influence collaboration between teachers, parents, and students.

The parent survey consisted of 61 items forming 9 scales. They were Scale 1: parent perception of student-teacher communication, Scale 2: parent perception of student-parent communication, Scale 3: parent perception of teacher-parent communication about instruction, Scale 4: parent perception of teacher-parent communication in general, Scale 5: parent perception of teacher concern about parent involvement, Scale 6: parent perception of parent-school communication, Scale 7: parent values schooling, Scale 8: parent perception of school climate, and Scale 9: parent perception of parent efficacy. In addition, parents were asked to rate the school on a 10-point scale. Demographic data, including family education level, was requested at the end of the survey.

Items were constructed with five-point Likert scale responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. To avoid generalized response patterns, both negatively and positively worded items were used throughout the instruments. The parent survey questions are included in Appendix C.

A parent interview schedule containing open-ended questions with probes was developed by the research team. (See Appendix B). The parent interview schedule contained questions about Parent Involvement, Student-Teacher Communication, Student-Parent Communication, Teacher-Parent Communication, Parent-School Communication, and Parent Efficacy.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES:

In the fall of 1990, a member of the research team contacted the superintendent of each district requesting permission to conduct research in some of its elementary schools. The team then selected neighbouring elementary schools that fed into one secondary school. This would enable some members of the team to conduct longterm studies, that is, they could study subjects as the students made the transition into secondary school. A member of the research team then contacted and met with each of the principals at the elementary schools to explain the purposes of the study and to invite them to participate. Two principals declined to participate in the study. One was speaking on behalf of his staff who responded that they had several other projects underway at the time. The other principal declined citing teacher time as a factor because many of the staff were new to the school. Two more schools which met the criteria of feeding into the secondary school were then approached to create a larger sample. Letters of consent were obtained from all the principals of the participating schools. To ensure that the teachers, parents, and students in the schools would not become overwhelmed by contact with different researchers, each member of the research team agreed to be responsible for the collection of data from one or two schools.

Quantitative Data Collection

Teachers of grade six and seven students received a letter explaining the study purposes, procedures, and methods used to protect participant anonymity. Full and informed consent was obtained from twelve teachers to participate in the data collection for the project. Letters of Consent are included in Appendix A. All of the twelve teachers involved in the study were surveyed. Surveys were coded with a teacher number (eg. 13100). The first digit in the number indicated the community (1 or 2); the second digit

indicated the classroom and ranged from 1 through 7 in site 1, and 1 through 5 in site 2; and the third digit indicated that the participant was a teacher. The fourth and fifth digits were not needed for coding the teacher surveys. Zeros were assigned to the columns to keep the coding pattern consistent with the coding for the parent and student surveys.

A letter of invitation, which included an overview of the Co-production Project and an explanation of confidentiality, was distributed to the parents in each teacher's classroom. Members of the research team contacted parents by telephone to ensure that they had received the invitation and to answer any initial questions about the study. Parents who wished to participate in the study with their children filled in a letter of consent and returned it to the school. (Letters of Consent are included in Appendix A.) About 30% of parents contacted declined. A survey and envelope was sent home with the students to all parents who had volunteered to participate. After an extensive telephone campaign by members of the research team to request that the envelopes be returned as soon as possible, most sealed envelopes were returned to the school and collected from teachers by members of the research team. To preserve anonymity, each survey was coded with a parent number (eg. 13225). As with the teacher surveys the first two digits indicated the site and classroom. The third digit indicated that the respondent was a parent. The fourth and fifth columns were used to assign student numbers which corresponded to the order of the student on the teacher's class list (1 through 31). Thus, 13225 was the code for site 1, classroom 3, parent survey, for student #25. After a number had been assigned to the survey, the consent form was detached from the survey form.

Student surveys were distributed to all students whose parents had given consent for participation. Before distribution, student surveys were

coded with a student number so that they could be matched to teacher and parent surveys for triad analysis. Some student surveys were distributed by teachers in envelopes in class time; others were handed personally to students by researchers. In most cases, teachers collected the sealed envelopes and researchers collected the envelopes from the teachers. Some envelopes were collected personally by researchers.

After some delay due to a teacher strike in Site Beta, the collection of quantitative data from all of the participating schools was complete. The researchers matched the code number on each survey to create 230 teacher/parent/student triads in all. The response set for the quantitative data collection was defined as the set for which all three surveys (teacher, parent, and student) were received; the n was 230. Subsequently two teachers (classrooms) dropped out, reducing the response set to 187 (Coleman, Collinge, and Seifert, 1992).

Quantitative Data Analysis:

The analyses used in "The Co-Production of Learning Project" treated teachers, parents, and students as members of a reference group and as individual members of a teacher, parent, student triad. The quantitative analysis for this thesis is limited to the data collected from the parent reference group and is specifically the perceptions of parents which influence parent rating of school.

A variety of analyses were conducted. First, Cronbach's Alpha was used to demonstrate "the internal consistency of the scales for each of the parent surveys for the largest data set (n=230)" (Coleman and Tabin, 1992, p.7). All were judged adequate by accepted standards (Coleman, Collinge, and Seifert, 1992). (See Appendix C.)

Second, scale scores were calculated for each parent on each of the relevant scales, and a correlation matrix was created that included 8 parent scales and the rating of school by parents (Q62). "Family Education Level was not related to any of the other variables at the significance level used throughout ($p < .001$)" (Coleman and Tabin, 1992).

The correlation matrix was used to establish the general relationships between the variables. Then, in conjunction with the conceptual framework of "The Co-Production of Learning Project", a speculative path analysis was developed (Coleman and Tabin, 1992). The path analysis described the set of causal relationships that linked parent variables as measured by the scales to the dependent variables.

The research team discussed the path analysis several times in the summer and fall of 1991. "Maps" of the relationships were drawn and redrawn, eventually resulting in "a supposed causal model of relationships" (Coleman and Tabin, 1992, p.8). The path analysis was tested by structural equation modelling using a program called EQS (Bentler, 1991) which "simultaneously tests a group of regression equations that constitute a model of causal relationships" (Coleman and Tabin, 1992, p.8). The relationships between the scales are illustrated in Figure 1 and described as quantitative results in Chapter Four.

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative data collection for this thesis was done in conjunction with the other members of "The Co-Production of Learning Project". After the research team had developed instruments, a pilot interview was conducted by one researcher with one teacher. The research team met to review this taped interview. Techniques researchers might use when interviewing were emphasized. For example, probes that would encourage the respondent and

probes that provided the respondent with too much information or indicated a bias were discussed in order that they might be avoided during interviewing.

In the winter of 1990/1991, members of the research team visited the schools to interview the twelve teachers who were participating in "The Co-Production of Learning Project". An interview room was set aside in the school so that the interview could be conducted in privacy. All teachers were asked the same questions. The interviewers made handwritten notes on an interview schedule and tape recorded the interview for transcribing at a later date. The interview schedule and the tape were labelled with the same teacher codes that were used for the surveys.

A random sample of parents and students was selected to be interviewed from the lists of parents and students who had participated in the quantitative data collection. Three parent/student pairs from each classroom were chosen with an attempt to include an equal number of male and female students. Parents and students were interviewed at home in most cases and at school in some cases during the months of December 1990 and January 1991. Interviewers contacted parents by telephone to set an appointment time to complete the parent interview and the student interview. In many cases two researchers would visit the home and one would interview the parent while the other interviewed the child. Interviewers once again took notes and taped the interviews for transcribing later. All interview schedules and tapes were coded to match the parent and student survey numbers. In total, 12 teachers, 36 parents, and 36 students were interviewed.

During this time period a data accounting sheet was developed to keep track of completed data sets (ie. one teacher, parent, and student survey and one teacher, parent, and student interview per triad). If one piece of data was missing, the data set would be excluded from the data bank. Even with this

care and attention some classrooms had only two triads at the end of the process. In some cases the tape recorder malfunctioned; in one case the taped student interview was misplaced. In the end, 18 triads from Site Alpha and 14 triads from Site Beta were complete.

The next step in the qualitative data collection was to transcribe the interview tapes. Some members of the research team and a clerical assistant based on campus fully transcribed the tapes to have a complete record of speech and other audible events. When complete sets of interview schedules had been transcribed and accounted for--one teacher schedule, one parent schedule, and one student schedule per triad--the interview transcriptions were ready to be coded.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The initial analysis of the qualitative data, done in conjunction with other members of the research team will be reported here first, followed by the analysis which is specific to this thesis.

Coding:

In the summer of 1991, members of the research team (including this researcher) met on campus to develop a master list of codes. To begin the process, one teacher interview schedule which the researchers thought would contain the most amount of information was selected and distributed to the group. Members generated a "start list" of codes as they discussed the first few pages of the interview schedule together. Sometimes earlier segments had to be recoded as a more descriptively representative scheme emerged. The conceptual structure of the project influenced the definitions of the codes (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Codes, developed to indicate acts, activities, meanings, participation, relationships, and settings, were kept semantically close to the terms they represented. Second level codes were attached to the

main codes in order to help differentiate between the many responses that might fall under one code heading. For example; PI/INIT//T meant Parent Involvement Initiated by the Teacher, PI/INIT//P meant Parent Involvement Initiated by the Parent. Clear operational definitions were established for all codes to avoid ambiguity because of multiple researchers.

Using the "start list" of codes, researchers coded the material independently. Then the group met again to check intra-rater reliability and to revise the "start list" of codes. Much discussion ensued. Disagreements showed which definitions had to be expanded or amended. One doctoral student was designated to be in charge of the master code list.

Each researcher then coded twelve teacher, parent, or student interview schedules using the revised list of codes. Researchers sent memos to the person in charge of the master list of codes identifying new codes that had emerged. The code list was then checked and revised once more. The final master list of codes contained 230 codes. The researchers then rechecked the twelve coded interview schedules and made any necessary revisions.

After participating in the procedure described above, this researcher coded the eighteen parent interviews from Site Alpha in order to further describe teacher-parent communication. First, a more specific master list of codes for communication between teachers and parents had to be developed. Using clean transcripts, specific codes were identified by attaching second and third level codes to some main codes. The process involved reading a parent interview and adding specific codes such as TB (Teacher Behavior) or Me/to/S (Message to Student) to first-level codes such as PTC (Parent to Teacher Communication) or TPC (Teacher to Parent Communication). The definitions for each secondary code were made as precise and operational as possible. The final level for each code was a "+" or "-" to indicate whether the

communication had a positive or negative tone. For example, a negative sign would be attached to a comment such as, "She would have him repeat and repeat until he got it right...I was really upset...I talked to the teacher." As this sample illustrates, the unit of analysis was a sentence or "multisentence chunk" (Huberman and Miles, 1984), and the following heuristic was utilized, "Assign the single most appropriate code among those derived from a given research question" (Huberman and Miles, 1984, p.63).

In order to develop a list of codes that would encompass all possibilities for teacher-parent communication, but would not be too unwieldy, the codes were charted on a large matrix to enable the researcher to view all codes and typical responses at a glance. This was achieved by using yellow post-it notes to record the code, the interview number, a direct quote, and the interview page where it was stated. Each column of the matrix contained comments made by one parent respondent. After twelve parent interviews had been recorded on the matrix, it became apparent that no new codes were being created. The entire matrix was then reviewed to ensure that codes were consistent. Some segments of interviews had to be reviewed and recoded. As a result of clustering the post-it notes, three obvious categories emerged for the code list: parent to teacher communication, teacher to parent communication, and parent perceptions of communication between teachers and parents. A list of the final codes is attached in Appendix D. Two safeguards ensured the validity and meaning of the codes. First, the coding was checked against the initial group coding. Second, one parent interview was then coded by two other members of the research team, using an annotated list of the codes. The coding by different raters was almost identical.

Cross-Site Analysis:

The first reduction of the data involved transcribing the large matrix onto a Word 4.0 data base to enable the researcher to view and analyze the comments of the respondents. This reduction decreased the data from 118 pages of transcripts to 23 pages of clustered comments. Three matrices were printed: one each for Parent to Teacher Communication, Teacher to Parent Communication, and Parent Perceptions of Communication between Teachers and Parents. The three matrices could then be viewed in two ways. By looking down columns, the researcher could view all of the responses made by one parent. By laying the matrices side by side, the researcher could look across rows for similarities and differences between respondents. The results of the analysis are reported as general findings in Chapter Four of this thesis.

After the researcher had recorded the general patterns of communication that emerged from the general analysis, a secondary analysis was conducted. The quantitative analysis guided this second look at the data. The results of the quantitative analysis indicated that Scale 5 (Parent Perceptions of Teacher Concern about Parent Involvement) was central to the development of positive attitudes amongst parents. "[T]he cycle of positive attitude development begins with the parent perception that teachers are concerned about parent involvement " (Coleman, Collinge, and Seifert, 1992). Parent perceptions of teacher concern about parent involvement (Scale 5) predicts parent efficacy (Scale 9) and parent willingness to communicate with school personnel (Scale 6). With these quantitative results as a focus, a secondary analysis was designed to determine why some parents' perceptions of teacher-parent communication were positive while others' perceptions were negative.

Parent Number	a Number of Negative Comments	b Number of Positive Comments	b - a
11226	22	12	-10 *
14205	20	14	-6 *
17202	28	23	-5 *
12219	17	13	-4 *
12205	16	14	-2 *
13214	7	9	+2
12211	7	10	+3
14212	22	26	+4
15213	26	30	+4
16222	6	12	+6
11227	10	19	+9
16201	9	18	+9
13205	9	19	+10
16228	2	14	+12 **
17226	4	20	+16 **
17224	1	19	+18 **
15212	12	32	+20 **
14219	6	38	+32 **

* Selected to the group of parents whose comments were mostly negative.

** Selected to the group of parents whose comments were mostly positive.

Table 1: Comparison of positive and negative responses from parents

The five parents whose comments about parent to teacher communication, teacher to parent communication, and perceptions of communication between teachers and parents were mostly negative were selected as one group. Five parents whose comments were the most positive were selected as the second group. To determine who was most negative or positive, the total number of negative and positive comments made by parents were compared (See Table 1.) When the parent numbers were ordered from most negative to most positive, no pattern emerged to indicate that parents from one school had similar perceptions--two parents from class 17 were very positive, however, another parent from class 17 was very negative. The selection of the two groups was purposely left to this stage in the analysis in order that the researcher's preconceptions about parents would not bias the analysis during coding. The researcher then looked at comments from the parents to determine similarities amongst group members and differences between the two groups which might help to explain how parent perceptions of teacher-parent communication are derived. In addition, the researcher read each interview in order to connect the responses from each parent into one concise portrait. In particular, the researcher looked for teacher practices that seemed to strengthen the parent perception that teachers are concerned about parent involvement in the education of the child (Coleman, Collinge, and Seifert, 1992). The results of the secondary analysis are reported in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: Results

The results of the analyses are presented in this chapter as Quantitative Results, Qualitative Results: General Findings, and Qualitative Results: A Secondary Analysis.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS:

The results of the quantitative data analysis in the larger "Co-Production" study indicated that parent perceptions of parent efficacy, parent perceptions of communication with/from school, parent perceptions of school climate, and parent rating of school are all partially dependent upon parent perceptions of teacher concern about parent involvement. To help to clarify these relationships an excerpt from the general model of "the levers of change" produced by Coleman, Collinge, and Seifert (1992, p.13) for "The Co-Production of Learning Project" is presented here as Figure 1.

Figure 1 represents the model of the parent survey data. Parent Scale 5: Parent Perception of Teacher Concern about Parent Involvement is the first link in a causal chain which leads to parent rating of school. Parent Perception of Teacher Concern about Parent Involvement (Scale 5) influences Parent Perception of Parent Efficacy (Scale 9) which influences Parent Perceptions of Communication with/from School (Scale F 1). Scale F1 is a construct of the factor analysis which combines: Scale 1, Parent Perception of Student-Teacher Communication; Scale 3, Parent Perception of Teacher-Parent Communication (Instruction); Scale 4, Parent Perception of Teacher-Parent Communication (General); and Scale 6, Parent Perception of Parent-School Communication. Parent Perceptions of Communication with/from School (Scale F 1) is a predictor of the dependent variable Parent

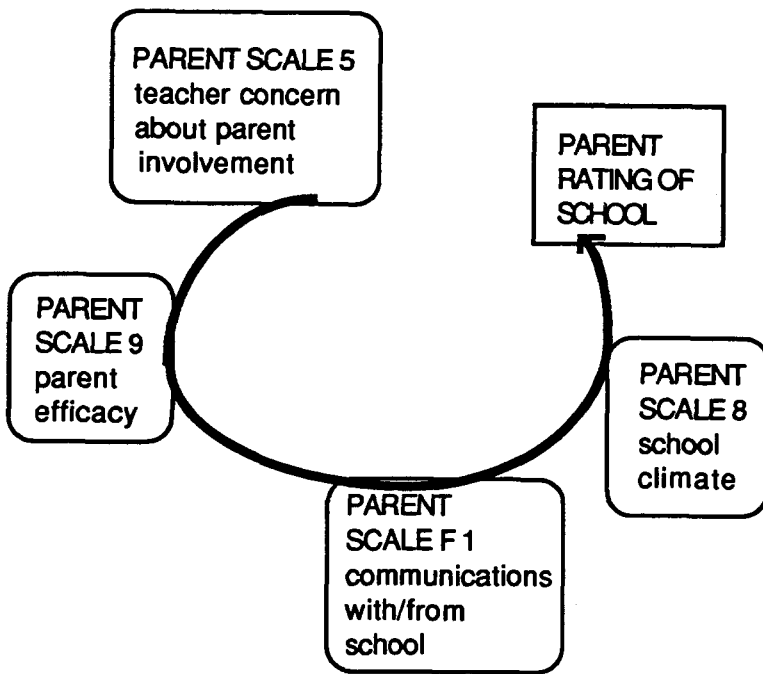


FIGURE 1: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF PARENT PERCEPTIONS

Perception of School Climate (Scale 8), which in turn predicts parent rating of school (Coleman, Collinge, and Seifert, 1992). These quantitative results provided a conceptual framework for the secondary analysis of the qualitative data for this thesis.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: GENERAL FINDINGS

The general findings of the qualitative analysis are presented here in five categories: Parent to Teacher Communication, Parent Perceptions of Parent to Teacher Communication, Parent Perceptions of Teacher Response to Parent to Teacher Communication, Teacher to Parent Communication, and Parent Perceptions of Teacher to Parent Communication. Specific parent comments are carefully chosen and quoted here to represent the variety of parent responses.

Parent to Teacher Communication

Parents' communication to teachers includes a variety of topics: a few parents made comments about academic progress, homework completion, and personal concerns about the student; but almost all parents mentioned acting as an advocate for their child(ren).

Some parents made general inquiries about academic issues. One parent commented, "I kind of talked to him for over half an hour on the phone just to see how he's [the student] doing over the year" (16201). Another commented, "I usually ask if there's anything we could be working on at home that would strengthen what's happening in school" (14219). A few parents made specific requests. "I have asked for testing for C... several times" (15213). "When S... was in grade four, she started her times tables and I mentioned to the one teacher over there, 'should I do up flashcards?' "

(12205). Others contacted the teacher when the child was absent from school. "I call them when the kids are sick" (11226). "My father-in-law died, and we pulled the kids from school for a week...I went in and asked the teachers for work to do while the kids were gone" (12205). Homework completion was discussed by some teachers and parents by way of a student homework book. "We have a direct intercourse [*sic*] about his homework" (11227).

Parents contacted teachers about issues other than the progress of their children. One parent mentioned contacting the teacher to leave a message for the student. In answer to the question "when you and your child's teacher meet, what kinds of things are typically discussed?" one parent responded, "Usually, whatever concerns I have. As I say often my concerns have been the stress level on Chad" (15213). A few parents called the teacher to offer assistance in the classroom. "I said that I would come in and help her because she didn't have any volunteers yet" (16222). "I spoke to his teacher last week and offered to go in and...listen to reading or...whatever they want" (14212).

None of these topics seemed as important to parents as acting as an advocate for their child(ren). The number of comments about speaking to the teacher on behalf of the student outnumbered the aggregate of comments about academic progress and personal contacts.

Parents named many reasons for communicating with the teacher in the role of advocate for the student: the student's educational program, believing in the student, the physical well-being of the student, and classroom placement. Almost all parents had a tale to tell. First, parents contact the teacher to discuss the educational program provided for their child. Parents want their children to move along with their peer group. When asked about having to stand up for her child, one parent answered, "My oldest daughter, they wanted to have her move up a grade and I didn't feel it would work, I

didn't agree" (17224). Another responded, "They were going to...fail him...but I felt that he should continue ..but he came out really good and he is doing excellent now" (17226). Secondly, parents want to ensure that the academic program their child is enrolled in is meeting the needs of the child. One parent spoke of visiting the school to find "her teacher had already talked to the enrichment, district enrichment person and had plans in the works. I didn't have to push for anything" (14219). Another parent spoke of questioning why his child was still in a Learning Assistance Program. Parents mentioned expressing dissatisfaction to teachers when the topic being taught such as evolution did not agree with their family's beliefs. No matter what the parents perceived their child's abilities to be, they all expressed concern for the appropriate learning program for their child.

Second, parents spoke of believing in their children and speaking to the teacher "if I feel my child is hurting or wronged" (12219). One parent recalled having to do "a little bit of standing up" to the teacher because the teacher saw her child "as something negative" (14219). Another remembered "where the teacher had taken another child's point of view and I had to go in once I got my child's story...fight for them" (13205). Parents mentioned speaking to the teacher when there was a discrepancy between what the child said and what the teacher had reported to them.

Third, parents expressed concern for the physical well being of their child. One parent confronted the teacher when she felt that the teacher was leaving the students unattended too often.

I walked in one day and walked in the classroom and there was nobody there. No teacher, the kids were all doing whatever and I never thought, well, I thought maybe the teacher happened to be off to the office, getting papers or whatever. And two or three days later I went back in and the same thing. So I was beginning to wonder where the control was. But when we did approach her

on it, we sort of got it is my classroom, my business type thing, stay clear (17202).

Another parent told this surprising tale.

The teacher had cuffed her. C... was supposed to be quiet because the principal was over the PA system and she hadn't heard the teacher. She said 'be quiet, and the teacher went up behind her and cuffed her one over the mouth and upset C... and she ran away from school. But between us and the principal it was all straightened around. By the end of the year with that particular teacher, I don't think C... could have a better relationship with any teacher. By the end of the year they were best of friends (15212).

Fourth, the classroom in which the child was placed was a cause for parents to visit the school. One parent reported,

The only other run in, I guess, was last year when our daughter was involved in a split class and we were very unhappy about that. So we didn't get much satisfaction about it except that none of them is in any split classes this year. We went in and had quite a discussion with the teacher and with the principal. We made our feelings known (14212).

Another parent spoke of an incident that was, "more preventative than it was a problem. There was a teacher coming on staff and my husband knew her professionally and just didn't want my daughter in her class" (14219).

It seems apparent that parents have distinct perceptions of their role and responsibility with respect to the educational program of their child.

Parent Perceptions of Parent to Teacher Communication

In general, parents felt comfortable about approaching teachers about both academic and non-academic issues. Comments like, "You can ask questions that go beyond the classroom" (14219), "If you need help, you contact the teacher" (12211), or "I can go over and talk about a personal problem or scholastic problem" (12201) were common responses from parents. However even though parents felt positive about contacting teachers, they seemed to have the perception that the time for parents to communicate

with the teacher is when there is a problem. Some typical comments from parents were, "if you have a problem, you see the teacher...the teacher is there" (12211), "I've always felt I could go in if I had any problems" (13205), or "Just when I feel the need or I think Mark is slipping behind a little bit" (16201). While the tone of statements such as these is generally positive, there seems to be an underlying negative perception that the purpose of conversations with teachers is to solve situations that are problematic.

The language parents used to communicate the belief that teachers were open to communication was itself indicative of this negative perception. One parent in particular said "I walked in there and had it solved in about ten minutes" and "I walked in and went 'what is she doing wrong?' " (17202). Another commented, "We haven't really had problems" (17724).

Parents' perceptions that communicating with teachers helped to solve problems seemed to set the tone for how they approached conversations with teachers. "If we are able to do something, we are not afraid to go and tell them," commented one parent (14212). Another stated, "I always feel comfortable meeting with people because I have the upper hand" (11227). A third respondent said, "If I feel they are wrong, then I am willing to say so" (12211).

A few parents indicated that it is the parent's responsibility to take the initiative to keep teachers informed. One parent stated that maintaining homework books is the parent's responsibility and emphasized, "With our other two children we often had to insist that the teacher implement this homework book program" (15213). Another parent endorsed parents joining the Parent Advisory Committee because "it gives parents a chance to interact with the teachers" (12219).

Many parents named barriers which prevent parents from communicating with teachers. Parents mentioned time as a factor, "parents are so incredibly busy" (12219). However, some of the obstacles to communication were much more subtle. One parent simply didn't feel comfortable talking to the teacher. She seemed to have come to this conclusion from comments that her daughter had made, "I listened to J... say a few things about him and I'm not too sure I like some of his beliefs or his way of handling situations" (11226). The same parent, who with her husband had been very involved over the years with the Parent Advisory Committee and volunteer work, commented "I haven't made an effort to get to know them because it's her last year and I've got to go on to the next school anyways [sic] and that's going to be hard enough" (11226). The perception shared by many parents is that they do not want any communication from themselves to have a negative effect upon the relationship that their child has with the teacher. "Sometimes you wonder if bringing up an issue with the teacher will result in retaliation against your child" (12219). "There's been times when I felt I should have, but didn't...I just felt it was easier than not making waves" (11226).

Parents feel comfortable approaching teachers, but they believe the time to do so is when there is a problem to solve. Parent perceptions of barriers to communication with teachers are time, comfort level, energy level, and concern for consequences.

Parent Perceptions of Teacher Response to Communication from Parents

The parents' comments about their perceptions of the teachers' response to communication from parents were both positive and negative. Some parents were very positive. Responses such as, "If I have ever phoned one of the teachers, they always return the call as soon as they can" (12205)

and "Whenever I have a concern, they have listened " (13214) indicate that parents believe that the avenues for communication between parents and teachers are open. Other parents do not share this belief. In fact, their perceptions seem to be quite the opposite. One parent stated, "I would have liked it if someone would have got back to me" (12219). Another claimed, "I put my name down that I would help for different things, but nobody has ever called" (13214). A third parent reflected, "So we disagreed with that all year and I had two or three interviews with them and it didn't do much good" (15213).

Teacher to Parent Communication

Teachers communicate with parents in a variety of ways about a variety of topics. For the purposes of this thesis, the methods of communicating are discussed briefly as a prelude to the more detailed examination of the kinds of issues teachers discuss with parents.

Parents reported that they receive information from teachers in several ways. All parents reported that they attend parent-teacher interviews; some parents visit the school with their spouse, others take turns. A few parents mentioned that they usually meet the teacher for the first time at an open house early in the year. Parents reported that they receive written information from the school and from the teacher. The intent of these notices is usually to inform parents of special events at the school or to ask for permission for the student to attend a field trip. However, some parents explained that they receive other notices as well. Some said that they receive weekly notices from the teacher about classroom activities; a few mentioned a monthly progress report about the student. Finally, parents reflected that teachers sometimes telephone parents to inform parents about student progress, to inquire about absences, and to ask for advice.

Teachers communicate with parents about academic progress, curriculum, homework completion, student behaviour and attitude, teacher behaviour, and instruction at home. First, parents reported that the topic most frequently discussed when teachers communicate with parents is academic progress. Academic progress can include the student's work habits, the student's ability compared to the rest of the class, test results, and letter grades. Some teachers require the parents to sign graded tests and assignments and return them to the teacher to indicate that they have received the information. When teachers and parents meet in person, teachers often show parents the students books and completed assignments. One parent mentioned a teacher who would call to ask, "What did you do with that kid, his work has just gone up" (16201).

Second, parents made comments about the information they receive pertaining to the curriculum and classroom activities. One parent noted, "It's all on the blackboard...what they'll be taking for the year" (11224). Another said, "He's so careful to explain everything that they're doing so we know" (16228). Yet, one parent said, "I don't think there's a whole lot on what they're studying" (14219). A fourth parent commented, "There is the odd teacher that tends to go on more about what the whole class is doing over all, and you want to know what your child is doing" (14205). One parent mentioned a teacher who kept her informed about "what they are suppose to be doing and what he expects..." (13214).

Third, teachers communicate with parents about the task of completing homework. A few parents mentioned teachers whose students wrote assignments into a homework book that went home for a parent signature. Parents expressed opinions about the success of such homework book programs. Some liked homework books; others mentioned difficulties such as

the teacher not having enough time to check each student's book each day and students informing parents that they had not brought the assignment home because it had been completed in class. Parents seem to have expectations of teachers with respect to homework. One parent noted, "Once we were notified about it, we went over them with her" (12205). Another parent related this story, "They gave us the reader to do at home and the book. The first time we took it over to be marked, the teacher said that she didn't really have time to do that" (16222).

Fourth, teachers contact parents to discuss non-academic issues. Two parents mentioned having discussions with teachers about behaviour and discipline. Two parents reported discussions about student attitude towards school work. A few parents said that social skills were sometimes discussed at parent-teacher interviews. One parent remarked, "A lot of what he's stressing is responsibility with kids, so he's let me know that" (16222).

Fifth, teachers sometimes telephone parents to report an incident that happened at school and how it was handled by the teacher. One parent reported that the teacher often called to say, "He's going to keep M..., make him finish his work and then he'll give him a ride home" (16201).

Finally, responses from parents were both positive and negative when asked whether or not teachers ever helped parents to assist students to learn. A few parents thought that teachers do not give parents instruction in how to help children learn. "I haven't come across anything written" (14205). "The teachers don't tell you how you can help your child" (14212). Other parents answered affirmatively and gave examples of how teachers had assisted them. "A lot of times they will send the parents information about what they want the student to be doing" (12219). A few mentioned home reading programs. "They encourage us to have her read out loud" (14205). Some

parents mentioned times table drills in mathematics. Only one said "He helped me get by a real tough problem in math with G..., little shortcut ways to get through to him" (11227). One parent reported that a teacher had helped with "working through a bit of shyness" (14219). Another answered, "a little psychology--how to get the best out of them" (11227).

Parent Perceptions of Teacher to Parent Communication

All but one parent clearly stated that teachers made them feel welcome in their child's school and classroom. Many remarked that the staff was very friendly and that "The teachers seem open any time you want to speak with them" (15213). "We've had good reception over there" (11227). One parent explained, "They didn't necessarily agree with what we said, but that was okay, we felt that we could go and talk with them....They were always prepared to talk" (14212). The one parent, who did not feel welcome, said the feeling she got whenever she went to the school was, "here comes S...'s interfering mother again" (15213).

Parent perceptions about teacher communication to parents in general were both positive and negative. Some parents made positive comments. "They're concerned; there's a tremendous amount of cooperation from the school" (11227). "They try to keep the communication going" (12205). "He's so open. Like he is willing to talk to you. About anything, any time" (17202). Parent (11227) responded, "Yes", if there was a problem the teacher would contact parents right away. Other parents made negative comments; complaining of the need for more communication. Some spoke of the desire for more frequent contact, "If he doesn't let you know if there's even a problem, then the kid gets a report card and it's all D's...what the heck?" (16201) Others said parents do not always receive conclusive information and are sometimes left wondering. One parent explained this with an example, "C... got all C's

and C-'s...And if she thinks that's OK I wonder why she thinks its OK?" (15213)
Finally, a third response from parents was that "there is not always a follow through [and] sometimes the follow through is a little slow" (15213).

Parents' observations about formal parent-teacher interviews were again both positive and negative. Some parents remarked that they felt very comfortable at these meetings and received information that satisfied them. "They [parent-teacher interviews] have been quite informative" (14205). A few emphasized the importance of personal contact. "I think the personal contact is just tremendous" (14214). Other parents were not positive about their personal contact with teachers in formal interviews. One parent, when asked if she felt comfortable at meetings with teachers, responded emphatically, "Of course not...I'm not well educated myself so then what do you ask?" (16222) She went on to explain, "You feel sort of intimidated. You sit there and you don't ask questions. You just listen to what they have to say, right?" Another parent complained, "sometimes I wonder whether the teacher is just doing this "upfront thing" [*sic*] ... and then it is forgotten after" and "I have developed a little bit of cynicism towards teachers...I often wonder if this person I am looking at and talking to is really interested" (15213). Parents protested that they were not given enough time and privacy at formal interviews. Lastly, one parent complained of having to bring the teacher back on track to talk about his daughter rather than what the class as a group was learning.

Parents expect that teachers will contact them regarding the student's behaviour at school. They want to know how the child gets along with other children, the child's "attention span", and whether or not the student is behaving in class. They become annoyed if they are not informed about unsatisfactory behaviour until the parent-teacher interview.

Parents want to be kept informed about the academic progress of the student throughout the school year. Some complained that they were not informed about the students low academic progress until the end of the school year. "I would like to see a lot more communication... at the end of the school year I was just...what? Why haven't you told me this before"? (16222) Others mentioned that they liked information about the individual progress of their son or daughter. "The letters that she has sent home initially, I liked the sound of them... strict but fair... look at them individually" (15213). "I wouldn't mind a bit more information coming home. S... was having problems in Math and we weren't really notified until after the problem had gotten to a point where she was getting quite upset about it" (12205). The parents wanted more communication from teachers in "problem areas in various subjects that your child might be having " (12219).

When asked if teachers help parents to learn how to assist their child, the responses were both positive and negative. One parent responded, "Very definitely. Yes, that's been a pleasant experience" (11227). Other comments ranged from "they give us lots of guidance" (17224) and "if there is anything we can do at home with her, he will mention it" (16228) to simply, "No." One parent remarked, "There are a lot of parents who want to help but who don't quite know how" (14219) and then commented "teaching the parents how to help, I see that as really valuable." One parent mentioned a successful home program for improving handwriting. Parents seemed to be confident about helping their children by reading at home and mentioned home reading programs that improved student ability in reading. They were less confident and wanted more information about how to help with mathematics. "I really feel that there should have been classes set up for parents to learn the metric system" (12219). "If there was somehow or another we could have some fact

sheets ...or...a companion book that goes with their math book" (11227). The same parent added, "God knows those people have got enough to do already without providing information for parents".

Parents mentioned time and comfort level as barriers to teacher-parent communication. First, regarding time, one parent observed, "Teachers are working under a handicap, ...you cannot give every child the individual attention they need" (12205). Parents also mentioned that teachers must supervise children all day in the classroom and may not have the time to contact parents. "I know the teacher works all day too" (14205). A lot of times, I imagine because of the time factor they don't get back to parents" (12219). Finally, parents observed that a school year is a very short time for teachers and parents to develop a working relationship. The barriers to communication which were related to the comfort level of the parent were more subtle. One parent criticized a teacher who "talked down to the parents, like they were students" (13205). Another mentioned a teacher who "compares the children to her child too much" (17202). One parent summarized, "I don't feel as in control with some teachers as with others and I think that is a problem. I prefer to be in control" (17202).

Despite the barriers mentioned above, most parents perceive that teachers view parents as partners who can assist in the education of children. Several parents seemed to build this perception from teacher requests for assistance in the classroom. The fact that a teacher had asked them to assist or invited them to visit any time indicated to parents that teachers saw parents as partners. One parent thought, "I feel that she must feel it's [parent involvement] fairly important because of the monthly report" (15213). Another parent observed, "I think she is obviously concerned enough that she phoned me early on in the year...I think she as a teacher realizes that you are helping"

(14212). "As far as extra help," summarized a third parent, "I think all teachers always kind of expect that you will be there but never actually ask you" (17202).

Summary of General Findings

In general, comments made by parents about parent to teacher communication were more negative than positive, although only slightly. Of 69 comments about parent to teacher communication, 36 comments had a negative tone, 33 comments had a positive tone. Comments made about teacher to parent communication were positive. Of 169 comments about teacher to parent communication, 129 comments had a positive tone, 40 comments had a negative tone. Finally, the parents' perceptions of communication between teachers and parents (parent perceptions of parent to teacher communication, parent perceptions of teachers' responses to communication from parents, and parent perceptions of teacher to parent communication) were somewhat more positive than negative. Of 318 comments about parent perceptions of communication between teachers and parents, 170 comments had a positive tone, 148 comments had a negative tone.

Parents perceive communication between teachers and parents to be positive even though parents acknowledge that comments made by parents to teachers are less than positive. These results give insight into parent attitudes about communication between teachers and parents. Parents seem to perceive that teachers make an effort to communicate with parents in a positive way. At the same time, parents accept that parents communicate with teachers whenever there is a problem.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: A SECONDARY ANALYSIS

A secondary analysis of the interview data was conducted to examine similarities between parents whose perceptions of communication with teachers seemed to be very negative and similarities between parents whose perceptions of communication with teachers seemed to be very positive. The conceptual framework provided by the quantitative data as developed by Coleman, Collinge, Seifert (1992) and presented in this thesis as Figure 1 provided further direction for this secondary analysis. The quantitative analysis suggested that parents' perceptions of teacher concern about parent involvement influence parents' perceptions of communication between teachers and parents. The secondary analysis in this thesis was conducted in an attempt to discover clues to understanding this process. The following portraits of ten parents include brief descriptions of the parents' comments about helping with school work; remarks about their child's academic ability; responses with respect to teacher-parent communication and teacher-parent relationships; and parents' observations about barriers to teacher-parent communication.

Parents with Negative Perceptions

Five parents comprised the group of parents whose comments were generally negative. When the researcher compared commonalities between these parents some main points emerged. First, the parents in this group did not appear to be satisfied with the contact that they had with teachers. Second, the parents often expressed dissatisfaction with the way that a problem had been resolved. Finally, a lack of trust seemed to be apparent; the parents did not seem to feel that the relationship between teachers and parents was a partnership.

Parent 11226: Parent 11226 was not confident about helping her daughter with school work. "Myself, it's basically I don't know a lot of the stuff they're learning nowadays, especially in math. ...It's so different from when we were at school that it's like she's better at it than I am. I'm just right completely out of it." Still she enjoyed helping her child study by "asking her questions after she's studied the stuff". Parent 11226 commented, "A couple of years ago when I was working with the reading and the math with the kids, it helped me a lot to get her to learn her stuff, by working with the other kids." This parent believed that her daughter was "quite happy to go" to school and that her daughter did "fairly well". "She's not an A student, but she's pretty near a high B."

Parent 11226 stated many times in several different ways that she did not have any contact with the classroom teacher this year. "I just never hear from him or I never get correspondence from him." She mentioned several reasons for the lack of teacher-parent communication. "One thing is when there's a big turnover at the school it is a little harder to get back into the rapport with the teachers, you know that you had in previous years". "I haven't really made an effort to get to know them because it's her last year and I've got to go on to the next school anyways *[sic]* and that's going to be hard enough." Parent 11226 named the differences in the teacher's beliefs and her family's beliefs as a reason for her to act as an advocate for her child. However, she felt that it was easier to talk to her daughter and "not make waves" about a problem situation than to contact the teacher. "I just don't feel comfortable talking to him. And I listened to J... talk about him and I'm not too sure I like some of his beliefs or his way of handling situations." She summarized, "I'm just kind of comparing him to the other teachers she's had and I find him very almost stand-offish or... I don't know. It just doesn't flow the

way they have with other teachers." Parent 11226 had volunteered at the school for many years and had never felt excluded from her child's education "before this school year".

Parent 12205: Parent 12205 was confident that she could assist her children with school work. "Say in Math, I might write up a completely different equation and show her how to get the answer so that she can do that particular equation. If they are word problems, I try to simplify the language." She and her husband shared the job of helping the children to learn. "Both of us have different things that we enjoy more than others. I find Canadian history extremely boring. So when we are working on that, Ray does most of that because he has always enjoyed that type of thing." Parent 12205 became upset with teachers when they did not inform her of problem areas immediately so that she could assist her children. She mentioned being annoyed last year when she was not informed about her son's unsatisfactory behaviour until the parent-teacher interview. The following "story" illustrates her proactive attitude:

When S... was in grade four, she started her timetables and I mentioned to the one teacher over there, 'should I do up flash cards?', and I was told no; that they were going to make learning fun and they were going to pick up the times tables through these games. So I came home and talked to Ray and I said, 'that's bullshit, there are a number of things that you have to do by memory.' So we did flashcards. And at the end of the year, there were three kids that knew their timetables. S... was one of them. And we didn't bother telling her that we had done flash cards because we didn't feel it was worth a fight.

Parent 12205 believed that her daughter was "quite intelligent".

One of the problems is that to a certain extent she is too smart for her own good. I was very angry last year. She did a report; she had two weeks to do it. She whipped it off in one night. She got ninety-eight out of a hundred on it and I felt like phoning the teacher and telling her to give her a really low grade on it. She did not work at it at all. And I think this is a handicap to a

certain..., when she gets into grade 10, 11, 12, she is not use to doing homework. To a certain extent she picks it up too fast.

Parent 12205 remarked that her daughter was "a bit of a perfectionist" who did not like to ask for assistance.

Parent 12205 reported that she had not had any contact with the teacher this school year regarding her daughter's education. She told of one incident when she had contacted the teacher because she disagreed with what the teacher had said:

One day D... got up and said that her grandpa had died and the teacher told her that that was private business and you didn't bring that to school; this was during show and tell. And D... was very upset because a little boy had just gotten up and said that his mom had a new baby and she said 'what is the difference between his mom having a baby and my grandpa dying?' And I spoke to the teacher about that because I wasn't pleased.

Parent 12205 also spoke of being dissatisfied with the attitude of the same teacher:

There was one instance that I was extremely angry with a teacher. My father-in-law died. ... I went in and asked the teachers for work to do while the kids were gone. ... The teacher was quite annoyed because this was a very important time and D... should not be missing this and we could not keep up with what she was doing in school--I did not like her attitude. And then she finally did give me a little bit of work,...and then she was very angry when we got back. I had done all the work from page one to page twelve because that was what was circled and she had meant page one and page twelve, not the pages in-between. So she was angry with me because I had gone ahead.

Three barriers to communication were mentioned by this parent. First, with respect to parent-teacher interviews, parent 12205 reflected "you don't have the privacy required." Second, "you may have gone into something a little more if you hadn't felt that you had to get out of his or her hair." Finally, she

noted "The teachers are working under a handicap. If you've got 20 odd kids in the class, you cannot give every child the individual attention they need."

Parent 12219: Parent 12219 felt comfortable helping her child with school work, but admitted to having difficulties when it came to helping with Math.

...The higher grades that he is in, the harder it is for me. Quite often we will arrive at the same answer, but I do it different and he will say that that is the wrong way to do it. And the metric system- -I'm lost. I really feel that there should have been classes set up for parents to learn the metric system. ...He gets frustrated if I tell him he is doing it the wrong way and quite often it will end up with him in tears and mad. And I've heard this a lot with other parents. I don't know if we have more patience with other people's kids or if it is our children who react differently with other adults.

Parent 12219 believed that guidelines for parents about how to help, particularly with Math, would be useful. Parent 12219 thought that her son preferred to work with his hands. Regarding achievement, she remarked, "He's about average..., he's never gotten really very high marks."

Parent 12219 reported that she did receive newsletters about what the students should be doing, however, she had not had any contact with the teacher other than one formal parent-teacher interview. Her daughter's teacher had invited her to call or visit any time. "I thought that he was great and that he looked forward to any involvement that I could give in the classroom--that hasn't always been the case, but it certainly is this year." Even though she felt positive about the fall parent-teacher interview, past experience seemed to color her perception of parent to teacher communication. She explained, "One time I got the impression that the teacher didn't want parental interference and she looked at it as interference." "Sometimes you wonder if bringing up an issue with the teacher will result in retaliation against your child." This parent did however believe that a parent

should act as an advocate for the child if the child "is hurting or is wronged".

She recalled the following example:

R..., in kindergarten, he was very shy, he was only four when he started and he didn't like to talk at all and at one point the teacher made the statement that she found it very frustrating because he wouldn't talk and she would keep after him until she said the tears started to come down his cheeks and she said it was frustrating for her and then sort of in the next sentence, she said that he didn't pronounce his words correctly and she would have him repeat and repeat until he got it right. And I was really upset because I thought, well, no wonder he doesn't want to talk. ...I talked to the teacher.

The parent did not know how the incident had been resolved:

I didn't seem to feel that I got anywhere, so I then went to the principal. And I don't really know what happened after that. ...Well I would have liked it if someone would have got back to me and said, you know, we've looked at this. But no one ever did.

This parent recognized that time was probably a barrier to teacher to parent communication.

I'm sure they try to. A lot of times, I imagine because of the time factor, they don't get back to the parents and say, well, you know, we've looked at this problem. A lot of times parents are probably left wondering.

Parent 14205: Parent 14205 felt comfortable helping her child with homework "up to a point". "Sometimes I get the feeling that I am doing the homework. I don't mind helping, encouraging them to learn what the heck it is they are supposed to be doing as opposed to just telling the answers." Parent 14205 thought that her daughter "takes school very seriously". "She is certainly rather pleased when she comes home with a test result that is in the 90's as opposed to in the 50's. She went on to say:

And that is something that she has developed herself. ...She is not an over achiever--she is not anything like that. She is not going to come down hard on herself because she only got 92

rather than 100. She is not like that at all. But if she has made an obvious goof she is pretty upset with herself.

Parent 14205 believed that teacher to parent communication was indirect. "Oh, it's there, but it's sort of once removed. Most of the time it's through K...--secondhand." The parents took turns taking time from work to attend parent-teacher interviews. Parent 14205 was of the opinion that the purpose of the parent-teacher interview was to inform parents about the individual progress of the student.

There is the odd teacher that ends to go on more about what the whole class is doing over all more than, and you want to know what your child is doing. But we have had to mention, for example, 'what is K... doing and let's talk about K... and bring them on track again.

This parent desired more personal contact with the teacher during the course of the year. "Personally, I wouldn't mind speaking to the teacher more than twice a year." However, she recognized that time was a barrier to personal contact between teachers and parents, "Again, it is probably partially a function of the fact that we both work. ..." "I know the teacher works all day too." Time as a barrier to communication seemed to concern this parent and perhaps even interfere with her trust in the teacher to inform her of problems. "I just hope that if there is a problem, she will contact us." To summarize, parent 14205 described the relationship between teachers and parents as "distant".

Parent 17202: Parent 17202 reported that his son who was participating in "The Co-Production of Learning Project", was a "straight A" student. Throughout the interview the parent made comments with reference to his ten year old daughter who he perceived was very lazy and not as interested in learning. When asked about how he could assist his children to learn, the parent responded, "well I know some of it. ... The reason I say 'some

of it',...I do a lot of work at the mill with metric, but if it wasn't for the mill I would be totally lost as far as the metric system. That is one thing I was never taught."

This parent had worked with his daughter at home.

C... came home and was having problems and was put into what I call remedial learning assistance. And she kept going and going to school upset. She was crying she was the stupidest kid in the class. I would sit down with her and explain things out and she would do it for me. She goes back to school, she comes home totally confused. I was getting to a point where I almost stepped in until J... (mother) sat down and taught her multiplication.

Parent 17202 reported positive perceptions about communication with teachers regarding his son. However, the parent's general impression of communication between teachers and parents were coloured by past experiences with the teachers of the younger sibling. Parent 17202 related a specific incident to explain his dissatisfaction with the contact he had with the teacher of the sibling, "I was told that she would be in learning assistance for three weeks. Three weeks turned into three months and I had no idea that she was still in there. ...Well it wasn't three months but two months, it was the middle of October." The contact that this family had with teachers seemed to be entirely confrontational. Newsletters from teachers did not satisfy their needs. "Yeah, the teachers will send their little letters home," said the father. Twice the parent mentioned "ranting and raving" at the teacher. The parents had visited the school to express their dissatisfaction on a number of occasions.

She (the daughter) will just slough things off...until its too late. And trying to get her teachers to understand this has been a problem throughout the years. But we have never had that problem with any of C..."s teachers. ..."See with C... it is fine because he has always been such a happy, cheerful, go-lucky child.

I walked in one day and walked in the classroom and there was nobody there. No teacher, the kids were doing whatever and I never thought..., well, I thought maybe the teacher happened to be off to the office, getting papers or whatever. And two or three days later I went back in and the same thing. So I was beginning to wonder where the control was. But when we did approach her on it, we sort of got, "it is my classroom, my business" type of thing, stay clear. And I said, "hey, wait a minute...[the children can't] be left on their own.

This year I finally stepped in and asked if I could show C... my way of doing Mathematics or whatever. But they have never come to me and asked me or shown me anything.

Parent 17202 stated that he felt comfortable whenever he met with teachers. "I do [feel comfortable] in just about any situation, because I feel I speak my mind". However, whenever the parent had visited the school to voice a concern, he was never satisfied with the response from teachers.

Parent 17202 criticized one teacher because she compared the children to her own child too much. "Her daughter could come in and teach these boys how to play volleyball properly." This parent seemed to want the teacher to accept her child as an individual.

When questioned about feeling excluded from his child's education, the father responded, "Not with Mr. K... . That is a nice way of saying, yes with other teachers." This comment was of interest as well because previously the father had stated,

I have never actually met Mr. K... outside of seeing him walk by at sports day type thing. ...From Grade One, as soon as C... went to that school, after a few months there, he could hardly wait until he got to Grade Seven and have Mr. K... as a teacher.

Parent 17202 seem to have gained his perceptions of teacher's willingness to work in partnership through confrontations with teachers and through what his child(ren) had reported to him. To summarize his past communication with teachers, the father expressed, "I don't feel as in control

with some teachers as with others and I think that is a problem. I prefer to be in control."

The comments from the five parents whose perceptions were mostly negative revealed that parent efficacy with respect to helping with school work varied. Three parent's remarks suggested that they did not feel efficacious when they attempted to assist their children with homework. Three of the areas of concern for the parents were lack of knowledge of the subject as the students grew older, particularly in Math; lack of knowledge of how to explain a concept rather than "just doing the homework for the child"; and discrepancies between the methods that teachers and parents used to assist students that resulted in family arguments. One parent's (17202) comments indicated that he was sometimes frustrated when he attempted to help his daughter. In fact he did not appear to feel effective at helping, although he seemed reluctant to admit it. A fifth parent seemed very confident about her ability to assist her children and substantiated her comments with evidence of her proactive practices with her children. This parent named reading with her children; drilling her children on math facts; rewording problems for her children to help them understand the questions; and creating similar problems for her children to check for the children's' understanding of the lesson as methods that she used to help her children with learning. The parent felt frustrated and perhaps ineffective when the teacher neglected to notify her of a problem immediately so that she could assist her child. In summary, three of the five parents did not feel efficacious with respect to helping their children to learn.

Regarding teacher-parent communication, the responses from these five parents suggest that parents who view teacher-parent communication negatively are dissatisfied with the amount of personal contact they have with the teacher about the child as an individual. Sometimes their perceptions are

influenced by what the child reports at home. These parents have had a negative experience in the past which was not resolved to their satisfaction. Because of negative experiences from the past or with any one of their children, their trust in almost all teachers is diminished. They do not perceive the relationship between teachers and parents to be one of partnership.

Parents with Positive Perceptions

Parents whose perceptions of teacher-parent communication were positive shared a different opinion about teacher-parent communication. Some relayed stories that could have been potentially damaging to the fragile relationship that exists between teachers and parents; however, because the problems had been resolved to their satisfaction, their perceptions of teacher-parent communication remained positively intact. All five of the parents in this group viewed the relationship between teachers and parents as a partnership. Not all of the parents, however, felt effectual when they helped their children with school work at home.

Parent 14219: Parent 14219 believed she was efficacious when assisting her children with homework. She described how she assisted her children in various subjects.

With Math if they're not quite sure how to do a problem or what's asked for, we'll sit down and we'll do it together and I teach them and then make sure they understand it and they do more and I doublecheck what they're doing. Socials, Science, we do a lot of talking....T... had a major research thing a few weeks ago and she came home and told me. We headed downtown and the three of us went to the library and got the books we needed. Uh, proofread. ...They'll come to me or to their dad. I usually know where they're at when they're having trouble with something...

When asked if there were any subject areas in which she did not feel comfortable, parent 14219 responded, "Not yet", indicating that she anticipated that at some time in the future she might not feel as confident. Parent 14219

indicated that her daughter achieved "good marks" in school and was involved in school clubs and activities.

Parent 14219 knew her daughter's teacher personally. They chatted about their horses, their families, mutual acquaintances,..."it's sort of beyond the classroom." Even though she had not yet visited the school for a formal parent-teacher interview and had not received any telephone calls, she felt informed about her daughter's progress because the teacher sent home graded tests for parents to sign and return to the school. "I see that as part of ensuring that the parents are aware of what's happening." This parent felt confident that the teacher would contact her if necessary and that she was welcome to contact the teacher with any information that would assist in the education of her child.

Parent 14219 had contacted the school on numerous occasions to act as an advocate for her child. Two of these incidents are described here as examples:

When T... was in Kindergarten, she was just extremely shy, ... but her teacher saw her as something negative so I had to basically say, 'well, what you're saying is true, but I don't see it in a negative light like you do'.

I would say and it was more preventative than it was a problem, like. There was a teacher coming on staff and my husband knew her professionally and just didn't want my daughter in her class. ...If she had been placed in that class we would have never ever fought it, but we asked ahead of time to see if it was possible and she's not in the class.

In all the incidents of parent involvement that this parent related, the problem had been resolved to her satisfaction. Parent 14219 in fact described how she sometimes helped her children to solve their own problems at school.

We will get involved if it's necessary, but in a lot of cases if they're concerned about a mark or why they didn't get something or whatever, I usually try and talk to them about what should you do

about it. Who can answer the question? Your teacher? Then go and talk to your teacher. And I stress being polite and all that, but I try to make them realize it's okay to go and ask questions.

To summarize past contacts with teachers, parent 14219 mentioned, "mutual respect" and stated, "given what happened in the past, I certainly view the school as seeing [*sic*] a team, parents and teachers working together."

Parent 15212: Parent 15212 reported that she felt comfortable helping her child with school work, but wasn't sure that her daughter felt the same.

She attempted to explain why:

I think maybe she figures she has already been taught the material. She should already know it, so why should she have to ask for help. I don't know if that's it or not. ... Sometimes too, when she has been taught one way and then we will see it another way, she still wants to do it the way the teacher showed her.

With respect with advice from teachers on how to assist children with homework, parent 15212 did not believe that she had received any guidelines and commented, "They just bring it home and we are supposed to know what we are supposed to do."

Parent 15212 remarked that her daughter liked school and knew that it was really important. She added, "She does kind of coast along though, because she has about a B average and it wouldn't take much work for her to be an A average student."

Parent 15212 had not met with the teacher yet this school year. At the beginning of the school year the teacher had introduced homework books for recording assignments. However, that practice "did not last very long." The parents did not like the homework book system because, "She [the student] wasn't writing things down. ... And the thing was a lot of those assignments that she wrote down she had finished in class and of course we didn't know because we didn't see it." However, the parent felt informed because she

received a progress report about her daughter once a month. The progress report included marks as well as a record of any incomplete assignments. "If there is anything in between, they always send home notes," added the parent.

This parent reported two occasions when she had communicated to the teacher on behalf of her child. The first was a written communication:

Just last month, when C... brought home the progress report,...a whole bunch of assignments hadn't been handed in. We had seen C...do them at home and they were handed in and they were reported as not being completed and I made a note when I returned the parent's signature indicating that we had seen the note sort of thing. I made a note that we acknowledged receiving this but there was a discrepancy between what you say and what C...says.

The second incident was of a more serious nature and it is interesting that this parent's perceptions were not tainted because of it.

The teacher had cuffed her. C... was supposed to be quiet because the principal was over the PA system and she hadn't heard the teacher. She said 'Be Quiet' and the teacher went up behind her and cuffed her one over the mouth and upset C... and she ran away from school. ... But between us and the principal it was all straightened around. ... By the end of the year with that particular teacher I don't think C... could have had a better relationship with any teacher. ... By the end of the year they were best of friends.

Once again, it seems that the solution to the problem was resolved to the parent's liking and the relationship between the teacher and the parents was not harmed. With respect to the relationship between teachers and parents, parent 15212 claimed, "We don't really know them that well." She reflected, however, "I am sure that she would view our role as being very important."

Parent 16228: Parent 16228 reported that her daughter was a B+/A student who rarely asked for assistance with homework. "She'll come in and go to her room and she's doing it." The father was a teacher and the mother

admitted that both parents were perfectionists. "There are times when we get frustrated when we want them to do it perfectly and they want to hand it in now." The mother reported that in the past when she taught as a substitute teacher, "I would be doing what they were teaching so it was more of a help for me at home."

Parent 16228 was very positive about the personal contact she had with the current teacher.

He's just so welcome to talk to you when you are in the school. He shows a lot of eagerness to know as much about the child as possible. ... He shows an interest in them, each as an individual. I've never heard him say anything negative about a child, he's always looking for the best. I've heard parents make a snide remark about their child, and they're just joking but he never lets them get away with it. He always says something positive about the child so the parent draws up short and thinks, yah I know.

This parent also noted that her contact with teachers had always been positive. "We've had excellent teachers all the way in that school. We've never had the experience where we've had to deal with someone that wasn't there mainly for the children." Parent 16228 appreciated knowing what the class was learning. "He's so careful to explain everything that they're doing so we know." She felt that she was a partner in her child's education.

Parent 17224: Parent 17224 commented that her daughter rarely asked for help with school work at home. She reported that her daughter was a good student, had a positive attitude about school, and would probably, like her older siblings, go on to university.

Parent 17224 reported that she called or visited the school sometimes. She thought that the teachers were very friendly and always welcomed parents. She felt informed about her daughter's progress.

The first thing I would think of is the papers we have to sign so that they know that we've seen them, you know, exam marks and

things like that. ... And they check up too, because I think they get marks for having a parent's signature, so it is not that they can lose it. It has to be returned.

Parent 17224 appreciated information about what the class was studying. She felt that the teacher gave her information about social development as well as academic progress. The one time that this parent had visited the school to express a concern, she had been satisfied with the result. "It was my oldest daughter, they wanted to have her move up a grade and I didn't feel it would work. I didn't agree. ...They agreed with me." Parent 17224 mentioned one barrier to building a relationship with teachers. "You never really get a chance to know them that well because there is a new teacher each year." However, despite this barrier, she did feel that she was a partner in educating her child.

Parent 17226: Parent 17226 did not feel efficacious with respect to helping her son with school work.

Actually right now I can't help him, he is way above me. He has learned more than I ever did, so I can't...,especially Math and some writing and putting essays together, it is different..., to give him ideas, you know what I mean, but to actually go and try to help him and look at his Math book, I can't do anything about it. I don't understand.

This parent cited the fact that English was not her mother language as the reason why she was unable to assist with learning.

Parent 17226 attended parent-teacher interviews and visited the school every once in a while. She felt satisfied with these visits. "We go through what he has done the last two, three months previous to that. His Math, we check his books and the teacher usually asks if I have any questions or..., you know, and we go through everything that he has learned." She had once visited the school to speak for her child and had been satisfied with the result:

That was when he was finishing Grade Three. He had problems with Math and they were going to leave him..., fail him, leave him on Grade Three and start the following year on Grade Four. But I felt that he should continue on Grade Four and if he didn't do his homework on Grade Four, like Grade Three they don't have homework, I said that if he doesn't finish his homework and if he doesn't do good, then they can do whatever they want. But he came out really good and he is doing excellent now. ...This year he had one hundred percent best on Math.

Parent 17726 perceived herself to be a partner in the education of her child.

Unlike the parents with negative perceptions, all five parents with positive perceptions responded that they believed they were working in partnership with the teacher to provide an education for their child. Parents' perceptions of parent efficacy appeared to be positive in three of the cases. A fourth parent expressed some uncertainty about knowing what to do with home assignments. She suggested that instructions for parents were needed for school work that is to be completed at home. The fifth parent did not feel efficacious because of her lack of knowledge of the English language. For these five parents, issues which might have dissolved the partnership had been resolved in a manner that satisfied the parents and left the relationship between the parents and the teacher intact. The perception of these parents was that teachers would keep them informed about the individual progress of their child.

Summary of the Secondary Analysis

Parent perceptions of parent efficacy and parent perceptions of student achievement were reported in this analysis to provide background information for each parent. Not surprisingly, three of the five parents whose perceptions were mostly negative felt ineffective at times with respect to homework, while three of the five parents whose perceptions were mostly positive felt efficacious when they assisted their children. Parents' feelings of efficacy seemed to be influenced by their knowledge of the subject or content area,

their perceptions of their own ability to explain a concept rather than simply finding the right answer, their ability to recreate similar questions to test their child's understanding, and their confidence that the method they use to solve the problem is similar to the method taught at school. Most of the parents believed that their child was successful at school. Eight parents reported that their child achieved above average grades, one parent reported that the student was of average ability, and one parent acknowledged that the student achieved A+ grades and then commented mostly about the younger sibling who had difficulties concentrating on her school work.

Parents whose perceptions of communication between teachers and parents were negative wanted more information from teachers about the individual progress of their child, received "second hand" information about the teacher from their children, had past communication with teachers that they believed had not been resolved to their satisfaction, and did not believe that the relationship between teachers and parents was a partnership. Parents whose perceptions of communication between teachers and parents were positive believed that the teacher kept them informed about individual progress, that the consultations they had with teacher about parent concerns were resolved satisfactorily, and that they and the teachers were working in partnership.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions, Discussion, Implications

CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this study was to answer five questions about teacher-parent communication. The answers to these questions are provided here as conclusions deduced from the results of the study:

1. When teachers and parents communicate with one another, what do they talk about?

Parents contact teachers to inquire how the child is progressing in general and to make specific requests for testing, ways to help at home, and for homework to be completed during student absences. In addition to these academic issues, parents communicate with teachers to discuss student stress and to offer parental assistance at school. Parents discuss their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the student's educational program with teachers. They speak to the teacher on behalf of a child if they think the child is being treated unfairly and to question the educational program the child is receiving.

Teachers communicate with parents to inform them about academic progress including student work habits, the student's ability compared to the other students, test results, and letter grades; curriculum; homework completion; student behaviour and attitude; teacher behaviour; and instruction at home.

2. How do parents perceive communication with teachers that parents initiate?

Although parents feel comfortable approaching teachers about academic and non-academic issues, the comments made by parents indicate that parents perceive that the time to contact teachers is when there is a

problem to solve. Parent perceptions of barriers to parent to teacher communication are time, comfort level, energy level, and concern for negative consequences.

3. How do parents perceive the communication they receive from teachers?

Parent perceptions are that teachers make them feel welcome in the school and in the classroom. General comments made by parents indicate that parent perceptions of teacher-parent communication are both positive and negative. Some parents feel that teachers are concerned and keep communication flowing; others believe that parents do not have enough contact with teachers and are often left wondering. Parents expect teachers to communicate with them on a regular basis about the student's individual progress. This might include student behaviour and/or academic progress. Parents believe that parents and students would benefit from instruction from teachers on how to assist students at home, particularly in math. Parents also recognize that teachers are very busy teaching students and may not have time to teach parents as well.

Parent perceptions of barriers to teacher-parent communication are time and comfort level. Parents recognize that teachers have many students and put in long hours. Some parents believe that the school year is a short time for parents and teachers to get acquainted with one another. Regarding comfort level, parents want to feel "in control" when they talk with teachers. They name "talking down to parents" as a barrier to communication. Despite these barriers, most parents perceive that teachers view parents as partners who can assist in the education of students.

4. When teachers and parents communicate, which topics of conversation influence parent perceptions of teacher-parent communication in a positive way?

The results of the quantitative analysis and the results of the secondary analysis of the qualitative data were complementary, and provided answers to this question. The quantitative analysis revealed that parent perceptions of teacher-parent communication are influenced by parent perceptions of parent efficacy which are influenced by parent perceptions of teacher concern about parent involvement. The secondary analysis of the qualitative data provided details to explain these relationships.

The secondary analysis indicated that parent perceptions of parent efficacy are derived from the parents' perceptions that they are knowledgeable about a school subject, that they have the ability to explain a concept rather than simply "get the answer", that they can reproduce homework questions to check for student understanding, and that they are using a method of instruction that is similar to or complementary with the teacher's method.

Results of the secondary analysis also indicated that parent perceptions of teacher concern about parent involvement are coloured by past experiences, experiences with the teachers of siblings, and by the "second hand" information students bring home about the teacher. Positive perceptions are generated when parents perceive that the teacher is genuinely interested in the child as an individual, that the teacher will contact them if necessary, and that the teacher believes the relationship between teachers and parents is one of partnership. Positive perceptions are severed when parents voice a concern to a teacher and are not satisfied with the response.

Weekly newsletters, which report the topics the class are studying, do not seem to be sufficient to satisfy parents' quest for information about the child as an individual. In addition to information about curriculum and class activities, parents want individual instructions about how to help their child(ren) learn. When teachers and parents communicate, the topics of interest to parents are information about the content of the subject being taught and the teaching strategies that the teacher is using, including details about how to explain concepts. In addition, parents want to receive information about the individual progress of their child. Monthly progress reports, parent signatures on graded test papers, and homework books are three of the successful ways teachers use to keep parents informed about progress.

5. How are teacher-parent communication, parent perceptions of communication with teachers, and teacher-parent relationships related?

Parents who perceive that the teacher is concerned about parent involvement--a perception that is affected by the parent's belief that the teacher will contact them if necessary and that the teacher views them as a partner in education--have positive perceptions of teacher-parent communication. Parents who do not have positive perceptions of teacher-parent communication have usually had a negative experience in the past which was not resolved to their satisfaction. Negative past experiences seem to have a negative influence upon present and future communication with teachers. Parents with negative perceptions of communication have confrontational conversations with teachers.

SUMMARY:

These conclusions demonstrate that for the sample group in this study, parents' perceptions are that communication parents initiate is more negative than positive; parents see themselves communicating with teachers to solve problems. By contrast, parents perceive communication initiated by teachers to be more positive than negative; teachers communicate to parents about academic ability, curriculum, homework, student behaviour and attitude, teacher behaviour, and instruction at home. Some parents are satisfied with the information they receive from teachers, others desire more communication from teachers about the student's individual progress. Some parents want information about how to help their children with school work; and many parents believe that parents and students would benefit from such information. Not all parents perceive the relationship between teachers and parents to be a partnership. The relationship between teachers and parents is a fragile one--an unsatisfactory response from a teacher can thwart a relationship and build mistrust which seems to influence perceptions of communication with other teachers and with future teachers.

HOW THE CONCLUSIONS RELATE TO THE CURRENT LITERATURE:

The most important contribution of this thesis to the research on parent involvement is that parents desire information about their children as individuals. Lightfoot's (1978) theory that parents have an "individualistic" perception of the student in the classroom has once again been confirmed. This conclusion should not be ignored because of its simplicity. Researchers who proclaim that teachers and parents must collaborate with one another to help students learn must acknowledge that the phenomenological barriers identified by Lightfoot in the 1970's are probably relevant today. Fullan's

contention in The New Meaning of Educational Change (1991) that parent involvement programs should forge ahead, with no warning of possible barriers, is perhaps too optimistic.

The results of this thesis demonstrate that parents who had negative perceptions about their relationships with teachers--the relationship was not a partnership--had negative perceptions of teacher-parent communication. This conclusion complements the conclusions of Henderson, "If schools treat parents as unimportant, if they treat them as negative educational influences on their children, or if they discourage parents from becoming involved, then they promote the development of attitudes that inhibit achievement at school" (1988, p.151).

The results of this thesis are congruent with one of the findings of Lietch and Tangri (1988). Teachers and parents do not map strategies together, nor do they have follow-up discussions to re-evaluate situations. However, Lietch and Tangri concluded that this lack of specific planning rather than misperceptions of one another prevented parents and teachers from collaborating to assist student learning. The results of this thesis demonstrate that this is not the case. Parent perceptions of teacher concern about communication do prevent parents from engaging in communication with teachers to promote student learning.

The results of this study complement Epstein's conclusion that parents want more direction on how to help their older children in reading and math activities. Parents in this study mentioned mathematics most often as a subject in which they required assistance.

Finally, Lareau and Benson (1984) contend that educators must be sensitive to parent beliefs about the parental role in the educational process. Parents in this study reported contacting the teacher to speak on behalf of their

children. The results of this thesis demonstrate that the parent perception of the parent role is that parents must act as advocates for their child(ren) to ensure that the child's educational program is appropriate. In addition, parents whose perceptions of communication between teachers and parents are very positive perceive that teachers view them as partners and view their children as individuals. These results complement the work of Lareau and Benson. As teachers and parents work together in partnership, teachers deal with students in a more individual way (Lareau and Benson, 1984).

RELATING THE QUANTITATIVE AND THE QUALITATIVE DATA:

Fielding and Fielding (1986) provide an informative discussion of how quantitative and qualitative research should be related to one another:

To bring the two together, we could take the variable-centered regularities but would regard them not as an 'explanation' but as 'social facts' for explanation. In terms of research procedure, we might look at the survey results and then conduct interviews, or we might conduct interviews and then carry out a survey. There is nothing remarkable about this, but the results are frequently not analyzed in this way. Instead, reports often use qualitative data merely to 'illustrate' the on-the-surface 'hard' data of the survey (p.17).

Initially, the quantitative results for this thesis guided the qualitative analysis; subsequently, the qualitative analysis provided information to guide future quantitative studies. The quantitative analysis indicated that parent perceptions of teacher communication were related to parent perceptions of parent efficacy which were related to parent perceptions of teacher concern about parent involvement. The secondary analysis of the interviews was then conducted to search for indications of how these parent perceptions of parent efficacy and teacher concern about parent involvement might be derived. The analyses of the survey data and the interview data with respect to parent

perceptions of teacher concern about parent involvement were complementary to one another. Items for Scale 5 of the survey instrument asked parents for their perceptions of partnership and for their perceptions about information about school work. The analysis of the interview data for this thesis indicated that parent perceptions of teacher concern about parent involvement were derived from parent perceptions of partnerships, parent perceptions of information about individual student progress, and parent perceptions of the resolution of conflicts. These are three areas which might be explored with more detailed survey instruments in future quantitative studies of parent involvement.

The interview data indicated that parent perceptions of parent efficacy are derived from specific concerns about helping with school work. The questions on the survey instrument--for example, "I usually feel able to help my child with homework"--did not necessarily address the explicit concerns expressed by parents in the interview data. Future survey instruments might include items such as, "I have knowledge of the subjects my child studies in school," or "I am able to explain concepts to my child". The secondary analysis of the qualitative data, therefore provided information to enhance future quantitative studies.

The secondary analysis of the qualitative data was not conducted merely with the intention of qualifying the quantitative data. In one respect the secondary analysis was conducted as an independent study to verify the findings of the quantitative analysis. The two groups of parents who were compared in the secondary analysis were not determined by scale scores. The two groups of parents whose responses were analyzed for comparison were determined by coding and rating the parent responses to interview questions. The results of the secondary analysis were then compared to the quantitative

results. (ie. instead of grouping parents according to the individual parent scores for Scale 5: Parent Perception of Teacher Concern about Parent Involvement or Scale 9: Parent Perception of Parent Efficacy and then searching for explanations of the quantitative results, the two groups were determined regardless of the results of the quantitative analysis.) The results of the quantitative analysis and the results of the qualitative analyses were then compared and found to complement one another.

IMPLICATIONS:

Recommendations for Educators

An important implication for educators is that to improve teacher-parent communication educators must demonstrate to parents that parents are partners in the education of children. Newsletters to report to parents about class projects may not be sufficient to meet this end. Parents want monthly information in the form of individual progress reports, test results, and records of completed assignments. Parents desire information about how to teach their children and, in particular, how to address the individual problems their child is having with school work. In addition, parents want to feel that their concerns are acknowledged and responded to in such a way problems are resolved to their satisfaction.

Implications for Further Study

Parent perceptions are influenced by "second hand" information from the student. This implies that research which investigates the connections between teachers, parents, and students will provide more answers to the advancement of partnerships in education.

Barriers to communication such as time and energy were confirmed by this study. Some subtle obstacles surfaced, however, such as the perception

that teachers sometimes talk down to parents and the perception that the length of the school year is too short a time to build a relationship. These findings provide insight into barriers to communication and might be investigated further.

The secondary analysis of this thesis suggested that parent perceptions of parent efficacy are influenced by specific concerns that parents have about their knowledge of the subjects studied in school, their ability to help their children understand concepts, and their confidence that the teaching strategies they use at home are similar to those used by the teacher at school. The sample for this secondary analysis was only ten parents, and of those, most felt confident about their child's ability in school. The topic of parent efficacy needs further investigation.

Finally, further studies to investigate the content of teacher-parent communication are needed to confirm or deny the conclusions of this thesis. The results of this study will enhance the current research to investigate collaboration between teachers and parents to promote student learning, particularly by emphasizing that the "individualistic" perceptions of parents which influence their relationships with teachers (Lightfoot, 1978) are relevant in the 1990's. More research is needed so that educators and academics can develop a greater understanding of how to foster collaboration between teachers and parents.

APPENDIX A

Consent Forms

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Education
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6, CANADA

Administrative Leadership Program
Peter Coleman

(604) 291-3622
AUG 31, 1990

LETTER OF CONSENT (PRINCIPAL)

Dear :

Your school district has given permission for a group of teachers in the district and some graduate students at Simon Fraser University to conduct a research project in your school. We are interested in the extent to which teachers and parents can work together on instructional matters, to the advantage of the children.

The project is entitled **The Co-production of Learning**. Previous research suggests that in schools where parents are involved in helping with instructional activities, either at home or in the school, by such things as reading aloud to the child, or having the child explain mathematics problems, children sometimes learn more and develop more positive attitudes to school. These attitudes often persist into junior secondary school, and sometimes help to ease the transition between kinds of schools. Often such previous research has involved workshops for parents and teachers on how they can collaborate to help children learn.

The project will last for two or three years, covering the transition from grade 6 or 7 to grade 8. During this time the students and parents in the present grade six or seven class will be asked to work collaboratively with the teacher in a variety of ways. The research group will provide some training for teachers and parents in the co-production of learning and will monitor the results of these training activities.

There are two possible levels of participation for parents and children: Full participation involves attending some training sessions held at the school, agreeing to implement some of the recommended practices in working with the child in the home, and agreeing to respond to a series of brief telephone interviews and responding to pencil-and-paper opinion surveys during the period of the study. Limited participation involves the parent and child responding to a pencil-and-paper opinion survey and one or two brief interviews. Parents may choose not to participate at all.

For teachers, there are two levels of participation. Full participation means the involvement of the teacher's class; the teacher will participate in some teacher-only training sessions, which will be

scheduled at the convenience of the schools involved, with the project bearing the cost of release time. One session will be joint teacher/parent, and will necessarily be held in the evening. There will be a second parent evening meeting, which teachers may attend if they wish. Teachers will also be asked to complete some pencil-and-paper surveys, and participate in several brief interviews, often by telephone.

Limited participation, for teachers whose students and parents are not involved, will require only that the teachers complete a pencil-and-paper survey twice during the school year, and assist in the collection of surveys to be completed by parents.

For the school principal, involvement requires consenting to be interviewed a number of times during the school year, and facilitating the collection of information, including a survey from parents, some not participating in the project, regarding school climate.

All information provided during the course of the project will be held in confidence by the research group. Responses will be coded so that names do not appear in the data files. At no time will anyone at your school have access to the information provided by individuals. All reports will use coded data only. Anonymity for participants is thus assured.

Should you at any time have concerns about the project, you may contact the Director of the research team, Dr. Peter Coleman, by calling, collect, (604) 291-3622, or the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. You may also communicate with the Principal of the school or the Superintendent of the school district. Ongoing progress reports will automatically be provided to you; a final report will be available upon request.

Would you kindly indicate your willingness to be involved in this project by signing the second copy of this letter and returning it to your local contact person.

Yours truly

Peter Coleman,
Professor

I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE TERMS DESCRIBED. I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS CONSENT MAY BE WITHDRAWN AT ANY TIME, AT MY DISCRETION.

School Name: _____

Print Name : _____

Signature: _____

**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Education
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6, CANADA**

**Administrative Leadership Program
Peter Coleman**

(604) 291-3622

AUG 31, 1990

LETTER OF CONSENT (TEACHERS)

Dear Teachers:

Your school district has given permission for a group of teachers in the district and some graduate students at Simon Fraser University to conduct a research project in your school. We are interested in the extent to which teachers and parents can work together on instructional matters, to the advantage of the children.

The project is entitled **The Co-production of Learning**. Previous research suggests that in schools where parents are involved in helping with instructional activities, either at home or in the school, children sometimes learn more and develop more positive attitudes to school. These attitudes often persist into junior secondary school, and sometimes help to ease the transition between kinds of schools. Often such previous research has involved workshops for parents and teachers on how they can collaborate to help children learn.

The project will last for two or three years, covering the transition from grade 6 or 7 to grade 8. During this time the students and parents in the present grade six or seven class will be asked to work collaboratively with the teacher in a variety of ways. The research group will provide some training for teachers and parents in the co-production of learning and will monitor the results of these training activities.

There are two possible levels of participation for parents and children: Full participation involves attending some training sessions held at the school, agreeing to implementing some of the recommended practices in working with the child in the home, and agreeing to a series of brief telephone interviews and responding to pencil-and-paper opinion surveys during the period of the study. Limited participation involves the parent and child responding to a pencil-and-paper opinion survey and one or two brief interviews. Parents may choose not to participate at all.

For teachers, participation involves participating in some teacher-only training sessions, which will be scheduled at the convenience of the schools involved, with the project bearing the cost of release time. One session will be joint teacher/parent, and will necessarily be held in the evening. There will be a second parent evening meeting, which teachers may choose to attend.

Teachers will also be asked to complete some pencil-and-paper surveys, and participate in several brief interviews, often by telephone. All information provided by you during the course of the

project will be held in confidence by the research group. Your responses will be coded so that your name does not appear in the data files. At no time will anyone at your school have access to the information you personally provide. All reports will use coded data only. Your anonymity is thus assured.

Should you at any time have concerns about the project, you may contact the Director of the research team, Dr. Peter Coleman, by calling, collect, (604) 291-3622, or the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. You may also communicate with the Principal of the school or the Superintendent of the school district.

Ongoing progress reports will automatically be provided to you; a final report will be available upon request.

Would you kindly indicate your willingness to be involved in this project by signing the second copy of this letter and returning it to your principal.

Yours truly

Peter Coleman,
Professor

I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE TERMS DESCRIBED. I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS CONSENT MAY BE WITHDRAWN AT ANY TIME, AT MY DISCRETION.

School Name: _____

Print Name : _____

Signature : _____

HOME Telephone No.: _____

**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Education
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6, CANADA**

Administrative Leadership Program

Peter Coleman

(604) 291-3622

AUG 31, 1990

LETTER OF CONSENT (PARENTS - GRADE 6/7)

Dear Parents:

Your school and your school district have given permission for a group of teachers in the district and graduate students at Simon Fraser University to conduct a research project in your school. We are interested in the extent to which teachers and parents can work together on instructional matters, to the advantage of the children.

The project is entitled The Co-production of Learning. Previous research suggests that in schools where parents are involved in helping with instructional activities, either at home or in the school, by such things as helping the child to develop good study skills, children sometimes learn more and develop more positive attitudes to school. These positive attitudes often persist into junior secondary school, and sometimes help to ease the transition between kinds of schools. Often such previous research has involved workshops for parents and teachers on how they can collaborate to help children learn.

The project will last for three years covering the transition from elementary to junior secondary school. During this time the students and parents in the present Grade 6 or 7 class will be asked to work collaboratively with the teacher in a variety of ways. The research group will provide some training for parents and teachers in the co-production of learning and will monitor the results, providing continuing advice and assistance.

There are two possible levels of participation for parents and children:

- Full participation would involve attending some training sessions held at the school and agreeing to implement some of the recommended practices in working with your child in the home. In addition, full participation would involve agreeing to a series of brief telephone interviews during the three year period.

- Limited participation would involve you and your child responding to a pencil and paper opinion survey and one or two brief interviews during each year of the study.

You may, of course, choose not to participate at all. Should you choose at this time either full or limited participation, you and your child may still withdraw from the project at any time.

All information provided by you and your child during the course of the project will be held in confidence by the research group. Your

responses will be coded so that your name does not appear in the data files. At no time will anyone at your school have access to the information you provide. Your anonymity is thus assured.

Should you at any time have concerns about the project, you may contact the Director of the research team, Dr. Peter Coleman, by calling, collect, (604) 291-3622 or the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. You may also communicate with the Principal of the school or the Superintendent of the school district.

If you choose full participation, ongoing progress reports will automatically be provided to you. Should you choose limited or no participation, you may still learn about the results of the project by calling or writing to the Director of the project.

Would you kindly indicate your interest in this project by completing the attached form and returning it to your child's teacher.

Yours truly

Peter Coleman,
Professor

**CO-PRODUCTION OF LEARNING PROJECT
September, 1990**

LETTER OF CONSENT (PARENTS - GRADE 6/7)

I AGREE TO FULL PARTICIPATION FOR MY CHILD AND MYSELF

I AGREE TO LIMITED PARTICIPATION FOR MY CHILD AND MYSELF

I CHOOSE NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT

I NEED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BEFORE MAKING A DECISION

School Name: _____

Name (Child): _____

Name (Parent): _____

Signature: _____

Telephone No.: _____

APPENDIX B

FACULTY OF EDUCATION, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY CO-PRODUCTION OF LEARNING: PARENT INTERVIEW

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INITIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERVIEWERS

- A. Responses tend to be lengthier and more helpful if the respondent feels comfortable. This may require visiting them at home. School may be convenient, but perhaps not a relaxing place.
- B. Try to elicit full responses - if the response seems terse, use the PROBES listed with the questions. Your questions **must be short** though, so **only use the probes if needed**.
- C. If the respondent begins to repeat himself/herself, try to redirect the response by moving to a probe or to the next question.

INTRODUCTION: (TO BE READ): Our research group (teachers in the district and graduate students from Simon Fraser University) is engaged in a research project regarding the co-production of learning in children - that is the ways in which teachers and parents can work together to help children learn. We are collecting information from teachers, parents, and children about what happens and how people feel about it. Could you please answer the following questions as completely as possible. If you do not understand a question ask me to repeat it.

QUESTION 1: How many children do you have in school? What grade level(s)?

QUESTION 2: As a parent do you feel welcome in your child's school?
PROBES: What causes you to feel this way?

QUESTION 3: As a parent do you feel welcome in your child's classroom?
PROBES: Do the children accept your presence without fussing? Does the teacher greet you by name, when convenient?

QUESTION 4: Please describe the ways in which you are involved with the school your child attends?
PROBES: Do you work as a volunteer sometimes, when convenient? Do you attend meetings? Do you accompany children on field-trips? Do you call or visit the school sometimes?

QUESTION 5: Does the school encourage your involvement?
PROBES: Do you get written information from the school (school-level or classroom level)? Are you often invited to attend meetings? Does the teacher call you about helping?

QUESTION 6: Could you help in the school more than you do? In what ways?.

QUESTION 7: What prevents you from doing more to help your child learn?

PROBES: Do teachers welcome your assistance in classrooms or school?

Does your child ask for your help at home? Do you feel comfortable about helping your child with school work? What kind of help do you provide? Do you enjoy this experience? Does your child enjoy this?

QUESTION 8: Do you feel that your child's teacher sees you as a partner/team member in your child's education?

PROBES: Could you give some examples of what s/he does that makes you feel (not feel) that way? What could you do to help that you do not now do? Could you describe ways in which you and the teacher work together?

QUESTION 9: Has there ever been a time when you felt excluded from your child's schooling?

PROBES: What were the circumstances? Who made you feel that way?

QUESTION 10: Have there been times when you felt that you had to stand up for your child's interests at school?

PROBES: Have there been times when you felt you needed to, but did not? What stopped you?

QUESTION 11: Were there times when you felt that the teacher missed an opportunity to gain your support?

PROBES: Can you recall specific incidents?

QUESTION 12: When you and your child's teacher meet, what kinds of things are typically discussed?

PROBES: Do you feel comfortable in these meetings?

QUESTION 13: Do you have a sense that your child's teacher respects your child?

PROBES: What does s/he do that makes you feel this way?

QUESTION 14: Have your child's teachers (present/past) helped you to learn things that enabled you to assist your child with his/her school work?

PROBES: Could you give some examples?

QUESTION 15: How does your child feel about school?

PROBES: What makes you think that?

QUESTION 16: How far do you expect your child to go in school?

PROBES: Why do you think that? Does your child talk about going on in school?

QUESTION 17: In what ways do you feel your child takes responsibility for his/her own education?

PROBES: Could you give some examples? What would you like to see him/her do differently, if anything?

QUESTION 18: What words immediately come to mind when I mention the following: "the relationship between parents and teachers"?

PROBES: How do you think your child's teacher would respond to this question?

QUESTION 19: Is there anything I haven't asked you on this topic that you would like to mention?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE YOU HAVE PROVIDED.

APPENDIX C

CO-PRODUCTION OF LEARNING: PARENT SURVEY TIME 1:

Analysis of Scales

Peter Coleman, May 22, 1991

SCALE 1. PERCEPTION OF STUDENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

"Alpha" : .66. Items with "corrected item-total correlations":

- .37 16. My child's teacher(s) makes sure my child understands homework assignments.
- .55 23. **My child feels comfortable approaching teacher(s) with schoolwork questions or concerns.**
- .54 46. **My child feels comfortable asking the teacher(s) for help.**
- .48 48. My child feels that her/his learning is important to the teacher(s).

SCALE 2. PERCEPTION OF STUDENT-PARENT COMMUNICATION.

"Alpha" : .82. Items with "corrected item-total correlations":

- .56 3. My child keeps me informed about class-room activities.
- .47 8. My child talks to me about his/her plans for schooling in the future.
- .63 12. My child lets me know when s/he is having problems in the class.
- .65 13. My child usually discusses homework with me.
- .69 17. **My child keeps me informed about school activities.**
- .56 55. My child lets me know when he/she needs help with a homework assignment.

SCALE 3. PERCEPTION OF TEACHER-PARENT COMMUNICATION (INSTRUCTION).

"Alpha" : .72. Items with "corrected item-total correlations":

- .60 5. **My child's teacher(s) provides information about instructional programs so that I understand my child's schoolwork.**
- .55 7. **My child's teacher(s) keeps me informed about homework assignments.**
- .55 15. **My child's teacher(s) keeps me informed about what my child is learning in the classroom.**
- .36 53. **My child's teacher(s) gives me information which allows me help my child with homework.**

SCALE 4. PERCEPTION OF TEACHER-PARENT COMMUNICATION (GENERAL).

"Alpha" : .65. Items with "corrected item-total correlations":

- .54 6. **My child's teacher(s) keeps me informed about class-room activities.**
- .43 19. **My child's teacher(s) informs me when my child is doing well in class.**
- .28 33. **I feel satisfied with my interviews with my child's teacher(s).**
- .36 56. **My child's teacher(s) often asks me to help.**
- .45 61. **My child's teacher(s) work hard to interest and excite parents.**

SCALE 5. PERCEPTION OF TEACHER CONCERN ABOUT PARENT INVOLVEMENT

"Alpha" : .81. Items with "corrected item-total correlations":

- .54 27. **I am sure that my child's teacher(s) will contact me about my child's work in class, if necessary.**
- .48 29. **I am sure that my child's teacher(s) will contact me about my child's homework, if necessary.**
- .59 31. **I am sure that my child's teacher(s) will contact me about my child's behaviour, if necessary.**
- .56 37. **My child's teacher(s) makes me feel part of a team.**

- .72 39. **My child's teacher(s) seems interested in hearing my opinions about my child.**
- .50 40. Parents find teachers easily approachable at this school.
- .61 44. My child's teacher(s) makes time to talk to me when it is necessary.

SCALE 6. PERCEPTION OF PARENT-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

"Alpha" : .78. Items with "corrected item-total correlations":

- .38 2. I call/visit my child's teacher(s) to talk about my child's progress
- .43 9. I talk to my child's teacher(s) about the instructional program in the classroom.
- .45 18. I make sure to tell my child's teacher(s) when I think things are going well.
- .64 21. **I feel free to contact my child's teacher(s) about my child's work in class.**
- .67 22. **I feel free to contact my child's teacher(s) about my child's homework.**
- .71 25. **I feel free to contact my child's teacher(s) about my child's behaviour in class.**

SCALE 7. PARENT VALUES SCHOOLING

"Alpha" : .54. Items with "corrected item-total correlations":

- .41 1. I talk to my child about school events/activities.
- .35 4. I encourage my child always to do his/her best work in school.
- .38 59. I talk to my child about schoolwork quite a lot.

SCALE 8. PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

"Alpha" : .81. Items with "corrected item-total correlations":

- .38 10. The instructional program in our school helps to motivate students.

- .55 24. Students are excited about learning in this school.
- .46 26. Students in our school have the necessary ability to achieve well in basic skills.
- .50 28. The academic emphasis in our school is challenging to students.
- .63 30. Students are proud of our school.
- .53 32. Our school reflects the values of the community in which it is located.
- .53 36. Teachers make schoolwork interesting for students in this school.
- .46 45. Our school is an important part of the community.
- .51 47. Our school makes visitors feel welcome.
- .34 57. My child feels comfortable in class.

SCALE 9. PERCEPTION OF PARENT EFFICACY

"Alpha" : .45. Items with "corrected item-total correlations":

- .28 49. I usually feel able to help my child with homework.
- .13 51. I wish I could do more to assist my child with school work.
- .23 52. I make a strong contribution to how well my child does in school.
- .38 54. My child's family has strengths that could be tapped by the school to help my child succeed.
- .19 **REVERSED** 60. My child and I find it difficult to work together on schoolwork .

APPENDIX D:

Code List

Parent to Teacher Communication

PTC	ABS	Student Absence
PTC	ACPR	Academics and Progress
PTC	ADV	Advocating for the Student
PTC	HW	Homework Completion
PTC	LACK	Lack of PTC
PTC	METOS	Relaying Message to Student
PTC	PI	Parent Involvement
PTC	TB	Teacher Behavior
PTC	TRSPONS	Teacher Response to PTC

Teacher to Parent Communication

TPC	ACPR	Academics and Progress
TPC	CURR	Curriculum
TPC	HW	Homework Completion
TPC	INSTR	Instruction to Parents
TPC	LACK	Lack of TPC
TPC	PI	Parent Involvement
TPC	SB	Student Behavior
TPC	SRESP	Student Responsibility
TPC	TB	Teacher Behavior

Parent Perceptions

PP	PE	Parent Efficacy
PP	PTC	PTC
PP	PTC/BARR	Barriers to PTC
PP	PTC/TRSPONS	Teacher Response to PTC
PP	SAch	Student Achievement
PP	TA/PI	Teacher Attitude to Parent Involvement
PP	TPC	TPC
PP	TPC/ACPR	TPC about Academic Progress
PP	TPC/BARR	Barriers to TPC
PP	TPC/SB	TPC about Student Behavior

PP	TPC/TRAIN	TPC about Training Parents in Instruction
PP	TP/REL	Teacher/Parent Relationship

Third or Fourth level codes must be added to all of the above codes.

+	Positive response
-	Negative response

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