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**THE CHALLENGES AND
IMPLICATIONS OF
IMPLEMENTING MEANINGFUL
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:
TEACHER VOICES**

by

Rosa Fazio

A thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of**

Master of Education

**Department of Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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**The Challenges and Implications of Implementing Meaningful Parental Involvement:
Teacher Voices**

BY

Rosa Fazio

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
of**

Master of Education

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Abstract

This paper explores the nature of the decisions teachers make in light of parental involvement in the classroom. Previous research has shown that when parents play a positive role in their children's education, children do better in school. Missing from the research is teachers voice and a more thoughtful understanding of the reality of parents in the classroom and the challenges and implications teachers face in light of this involvement. Through a series of narratives and through interview transcripts with nine teachers in six schools with a combined 184 years of experience, I examine the impact parental involvement in schools has had on these teachers and their classroom program. I also show how action research can bring voice to teachers, can lead to a better understanding of a teacher's actions, and can effect changes that may stand a greater chance at improving professional practices.

Acknowledgments

In retrospect, one sees the benefit of working at six different schools in seven years. This has afforded me the opportunity to learn from numerous teachers, administrators, students and parents at schools within communities of varying ethnic diversity and socio-economic status. I have been fortunate to be able to share my experiences and engage in dialogue with numerous colleagues. Sharing teaching issues with teachers in the field opens the door to an auditorium of insights. Thank you to all those who have shared these insights.

A sincere appreciation goes to Dr. Roy Graham, whom I had the fortune of having as a professor, as my graduate advisor and as a friend.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Autobiographical Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Action Research and Narrative.....	11
Action Research	12
Teacher as Researcher	15
Narrative and the Human Experience	17
Teacher Narratives	19
Chapter 2: Methodology	23
Research Design and Data Collection	23
Negotiation of Entry	24
The Participants	25
Method of Data Analysis.....	29
Chapter 3: What Research Says About Parental Involvement ..	33
Historical Perspective	33
The Benefits of Parental Involvement	36
Levels of Parental Involvement	38
Finding the Right Balance	41
Instructional Parental Involvement	42
The Challenges Teachers' Face with Parental Involvement in Schools	44
Teachers Voice the Benefits of Parental Involvement	50
Chapter 4: The "Ability" of Parents	53
The Telephone Call	53
Stability	57
Availability	60
Dependability	62
Capability	63

Chapter 5: Teacher Comfort Level	66
Are You Sure You Want a Job There?	66
Teacher Confidence	70
Trust	71
Student Confidentiality	73
Defining Boundaries	74
 Chapter 6: Teacher Professionalism and Parent Power	77
Teachers Can't Fail Children Anymore, But Parents Can	77
Parent Power	81
Parents and Curriculum	83
Teacher as Expert	85
Teacher Control	86
Teacher as Educator of Parents	88
 Chapter 7: Key Issues and Implications for Practice	91
A Discussion of the Findings	91
Implication for Practice	95
Training Educators	97
Educating Parents	101
Establishing Purpose and Clearly Defined Goals	103
Concluding Remarks	107
 References	109
 Appendix A	127
Interview Prompts	
 Appendix B	132
Interview Transcripts	
 Appendix C.....	252
Table 1: Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement and Sample Practices	
Table 2: Challenges and Redefinitions for the Six Types of Involvement	
Table 3: Expected Results of the Six Types of Involvement for Students, Parents, and Teachers	

Appendix D	255
Letter A: Workshops for Parents	
Letter B: Workshops Being Offered	
Appendix E	257
Workshop Evaluation Form	
Appendix F	258
Letter: Family Involvement in Schools	
Appendix G	261
Pamphlet: The Key to a Successful Classroom Involvement Program	

Autobiographical Introduction

I was born in a small town in Southern Italy, where my parents barely made a living for the family. My father rented land for cattle raising. From November to May, he walked daily for two hours each way, to and from the rented land. From June to November, he slept in the pasture along with the cattle and travelled home once every two weeks. Mother took care of my sister and I and earned a little money sewing for others. In September of 1974, when I was six, my sister seven, my mother thirty-two, and my father thirty-six, we immigrated to Toronto, Canada. My parents decided to leave their homeland in hopes of a better job, greater material welfare for the family and a professional future for their children.

Our first four months of life in Canada were the most difficult. Absolutely everything was alien – the people, the language and the surroundings. I did not cope well with the disorientation and became a physically violent child towards other children and my teacher. I felt as though everything I loved was taken from me, even my sister. We went to the same school, but we were placed in separate classes. I cried in the morning, refused to eat, and cried at night. Why was everything so different? Why did I feel so stupid? Why was it so difficult for me to cope?

I wasn't the only one experiencing this pain. The disorientation was overwhelming for all of us; however, my father, my mother and my sister experienced their grief in more socially acceptable ways. We relied greatly on our immediate and extended family to lessen the disorientation, insecurity and anxiety of functioning in an alien culture that we feared we would never understand. After three stressful months in Toronto, my parents contemplated whether they had made the best decision moving to Canada. We wanted to return to Italy, badly; but before we did, our relatives from Vancouver insisted that we visit them before making any rash decision.

In Vancouver, I was placed in an English as a Second Language classroom with my sister. I think fondly of my teacher who found ways to tame my anger. My sister was given permission to speak Italian to me to help me cope. I began enjoying school but continued to remain "on guard," protecting both my sister and myself. I am not quite certain what I was protecting us from, perhaps the unknown. I wanted my world to remain as I knew it in Italy. The support from our relatives continued and they were there every step of the way to help us cope. We began feeling more at home. As I became more confident with my English I was integrated into a regular grade two classroom. I don't remember which year of my

elementary education I decided I would become a teacher, but I clearly remember my reason – I wanted to become a teacher who would meet the needs of all students . . . the way my needs were finally being met.

As the years passed, I began to understand more about the generational and cultural gap that was widening between my parents and I. My parents desperately wanted their Italian values instilled in me more and more, but I accepted the traditional values less and less. I wanted my parents to understand more about my life in school and my life as an Italian Canadian, with emphasis on Canadian. My parents also began articulating their dissatisfaction with the Canadian educational system. They believed that the Italian educational system was superior to that in Canada. I wondered how they came to that decision without visiting Canadian schools and without listening much to my explanations of my life at school. I began defending the system only to blame my parents for their lack of understanding. The attempted explanations of wanting my parents to understand my life in light of the school and Canadian culture ceased, but my wish to be understood didn't.

During my upbringing, I believed that my parents would understand me better and become less skeptical if they were involved in my education. However, lack of time and comfort level contributed to their lack of

involvement. They worked full time with inflexible schedules, experienced a language barrier and felt that teachers were the experts. I was raised believing that the teacher was always right no matter how little faith my parents had in the education system. I realized that their lack of involvement also meant good things. There was never a reason for teachers to telephone home, as I feared the consequences. I am unaware of the amount of contact teachers wanted of parents at that time, but my parents believed they should never speak to a teacher unless there was a problem – and that would never occur.

My assumption of what parents wanted from teachers remained constant throughout University. When I completed my teaching degree, I continued to believe that the responsibility of the teacher was quite distinct from the responsibility of the parent. Teachers were better qualified to make educational decisions for all students, and parents were to be responsive and supportive of those decisions. However, once I began teaching, I realized that many of my students' parents wanted to be involved or at least informed about the education of their children. I was fascinated by parents' willingness to volunteer in the school and in the classroom; however, I had no training on how to involve parents. Because of my struggles as an ESL student and the lack of knowledge my parents had of my

educational experience, I was excited about the notion of parental involvement and became passionate about learning all I could to facilitate it.

I began wondering what other teachers did to actively enlist parental involvement. What were some of the strategies teachers used to involve parents? How did they communicate with hard to reach parents? Was there a support system for teachers? The more I inquired the more I discovered that many educators preferred the gap to remain between home and school. I became silently critical and worked even harder towards finding meaningful ways to involve parents. I was determined to bridge the gap between home and school – the gap that existed when I was growing up and one that I would not allow to exist with the students and parents of my classroom. I asked many questions and learned as much as I could from a few teachers who also shared my view. Some teachers had set up home reading programs and others sent home newsletters to keep parents more informed.

I, too, began involving parents – through newsletters, with home reading programs, by using homework planners and by encouraging in-class volunteers. At first, I involved parents on a haphazard basis; but I wanted to have a more formalized and efficient parental involvement program.

By the time I reached my fifth year of teaching, I had an established

and organized parental involvement program. I had a parent volunteer coordinator who phoned the parents of the children in my classroom to sign up to volunteer in the classroom when available. One parent was scheduled on a daily basis to work with the kindergarten class I was teaching. Although I had a daily parent volunteer, when I looked at the monthly volunteer schedule, I discovered that nine mothers were involved on a monthly basis. Obviously, I was working in a community where parents were fortunate enough to have flexible schedules and a command of the English language. However, these nine mothers were seeing their children in action and experiencing school along with them, but how about the rest of the parents who didn't have the flexibility?

I continued to wonder what I could do to allow the rest of the working parents or those who did not feel comfortable or capable of volunteering in class, like my own parents, to gain a better understanding of their child's life in school. I took photographs during our daily activities and organized the pictures in a photo album with captions. I sent the travelling photos home and received a number of messages that shed light on how parents felt:

"This is an excellent way to bring parents closer to the learning experiences of their children. Thank you for sharing it with me."

"We really enjoyed looking at some of the activities the kids did. This is a very good idea. It gives all of us a chance to experience, along with our children."

"They say a picture says a thousand words and that's exactly what this photo-album did."

To bring the photos to life, I requested the help of a parent volunteer who was willing to videotape our classroom for the morning to capture a glimpse into "a day in the life of your child." On the Friday morning when Mrs. Pincarrow joined our class and captured some moments on tape, she echoed what other parent volunteers had stated, "Where do you find the energy and patience to do this everyday? You need a special kind of person to be a teacher." On Monday morning, as Mr. Pincarrow was dropping off his child, he informed me that Mrs. Pincarrow came home "totally wiped out." I knew exactly how she felt and I smiled knowing that I was appreciated.

By mid-week, I received two copies of the edited tape. One was sent to our E-mail pals in Florida and the other was placed in a drawstring bag with a journal and travelled to each child's home. The positive comments from parents persisted:

"The video of your class was much better than the class pictures as the

children's personalities were displayed. You obviously have a lot of patience."

"We thoroughly enjoyed the videos. Ian really enjoyed telling his Dad the names of his classmates and singing along with the songs for him."

I realized that the video was a great public relation tool. I was using strategies to allow parents to be more involved or at least informed about their child's education, but was the time investment worth it? Was the amount of involvement occurring because I worked in an affluent community? Was it because I was teaching Kindergarten? Was it meaningful involvement?

I was so involved in ensuring that parents were well informed that, in retrospect, I realize that I spent an unreasonable amount of time on my parent involvement program. I believed that just as curriculum is essential to learning and teaching, so too is parental involvement. One of the quotes that I chose to highlight in my newsletters sheds light on my willingness to include parents in the process. "What parents teach stays with you always. What they fail to teach can never be learned from others" (Keane, 1991). I strongly believed that parental involvement was a critical component of my classroom program.

In my sixth year of teaching, I had a grade four class at the same

school and a phenomenal amount of parental involvement continued to occur. I continued to be eager and enthusiastic about involving parents and challenged myself to further involve parents. I was an active member of the provincial parent advisory council and attended a number of evening meetings and weekend conferences. However, I began to reflect more critically on the challenges and implications I faced that year. I had parents and children phone me at home, I had parents constantly at my door asking about their child's progress, I had parents who wanted to be actively involved in curriculum planning, and I had parent volunteers wanting to help me teach in the classroom. I was feeling that no matter how much I did, I was still not doing enough to satisfy parents.

My seventh year of teaching, I transferred to another school in another province, and began realizing that I wanted very little involvement from parents. Prior to this year, I had strong convictions and supported a statement I could vividly recall but unable to locate, "trying to educate children without support from the home is akin to trying to rake leaves in a high wind." Though, I began to feel that sometimes trying to educate children with support from the home was akin to trying to rake leaves in a high wind. I avoided involving parents in my classroom. I became somewhat distressed because I didn't fully understand this change

in outlook. I needed to understand what was occurring to cause this change and why. Was it because I was overwhelmed with the enormity of needs of the students in my classroom and to add parents to the equation would only complicate that enormity? Was it because I was reflecting critically on the challenges I faced when I involved parents? How could these challenges be overcome? Was it worth the time and effort? Was it really beneficial to students?

The questions led me to further reconstruct a mental framework of how I would explore the topic of parental involvement. I decided to embark on an action research study in hopes of improving my teaching practice by gaining a better understanding of why teachers make decisions whether to involve parents or not, by uncovering some of the challenges teachers face and by discovering ways to improve the quality and meaningfulness of parent involvement.

CHAPTER 1

Action Research and Narrative

“It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it” (Stenhouse, in Rudduck, 1988, p.30).

When I embarked on my Masters in 1993 one of the first articles a professor gave me was an introduction to various research methodologies by Gable and Rogers (1987), “Take the Terror Out of Research.” The article stated the nine basic methods of research - historical, descriptive, developmental, case and field, correlational, causal-comparative, true experimental, quasi-experimental and action. As we read research articles in class, we were encouraged to analyze and evaluate the various articles according to Nielsen and Reilly’s (1985) recommendations. They suggested that good research had a sound theory base, a clearly stated problem, definition of the variables, description of the population, type of research design, reliability and validity of test instruments, consistency of results and conclusions, and recommendations for further research. However, many of

the research articles that I enjoyed and connected with were not necessarily strong in areas of generalizability, reliability and external validity in the traditional sense. The strength of these action research articles was the authenticity of the experience and the insight gained as a reader. I decided to take a course specifically dedicated to action research because I wanted to learn more about the type of research that would have a direct application and impact on my teaching practice and professional growth.

Action Research

“Action” and “research” highlight the essential features of this method of inquiry – trying out ideas in practice to increase knowledge and to improve curriculum, teaching and learning (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982). The common characteristics of this research methodology can be found in Carr (1989), McKernan (1988, 1991), Elliott (1987), Kemmis & McTaggart (1982, 1987, 1988), Lomax & Parker (1995) and Winter (1987) to name a few.

Action research is based on concrete problems in actual school situations, and no attempt is made to isolate a factor and study it divorced from the environment which gave it meaning. The main reason for action research is the improvement of practice. Therefore, action research involves being inquisitive and critically self-reflective, it requires keeping records,

such as a personal journal, to collect and analyze one's own judgements, reactions and perceptions. Because the problems of a teacher are often shared with other teachers, action research has tended to become dialectical and collaborative, a process which involves a small group of collaborators willing to share insights and make critical analyses of the situation.

The action research cycle begins with problem identification. Research questions emerge from areas teachers consider problematic, such as discrepancies between what is intended and what actually occurs in practice. Newman (1996) suggests that action research begins "not with a research question but with the muddle of daily work, with the moments that stand out from the general flow, and unless we record those moments they vanish, unavailable as data for reflection, for discerning some larger pattern of experience" (p. 2). Newman (1996) refers to the moments that allow us to stand back and examine our beliefs and our teaching as "critical incidents" (p. 2).

When I took a course with Newman, I was asked to document some of these "critical incidents" to help set the context for meaning in my teaching practice. These stories would become the tools for conducting research. I was soon made aware that my stories were missing Schon's (1982) account of "reflection-in-action." What was I thinking as the action

was occurring and how did my thinking serve to shape what I was saying and doing? This was a difficult concept to grasp because I was being asked to reflect on my thinking process prior to my actions. To conceptualize what "reflection in action" meant, I was introduced to Elbows' notion of "giving movies of your mind" as we listen, read and write by sharing our personal connections and reflecting upon our reactions (in Newman, 1991, p. 103). This critical skill of reflecting or "re-searching" (Burton, 1986) our experience is what Burton (1986) proposes that good action research does. He writes:

Reflection is the soul of action for it strengthens and gives our *intentions* sustenance and elevates our impressions. Reflection is not an act of looking backward to what is known, nor merely remembering. Rather, it is an 'engagement of impressions' that results in the illumination of layers of meaning. Action, on the other hand, is the content of reflection. It gives reflection substance and grounding. It helps to keep us intellectually honest and allows us to not only *think* ethically, but a chance to *be* ethical. In this way, both action and reflection are forward moving (p. 723).

Burton (1986) also indicates that the "reciprocity of action and reflection is a disciplined endeavor that is forever being held in check" and is "publicly adjusted" as one shares a story with colleagues and friends (p. 723). Collaborating with others to help make sense of one's inquiry is the next

step that is encouraged in action research as a way to help make sense of one's inquiry.

Through this process, I realized that I wanted to know why I was an active advocate of parental involvement, yet I didn't want to involve some parents. Why did a tension exist in my beliefs? I needed to understand why I made such decisions and at the same time I wanted to improve the quality and meaningful of parental involvement occurring in my classroom. I was ready to proceed to the next step in the action research cycle – systematic data collection, reflection and analysis.

Teacher as Researcher

Unlike scientific research methodologies, action researchers do not distance themselves from the data. Various articles written by such researchers as Richardson (1994), Bissess (1988), Kutz (1992), Fleischer (1994), Cochran-Smith & Lytle, (1990, 1993); Sardo-Brown, Welsh & Bolton, (1995) and Duckworth (1987) advocate the teacher as researcher. They state that teachers who conduct research may find it more useful as it gives them voices, provides an avenue to communicate their wealth of knowledge, and it helps them understand and improve their practice. Teacher research also allows the teacher a greater responsibility for directing one's own professional development. Carr & Kemmis (1986) state the purpose and

benefits of teacher research:

A primary task for any research activity is to emancipate teachers from their dependence on habit and tradition by providing them with the skills and resources that will enable them to reflect upon and examine critically the inadequacies of different conceptions of educational practice (p. 120).

When the teacher and the researcher are one and the same, issues of reliability, generalizability and validity are questioned. Northfield (1996), addresses the concepts of reliability, generalizability and validity. He suggests that the way in which we judge teacher research should take into account the purpose for the research and the audience in which the research is intended. The reader who comments, "You could have been describing my class," is clearly accepting an account as reliable and valid for their purposes. External validity is not central to action research; instead, it pursues local relevance or professional growth. Carr & Kemmis (1986) argue that the validity of educational research is "not its theoretical sophistication or its ability to conform to evaluative criteria derived from social sciences, but rather its capacity to resolve educational problems and improve educational practice" (p. 107).

Northfield's (1996) premise is that quality teacher research acknowledges the importance of collaboration and a willingness to

“reframe” classroom situations. Teacher collaboration inevitably provides a better understanding of the question at hand. “Reframing” or considering an issue in a different way allows further understanding and thinking. Therefore, collaboration and reframing attend to questions of reliability, validity and generalization. Northfield (1996) concludes by stating:

Teacher research aspires to invite the reader to consider the issue in light of their experience. Teachers are tentative rather than definitive in their knowledge claims. The best teacher research therefore promotes dialogue and further thinking and must include enough detail to allow the reader to relate their experiences to the situation being described (p. 8).

Collaborating and engaging in dialogue in our professional practice cannot help but expand our vision as professionals as we make sense of our own and others’ experiences.

Narrative and the Human Experience

In sharing our experiences to make better sense of our lives, we tell stories in narrative form. Connelly & Clandinin (1991) define narrative as “one way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience with enough detail to allow the reader to relate their experiences to the situation being described.” (p. 121) The works of Carr (1986), and Sarbin (1986) have helped me to appreciate “the universality of the story as a guide to living and as a vehicle for understanding the conduct of others.” (Sarbin, x)

Polkinghorne (1988), Mitchell (1981) and Crites (1971; 1975; 1986) are other frequently cited sources on narrative. Most generally, the various theorists of narratives “agree that the progression of events in narrative captures the dimension of time in lived experience. By arranging the flux and welter of experience around a narrative line, we make sense of our pasts, plan for our futures, and comprehend the lives of others.” (Narayan, 1991, p. 14)

Carr (1986) argues that living entails maintaining or restoring the narrative coherence of time. Our life experiences are logically connected. As humans we engage in autobiographical reflection, interpreting or reinterpreting the past in order to have it make sense with the present and the future. Events that were lived in terms of one story may later be seen as part of another. We “are at once the spectators of, agents in, and tellers of a story.” (Carr, 1986, p. 78) New information and new perspectives add to our narrative story. Through the narrative coherence of time, we seek to better understand our lives and the lives of others. These stories are the realities with which we live, which gives our lives form and structure. By structuring the incidents and the complex relationships in our lives, we seek to see patterns and to understand events in a broader context rather than in small fragmented pieces.

Teacher Narratives

In recent years there has been increasing recognition of the role narratives play in educational research. Connelly & Clandinin (1990), Ellis (1994), Newman (1987, 1991) and Witherell & Noddings (1991) reveal that the educational importance of narratives is critical for making sense of school experiences. Connelly & Clandinin eloquently explain:

We see teacher's narratives as metaphors for teaching-learning relationships. In understanding ourselves and our students educationally, we need an understanding of people with a narrative of life experiences. Life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations. . . . The educational importance of this line of work is that it brings theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived" (1990, p. 3).

Connelly & Clandinin are supporters of "Narrative Inquiry," a form of research concerned with the ways in which individuals and communities construct their experiences of the world. The rationale for narrative inquiry is that humans are storytellers who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Teachers and learners are also storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories, and the narratives become a construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories. These stories are constructed in both informal (anecdotes, journal entries, staff room chatter) and formal discussions (research articles, policy documents).

Narrative inquiry is concerned, in part, with analysis and criticism of these stories, the oral and inscribed text in which they are embedded and the myths and metaphors they employ (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, p. 2).

Teachers' stories of their experience and the knowledge gained from them are frequently shared in staff rooms but rarely in research articles; yet they have a considerable impact on subsequent professional decisions and on a teacher's well-being. Grumet (1987) explains the knowledge teachers possess as personal and practical knowledge:

Personal knowledge . . . is constituted by the stories about experience we usually keep to ourselves, and practical knowledge by the stories that are never, or rarely, related, but provide, nevertheless, the structure for the improvisations that we call coping, problem solving, action (p. 70).

Grumet (1987) further explains why teachers' personal and practical knowledge is rarely shared. This occurs because "the politics of personal knowledge demand that we acknowledge that telling is an alienation, that telling diminishes the teller, and that we who invite teachers to tell us their stories develop an ethic for that work" (p. 70) These implications must be dealt with because the sharing of teacher stories or "teacher lore" (Schubert, 1991) is crucial to a further understanding of teaching for the benefit of both the authors and the readers of the stories, and creates

knowledge about education. Schubert (1991) characterizes teacher lore:

Teacher lore is the study of the knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and understandings of teachers. In part, it is inquiry into the beliefs, values, and images that guide teachers' work. In this sense, it constitutes an attempt to learn what teachers learn from their experience. Teachers are continuously in the midst of a blend of theory (their evolving ideas and personal belief systems) and practice (their reflective action); I refer to this blend as praxis. To assume that scholarship can focus productively on what teachers learn recognizes teachers as important partners in the creation of knowledge about education (p. 207).

"Teacher lore" is critical to educational research as narratives of experience can have a direct impact on teachers' philosophy and practice. Teachers' theory and practice (praxis) guides teachers' thinking and results in the choices they make. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1990) also support that teachers' thinking and questions arise not from theory nor from practice, but from a "critical reflection on the intersection of the two" (p. 6).

Therefore, the sharing of personal and practical knowledge through the natural form we use to make sense of our lives, narrative, should be more widely shared and accessible in the educational community. Teachers have a rich store of personal knowledge from which to draw when deciding on a course of action. This knowledge gradually builds up through sharing stories of teaching experiences, enabling teachers to shift their understanding

of the professional world and reframe pedagogical beliefs and values. Teachers' narratives also contribute to valorizing teachers' own wisdom and understanding about praxis. Teacher stories should be studied in order to understand that which guides teachers' practice or lived experiences.

I situate my research with the narrative inquiry tradition in an attempt to give voice to teachers' personal and practical knowledge of their parental involvement experiences. The sharing of other teachers' stories provides perspectives for similar situations and by so doing, gives a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and implications teachers face as they struggle with parental involvement. These narratives, in turn, provide the reader with a genuine sense of the indeterminacy that exists in teaching.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

Research Design and Data Collection

Van Manen (1990) proposes that the preferred method for a qualitative human science approach “involves description, interpretation, and self-reflective or critical analysis” (p. 4). Data for this study was collected from different sources. As a believer in the educational importance of narratives to understanding praxis, I documented my experience with parental involvement by reflecting upon the events and discussions that occurred with parents and teachers through journal entries. To gain further insight of other teachers’ experiences and to provide valuable data for further reflection, interviews were conducted with nine teacher participants.

The interviews took place between April and June 1998. Each interview lasted up to one hour. Five interviews were conducted with the teacher researcher and one teacher participant, and two interviews were conducted with the teacher researcher and two teacher participants. An interview guide (see Appendix A) was present during the interview to help

keep the interview focus as suggested by Van Manen (1991). However, I engaged in a more open-ended conversation with each teacher to elicit a greater depth of response.

The interview can appear formalized, given that it is a conversation which begins with an agreement to participate, plans for a time and place, a list of questions to serve as starting places, and agreement to use a tape recorder. Nonetheless, the interviews were conducted in comfortable settings (on the front steps of a teacher's home, on the sofa or around a table in the staff room and in classrooms) and the feeling was a sharing of experiences between teachers. Within a week of each interview, the conversation was transcribed and a copy mailed to the participating teacher to allow them to edit, revise and approve the transcript. The transcripts can be found in Appendix B.

Negotiation of Entry

The teacher participants were chosen from six schools. The schools themselves were chosen with the following criteria in mind: 1) they represented various areas in the city of Vancouver (three east side and three west side schools; 2) they reflected the different socio-economic levels and cultural composition of Vancouver; 3) their principals were willing to negotiate entry into the schools; 4) a degree of parental involvement was

already occurring at each of the schools, and most importantly, 5) teachers were willing to go on record to share their experiences of parental involvement with me as a teacher researcher.

A letter was written to each school principal explaining the research, requesting consent to conduct the research with teachers at their school, and requesting assistance in identifying potential candidates to interview. Within days of sending the letter, the principals were contacted by telephone in order to introduce myself, and to enlist their support in suggesting teachers who might be willing to participate. Five out of the six principals shared the letter with the teachers on staff (the sixth principal preferred I contact the teachers on my own. I approached one teacher that I knew at that particular school and she gave me another contact name). Once the principals shared the letter, they forwarded names of interested teachers to my attention. A letter was mailed to each interested teacher and followed up with a telephone call.

The Participants

The intention was to interview one primary and one intermediate teacher from each of the six schools. However, due to teacher unavailability data was gathered from nine teachers. These nine teachers have a combined 184 years of teaching experience. What follows is a brief description of each

of the schools and the participants interviewed (names of individuals and schools have been changed to ensure confidentiality).

Blair Elementary is an affluent west side school with 565 children. It is primarily comprised of Caucasian students, with about one third of the students Asian. There is a high level of parental involvement; often both parents are involved, as their schedules are flexible. There are many professional and academic parents in the community surrounding Blair Elementary. Kate is presently teaching a grade five class. She has fifteen years of full-time teaching experience, half at the primary level and half at the intermediate level. She has also worked as an intermediate consultant at the School Board, has taught art at the high school level, and has worked as an enrichment teacher and with children who have learning disabilities. She taught at Blair for two years.

Ferris Elementary is a middle class west-side school with 422 students. This middle class community has a number of families who are living near poverty (high percentage of single parent families and subsidized housing). The majority of students are Caucasian (about 90%) and the majority of ethnic students are Greek. Fifteen to twenty per cent of the students come from outside of the school community due to the late French immersion program offered at Ferris. There is an active and committed parent group.

The teachers at Ferris were jointly interviewed. Joan is presently teaching grades three and four and has twenty-four years of teaching experience. All except one year have been as a primary teacher. Joan has taught at Ferris for about eleven years and lives in the community. Pat is a late French immersion teacher, presently teaching a grade six immersion class. She has taught grades five to twelve. She has been in the elementary school system for twelve years, seven of which have been teaching at Ferris.

Stave Elementary is a partially funded inner-city, downtown, west-side school with a fairly transient community. There are 427 students. About half of the students are from Eastern European countries, many are refugees. There are Intermediate ESL reception classes at Stave Elementary. There is a fair amount of parental involvement. Silvia is presently teaching kindergarten. She has nine years of full-time teaching experience in primary, as a kindergarten, learning assistance and ESL teacher. Silvia has been teaching at Stave for nine years. Elizabeth is presently teaching an intermediate ESL Reception class. She has taught primary for twelve years, and intermediate for eight years (the last three and one half years have been in an ESL reception class). Elizabeth has been teaching at Stave for three years.

Valley Elementary is a more affluent east-side school with 297 students. About 20% of the students are ESL. Parents in the community are supportive of teachers and leave teaching up to them. Angie has taught mostly primary for twenty-seven years. Angie has been teaching at Valley for eight years. Lori is presently teaching a grade seven class. She has taught grades one to seven for thirty-four years, has been a physical education consultant and coached gymnastics in high school. Lori has been teaching at Valley for nine years.

Cameron Elementary is primarily a middle class east-side school with a mixture of types of people and income levels. There are 237 students, and a portion of special needs students partially due to wheelchair accessibility. Matt is presently teaching a grade seven class. He taught special education for six years, about ten years in primary and three years in intermediate. He has been teaching at Cameron for nine years.

Eastview Elementary is an inner city school on the east side of Vancouver. There are 219 students, around 60% are First Nations and almost 40% are Asian. There are many single-parent families on social assistance. There is a phenomenal amount of support for the school from private donors and from community volunteers. Janet has taught thirteen years at the primary level and eleven years at the intermediate level. For

twenty-two years of her teaching career, she has taught at inner city schools. For two years she also taught an intermediate ESL reception class in an affluent west-side school.

Method of Data Analysis

A way to analyze and interpret the transcripts is to conduct a thematic analysis (Van Manen, 1990). Thematic analysis of qualitative human science research is not “an unambiguous and fairly mechanical application of some frequency count or coding of selected terms in transcripts or texts” (p. 78). I was intrigued by Van Manen (1990) and Mishler’s (1986) view that we treat interview responses as stories or narratives rather than as separate responses to be coded in a standardized manner. Mishler (1986) and Labov’s (1982) approach to analyzing interviews is to focus on a story from the various stories within the transcripts or to focus on one episode within a story. Core plots of stories are abstracted in order to facilitate a discussion and comparison of stories. The purpose of these stories is to come to know the situation as a whole, complex experience. Winter (1991) proposes “fictional-critical writing” as a method of interpreting the volume of data collected in interview transcripts. He suggests that researchers make a set of general notes elucidating an initial set of themes and to compose a story which “attempts to provide a

summary of the relationships between (and the implications of) these themes" (p. 252) Winter (1986, 1989) further suggests that fictional forms are appropriate for interpreting data because "they can easily convey ambiguity, complexity, and ironic relationships between multiple viewpoints" (Winter, 1991, p. 252). The "plurality of voices" (Winter, 1988, 236) implicit and explicit in the story interact to offer the reader the opportunity to interpret the text according to his or her own experiences, values, attitudes and predilections. Not just to interpret, but to ask questions of the contradictions that arise from the story. The story is then read by a number of readers who give their interpretation of the story, which combine to provide an overall interpretation.

The reader may question the nature of reality in the stories created by interpreting the transcripts and further question, "Whose reality is the story?" Winter (1988), in discussing reality in story, suggests that when people read or relay a story, they are actually reconstructing and reinterpreting reality and alternatives so there is no ultimate reality for the story. Van Manen (1990) further proposes.

It is important to realize that it is not of great concern whether a certain experience actually happened in exactly that way. We are less concerned with the factual accuracy of an account than with the plausibility of an account – whether it is true to our living sense of it (p. 65).

I decided to describe and reflect on teachers' lived experience by way of hermeneutic phenomenological writing. Van Manen (1990) explains hermeneutic phenomenology:

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive hermeneutic methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. The implied contradiction may be resolved if one acknowledges that the (phenomenological) "facts" of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the "facts" of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process (pp. 180-181).

I began interpreting the transcripts and my journal entries by looking for the tensions that exist for teachers. Three themes emerged – 1) the "ability" of parents (availability, stability, dependability and capability), 2) teacher's comfort level (confidence, trust, confidentiality and defining boundaries), and 3) teacher professionalism (parent power, parents and curriculum, teacher as expert, teacher control, and teacher as educator of parents). I captured some of these tensions through the use of hermeneutic phenomenological writing. The intention of the stories is to provide a whole, more complex understanding of the themes and to highlight some of the complexities behind teachers' decisions to involve or not to involve

parents. Along with the stories, direct quotes from the transcriptions are inserted to further interpret the research findings.

CHAPTER 3

What Research Says About Parental Involvement

“One parent is worth a thousand teachers.”

-Old Chinese Proverb

Historical Perspective

Because of the new publicity regarding parent involvement and the new programs developed for working with parents, society may think that the idea of parent involvement is new. However, society is encountering a renewed interest in parents. Educators are surprised to learn that the concern for parent involvement has its roots deep in history. John Locke (1632-1704) recognized the importance of parental examples and advised parents to spend time observing their children (Locke, in Osborn, 1975). He believed that all ideas developed from experience and that both family and teachers provided valuable experiences to enhance the child's young mind. In his book, *Emile*, Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) discusses the importance of beginning the child's education at birth and suggests that the real educators are mothers and fathers. He states, "A child will be better

brought up by a wise father however limited, than by the cleverest teacher in the world" (Boyd, 1956, p. 18). Pestalozzi (1747-1827), influenced by Rousseau's work, also stressed the importance of parents in their child's education. He wrote: "If I can only in some slight degree succeed in making the Art of education begin in the sanctuary of home, more than it now does . . . I shall see my greatest hopes fulfilled" (1894, pp. 190-191).

In the context of the US for example, during the late 1800s, parents and teachers became involved in many services and activities due to the establishment of the Congress of Parents and Teachers (the PTA). The association served as a communication link between school and home. Teachers commonly visited homes and met with groups of parents to discuss child rearing practices (Herwig, 1982). In the early 1920s, parent involvement and education changed considerably. Funding was provided by state and federal sources, and independent school districts were supported by local tax money and tuition fees. Universities established programs to meet goals such as researching the development of young children, training professionals to provide services to young children, and disseminating information and education of parents. Herwig (1982) points out that most of these programs for young children during the period of the 1920s typically involved middle-class parents. Poorer families received this

middle-class advice by an "authority" and always placed the teacher as the expert.

An avalanche of research and intervention efforts began in the late 1950s and early 1960s to explore the relationships of early experience, poverty, and compensatory education. These compensatory programs included a parent involvement component. In 1965, the Head Start program was initiated to give all children equal environmental opportunities, despite their economic situation (Braun & Edwards, 1972, pp. 245-246). Parents were actively involved in this program from its start as research was indicating that parent involvement and family background were positively correlated with academic success.

In the 1970s, researchers began to question the model on which these intervention parent programs were developed. The model was referred to as the "deficit model" and it questioned the fact that the goals of the programs were to impart middle-class parenting styles and values to lower-class parents. People criticized the deficit model as being one in which professionals were knowledge-givers and parents knowledge receivers (Kasting, 1990). The shift moved more towards a collaborative model. The position taken was that professional knowledge was different from the knowledge of parents; it was not superior, but complementary. The

"delegation model" of schooling (Seeley, 1989) which allowed parents to leave the education of their children up to the schools, began changing to a "parent involvement paradigm" in which parent involvement was seen as a necessity and the school as a collaborative learning environment.

The Benefits of Parent Involvement

The research that exists today (*i.e.*, Comer, 1986; Davies, 1991, 1995; Epstein, 1991, 1995; Fullan, 1991; Hester, 1989; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Johnston & Slotnik, 1985) is overwhelmingly clear: when parents play a positive role in their children's education, children do better in school. This is true regardless of a parent's education, family income, race or ethnic background. In general, major benefits of parent involvement include higher grades and test scores, positive attitudes and behaviour, more successful academic programs and more effective schools. Henderson (1988) indicates that parents in frequent contact with the school have higher achieving children than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents have infrequent contact (p. 148-153). Henderson and Berla (1994) reviewed sixty-six studies involving parent involvement and student achievement and found that, when parents are involved in their children's education at home they do better in school. When parents are involved at school, their children go farther in school and schools they go to are better

(p. 23-152). In Henderson's (1987) words, "The evidence is beyond dispute: parent involvement improves student achievement" (p. 1).

On the basis of the research, Ministries of Education throughout Canada acknowledge the need and value of parental involvement and have initiated a variety of activities to enhance the role of parents and community members as educational partners. For example, Manitoba's *Renewing Education: New Directions* (1995) document advises parents of their roles and responsibilities and ensures that parent views are clearly represented. The document states "when parents and community members are involved directly in educational programs, students, parents, schools, and the community receive significant benefits" which include:

- improved academic performance and student behaviour
- improved working environments for educators
- strengthened community networks (Manitoba Education and Training, 1995, p. 23).

British Columbia's *A Framework for Learning* (1990) document, urges parents to take an active role in their child's education by "supporting and helping to shape the school system's goals, and for sharing in the education of their children" (p. 96).

A brief list below, cited in Wolfendale (1992) from Rivalland (1989), reiterates the rationale or benefits for fostering parental involvement in schools by:

- ♦ giving children a more effective learning environment, made possible through an increased adult-pupil ratio
- ♦ providing schools with extra personnel and human resources
- ♦ giving parents new insights and understanding about their children, as they build bridges between home learning and school learning
- ♦ providing schools with parents who are knowledgeable about school needs (p. 57).

Besides the myriad of research that reiterates the benefits of involving parents, there exists much research on the level of involvement and strategies that may be used by educators and administrators to increase the amount of parental involvement.

Levels of Parental Involvement

The literature on parental involvement has a near consensus on the levels of parental involvement: (1) family responsibilities at home; (2) communications from schools; (3) volunteering in the schools; (4) involvement in learning activities at home and in the schools; and (5) involvement in decision making (*i.e.*, Comer & Haynes, 1993; Epstein, 1988;

Epstein & Dauber, 1991). From extensive work with parents, administrators, and teachers, Epstein (1995) redefines the types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and adds a sixth level, collaborating with the community). Each type of involvement is presented in three tables (see Appendix C). Table 1 provides examples of practices, Table 2 presents particular challenges for successful implementation and needed redefinitions of some basic principles of involvement, and Table 3 documents different results various educational partners are likely to observe with each type of “school, family, community partnership” (p. 704-708).

Along with defining the levels of involvement, is a discussion defining the term parent involvement. Epstein’s (1995) reference to “school-family-community partnerships,” Davis’ (1991) reference to “family involvement” and Gareau and Sawatzky’s (1995) reference to “parent-school collaboration” have emerged as more perceptive terms. Partnership, collaboration and family are broader and more inclusive terms to accommodate the changing perspectives and the restructuring of society. These new terms focus on the relationship between home and school and parents and educators working together towards common goals. Regardless

of the term used, all fall under the umbrella of parental involvement – the term that I choose to use as it is the language of schools.

There have been numerous attempts to derive lessons about parent involvement, but most of these attempts have focused on the types of tactics that can be used to increase involvement (*i.e.*, Burns, 1993; D'Angelo and Adler, 1991; McAfee, 1993; Nettles, 1991; Olmstad, 1991). However, St. John, Griffith & Allen-Haynes (1997) suggest that these “prescriptive tactics” do not work for educators “without reflecting critically on their own actions” (p. 73). They found that the various tactics suggested by researchers “created contradictions and ambiguities that impeded meaningful change” (p. 73) and suggest that a new approach is needed with a focus on “deeper issues – the communicative and reflective experiences of parents and educators who are involved in restructuring” (p. 73).

Generally, educators have not been enthusiastic about parent participation in curriculum development, instruction, or school governance. Williams (1984) reported that they supported other forms of parent involvement, such as assisting with homework or tutoring children, but they felt that teachers should give parents ideas about how to work together on such activities. However, parents expressed interest in taking a more active role than professionals were ready to provide.

Finding the Right Balance

The role of parental involvement continues to range from the deficit model to one of shared accountability. Coulombe (1995) reports that parental involvement is often wanted by schools "only when it is needed" (p. 71). Most teachers want parents to be involved in specific ways and at specific times. Some teachers do not want any parent involvement in their classroom. This total control of parental involvement by the school represents one extreme. Another extreme is represented by parents who want to run the school, including control over all expenditures, hiring and firing of staff, and curriculum selection. Although we would like to believe that reality is somewhere in between, the fact remains that each teacher and each parent varies in their views of the necessity and degree of meaningful parental involvement. The quest for the right balance of parental involvement in educational settings is not easily attained.

According to Epstein (1995), "just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful about trying" (p. 703). Sufficient research would seem to draw teachers' attention to various practices designed to increase the amount of involvement occurring in schools. Nevertheless, individual teachers, schools,

and school systems have experienced various challenges when trying to involve parents in the education of their children. The difficulties must be understood in order to be rectified.

Instructional Parental Involvement

Almost any form of parental involvement can be seen as meaningful, significant and worthwhile. Sattes (1989) indicates that almost any form of parent involvement appears to be beneficial to improving some aspect of a student's performance. However, not all types of involvement will improve student academic achievement. According to Epstein (1995), there exists a "misperception that any practice that involves families will raise children's achievement test scores. Certain practices are more likely than others to influence students academically and others affect attitude and behaviour" (p. 707). One could make an assumption that there might not be as many behavioural or attitudinal problems with students if their academic needs are being met (a child's academic program is being adapted, modified or enriched to accommodate his or her learning needs). If this were true, how can parents be involved to support students instructionally?

King (1996), discusses the meaningfulness of parental involvement with student achievement. He distinguishes between parent involvement and parent volunteerism. King (1996) states,

parents who are involved with their children's learning may donate time to the school but that is volunteerism, not parental involvement . . . parent involvement is the carrying out of defined responsibilities that have been worked out between parent and teacher in support of student performance . . . It is not charity (p. 2).

Therefore, according to King (1996), involvement that is meaningful to student achievement is 'parental involvement' and involvement that does not directly benefit the child educationally is "parent volunteerism". Fullan (1991) also characterizes meaningful parental involvement by referring to "instructional related involvement" (pp. 229-237) and "non-instructional forms of parent involvement" (pp. 237-243) and summarizes that there is little evidence to suggest non-instructional parent involvement affects student learning in the school. Whereas there is much evidence supporting parent involvement in instructionally related activities at home and/or at school benefits children. King (1996) further believes that "schools need intimate parental involvement with the curriculum: helping to decide and develop it; taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it; and enforcing participation of the student in it. This is parental involvement that increases student performance." (King, 1996, p. 2) The general message from King (1996) and Fullan (1991) is that by establishing parental involvement there is a positive correlation with student achievement because it is ultimately more gratifying for students and parents.

There is so much that can be done in schools to increase parental involvement. In light of the previous discussion, when I refer to purposeful parental involvement in schools, I speak of the type of involvement that enlists the support of parents in collaborating with teachers to assist with student instruction and learning. My research will focus on the challenges facing teachers in establishing purposeful parental involvement programs and the implications of this type of involvement.

Challenges Teachers' Face with Parent Involvement in Schools

The idea of parents assisting their children's education by working with schools has been the subject of much debate. On the one hand there is the interest of educators and parents and evidence of the idea's usefulness, yet on the other hand there are serious barriers to its implementation. Moles (1982) synthesizes the barriers that may limit the extent of home-school communication and parent cooperation with schools:

Many parents face competing demands of work and family life, come from different cultural backgrounds, and feel mistrust and anxiety when dealing with school staff. For their part, many teachers also face competing demands at school and at home, lack training for dealing with parents, and may have difficulty relating to culturally different families (1982, p. 45).

The challenges noted by Moles (1982) may be considered trivial in comparison to those presented a decade later by Wolfendale (1992). In her

book *Empowering Parents and Teachers: Working for Children*, she highlights the legitimate concerns stemming from teacher attitudes towards involving parents in the classroom:

- ◆ That parents in the classroom will undermine teachers' professionalism.
- ◆ That parents' views are not necessarily well informed and therefore a clash with teachers may be inevitable.
- ◆ That the active parents are a vocal, self-selecting group who are not representative of all parents (pp. 10-11).

Other barriers, some already mentioned, are addressed by the action research undertaken by Johnston and Slotnik's studies (1985) of an alternative "cooperative" elementary school. This school successfully involved parents in classroom participation and decision making (each parent spent three hours per week in the classroom). Johnston and Slotnik discuss the problems inherent at the school for the teachers:

- ◆ time constraints to accommodate parental requests
- ◆ finding a balance between allowing able parents to function independently in creative and effective ways and supporting parents who are less assertive or confident
- ◆ less teacher privacy as evening phone calls become more frequent and place teachers perpetually "on call"

- ♦ teachers are more privy to parent-child relationships which provide the teacher with a whole range of insights and information which rarely simplify matters
- ♦ parents in the classroom often overreact and make much of an incident that a child might have handled quite differently and quite adequately if left alone; teachers need to be highly organized and flexible as parents could cancel because of an unexpected occurrence
- ♦ maintaining consistency with student behaviour is challenging because students receive mixed messages from the various adults

Challenges teachers face is shown through Epstein & Becker's (1982) research concerning teacher practices. Many teachers commented on the time required by the teacher and wondered whether it was worth it. Teachers described problems associated with involvement unreliability of volunteers, parents lack of training for teaching children, and parents failing to follow through with activities at home. Teachers were concerned that students might not develop responsibility if parents assume too much. Other teachers expressed concern that parents have problems that interfere with a teacher's request for assistance. Some teachers admitted that they fear parents and that this fear inhibits the kinds of programs teachers attempt. Overall, "some teachers are very positive about parent involvement; others

have been discouraged by their attempts to communicate and work with parents” (Epstein & Becker, 1982, p. 103) The authors acknowledge that teacher commitment and parent commitment is essential to successful parent involvement programs. They also suggest that teacher attitude, training and experience has a lot to do with whether they choose to develop parent involvement programs. They further suggest that teachers need to understand the effects of parent involvement in order to improve or invest the time to develop such programs.

Various disadvantages of parent participation in the classroom have been noted by Wolfendale (1992), Moles (1982), Johnston & Slotnik (1985), and Becker & Epstein (1982). In light of the challenges, Johnston & Slotnik (1985) declared with enthusiasm at the end of their article that parent participation in the classroom is “really worth the effort.” The reason the above studies are included here is to draw attention to the eight to eighteen-year-old research. Amazingly, many of the same challenges are acknowledged by teachers in the chapters that follow. What is depressing and discouraging is that what was written in the 1980s continues to be true today. The above mentioned articles read as though they could have been written today. The value of including this research is that it shows how little progress has been made, despite the recognition, the knowledge, and

the rhetoric about the importance of parent involvement over the last number of decades. Addressing the challenges noted by teachers in a reflective and careful way is crucial if there is to be progress with parental involvement in schools.

This chapter has discussed some of the existing literature regarding the benefits of parental involvement; it refers to the various researchers that have developed strategies to increase the level of involvement and explains some of the barriers that exist for teachers in implementing effective parental involvement. Epstein (1991, 1995) notes that a gap exists between the high rhetoric of the importance of parental involvement and the practices for putting programs into place. Bastiani (1993) questions the rhetoric of the term partnership by noting the complexities of “unscrambling the relationship between rhetoric and reality between strongly held beliefs, politically motivated claims and the realities of everyday, lived experience, between what we say and what we do” (p. 111). As with my inquiry regarding parental involvement in my classroom, I began questioning the discrepancy that existed between my belief and my practice. Many ideas are available for educators to include parents in the education of their children, yet the amount of action taken by teachers and schools remains sporadic. With the amount of evidence that exists

substantiating the benefits of parental involvement and the prescribed strategies that may be undertaken to increase parental involvement, the question remains why is it not occurring on a more widespread level?

Research has failed to reveal a more thoughtful understanding of the reality of parents in the classroom to better understand the complexities teachers face. Instructional parental involvement, especially involvement in the school and classroom, may be most difficult for teachers to accept or address because of the direct impact on teachers and their programs. Researchers need to unravel a more thoughtful understanding of this type of purposeful involvement not only in discovering the challenges and implications that exist for teachers, but in shedding more light into the choices teachers make as they reflect upon the wisdom of their practice.

The intent of the following chapters is to gain a better understanding of the tensions that exist for teachers when trying to involve parents in the type of involvement that has a more direct impact on student learning and thus is considered to be more meaningful and significant. However, before proceeding to the challenges inherent to teachers when involving parents in the classroom, I would like to take the opportunity to state what teachers in the present study perceived to be the benefits of parental involvement. These benefits were distinctly articulated by the participants.

Teachers Voice the Benefits of Parental Involvement

The teachers participating in the present research pointed to considerable benefits that could accrue from involving parents in the formal education of their children. The benefits contained within the transcripts can be categorized in four areas – student benefits, parent benefits, teacher and program benefits, and community benefits.

The teachers identified the social and academic advantages for students due to parental involvement in the classroom. Socially the students have the opportunity to be introduced to another person's qualities – their mannerisms, accents and sense of humour. Academically parental involvement provides students with more personalized instruction to meet more student needs. It provides more depth to specific content areas, thus, providing a more enriching program for students.

The teachers also recognized both the social and academic benefits for parents. Socially parents are able to observe children in a social context to see how their children interact with their peers. Academically parents come away with a much stronger understanding of how the school system works and the kind of structures that are needed in classrooms. Parents are more likely to be able to assist their child with what the child is studying in school because they are better informed. It was also noted that some

parents, in light of their experience in the classroom, realize that they enjoy working with kids and sometimes pursue a career working with children.

The benefits to teachers and the program are also evident within the transcripts. Socially some teachers enjoy the adult company and the friendships that are often a result of frequent interactions. Academically teachers realize that they are able to plan more interesting activities when another adult is there to assist, it frees teachers to work more with small groups as it reduces the adult/child ratio and utilizing parent talent or expertise enriches the classroom program beyond the capability of one teacher.

The community benefit is primarily based on good public relations. When parents work in classrooms, they are likely to understand more about teaching philosophy and appreciate what is going on in schools. One teacher mentioned, "I think that most parents who work in classrooms come away with a much stronger sense of the kind of structures that are needed, even for an environment that seems loose" (Appendix B, p. 167). The belief amongst teachers is that involved parents are more educated about the school system and are more likely to be supportive of education.

Despite these clear benefits, numerous challenges were stated. A thoughtful discussion and understanding of these challenges is crucial to any

future success and a more widespread acceptance of parental involvement in schools. The following chapters shed light into the complexities of involving parents in the classroom program.

CHAPTER 4

The “Ability” of Parents – Stability, Availability, Dependability and Capability

The Telephone Call

It was 4:00. I was sitting in my classroom in a meeting with a parent when an announcement came over the P.A. “Ms. Spencer, telephone, line one.” I unwillingly excused myself to answer the phone. “Hello, Laura Spencer speaking.”

I heard an angry female voice. “This is Andrea, Ian’s mom. How dare you treat my child like that?”

In a puzzled voice I answered, “Excuse me?”

She replied with anger, “If he says he’s sick that means he’s sick and he doesn’t have to explain himself to anybody.”

I couldn’t believe she was yelling at me. I had already invested so much time with this parent and her child. I’d met with her numerous times over my lunch hour, after school and on the phone. He was already two years behind his age group. She was supposed to be helping him by ensuring that he come to school regularly to help him with his learning

gaps. Although Ian was new to our school, his attendance problem was documented from his previous school. After numerous conversations with myself and the support she received through the school psychologist, she was well aware of Ian's needs. I expected Andrea to be supporting me on the issue of attendance.

Then I remembered who I was dealing with. This was a lady who stormed in one day after school and screamed at Ian's grade three teacher, in front of the students, before she demanded he be removed from her class and placed in my grade two class. This was the same mother who hung up the phone on our secretary because she was furious that the secretary had asked Ian why nobody picks up the phone in the morning when she phones for the safe arrival program. This was the mother who didn't show up for her appointments with the psychologist and didn't even phone to cancel.

I thought that Andrea and I had connected more than others. I came to know a lot about her own school experience, her home life and her fears and desire to protect Ian from experiencing the negativity that she experienced in her schooling. She was invited to visit the classroom anytime throughout the day but she never showed up. However, we met on numerous occasions and she received instruction from me on how she could support Ian's learning at home. I was wrong to think that she would change

her ways and treat me differently.

Earlier that day, Ian arrived at school just before lunch. He had been away thirty-two days so far in the school year, most of which were half days so I viewed it more like he was away at least fifty days. He entered the class and, as usual, didn't have a note or even tell me why he was absent, so I asked him. He replied with his common answer, "I had a stomach ache."

I decided to reply somewhat sarcastically, "You mean to tell me you've had a stomach ache now for thirty-two days?" He didn't respond. Later on in the afternoon when I went to speak with him privately at his desk, he told me that he got new roller blades yesterday and that he was out roller blading and got a scrape on his knee.

However, on the phone Andrea was trying to tell me that he had a fever of 102 yesterday and that neither she or he had to explain to anybody why she chose to keep Ian at home. With Ian's story in mind, I began my own tirade. I told her that she could lie to herself if she wanted to, but I wasn't prepared to accept her lies anymore. I knew that Ian had been out roller blading last night and it would appear unusual that a child would be out roller blading with a fever of 102. She accused me of checking up on them and I told her that I had more important things to do on my weekends and that Ian had told me himself about roller blading. I was shaking while

she was screaming at me but I wanted her to take ownership for her parenting inadequacies and her lies. I had had enough and I let her know.

I guess I thought she'd come to realize that she was wrong and admit it, but she continued to scream at me and argue until I finally said, "I have someone who made an appointment with me waiting in my classroom. I refuse to be spoken to in the way that you are choosing to speak to me. If you want to set up a meeting with me when you've calmed down, I will be more than happy to meet with you. I need to go now, Andrea. Goodbye." I went back to my scheduled meeting but the telephone call continued to bother me throughout my meeting and throughout the evening.

I went to school early the next morning to speak to Dale, the principal, but he was at a principal's meeting. I was dreading Ian's arrival to school. Would I question his tardiness or absence? Would he even come to school today? When I saw Dale at lunch time, he asked to speak with me after I finished my lunch. We met in his office and he informed me that Andrea had phoned the superintendent of the school division. I couldn't believe she had phoned the superintendent - - did she bother telling him how volatile she was and how I wasn't prepared to give her the satisfaction of verbally abusing me? Did she tell him that her child had missed over thirty days of school and she didn't want the school to care? Was the

superintendent aware of Andrea's past experiences with the grade three teacher and with the secretary? I don't really know what she said to the superintendent but Dale assured me not to worry because the superintendent was already aware of this parent's past history. He suggested that we get the counsellor to deal with the situation. I realized that I had invested a lot of time with this family, hoping to make a difference; sadly realizing I hadn't.



Stability

The stability (mental health) of parents is a sub theme that falls under the ability of parents. One teacher, who works at a school in an affluent community with a lot of parental involvement stated that teachers, "have to believe that parents want the best for their children and believe they are competent" (Appendix B, p. 135). Although teachers want to assume this, a number of discussions arose throughout the interviews that contradict the assumption. The following comments demonstrate why teachers consciously make a decision not to involve parents in the classroom:

I had a parent once who wanted to change the way kids learn to read

to capital letters because that's how comic books are written because that was a major reading resource for children. So in grade one, children shouldn't be introduced to lower case letters. And he was quite adamant. I did try to involve him, I did try to encourage him because I thought well, it might help him to understand that children are capable of reading lower case letters and that there actually are books besides comic books. In the end, it wasn't possible for him to understand. When he was in the room, he did things such as noticing where I hung his daughter's picture; if it wasn't in a prominent enough spot, he would get upset and I realized eventually that it wasn't possible for him to have a balanced view. I also think that parent volunteers are there to make it easier and not there to cause more stress. So I think there's a personal limit. I also think that parent volunteers are there to make it easier and not there to cause more stress. I think there's a personal limit. If you know a parent is available to work in the classroom but as the teacher you don't feel so good about that, you have to monitor your feeling and decide that maybe it isn't worth the work to involve that parent in that way (Appendix B, p. 168).

Another experienced teacher echoed the above feelings about the importance of knowing when not to include parents:

You have a child come into your room. The child is going to be a handful, socially and emotionally, as well as behaviour and academics and you think, "OK I've got my year cut out for me with this one." Then three weeks later, at meet the teacher night, the parent walks in, that says it all. The apple does not fall far from the tree. So there's that side of it. You're dealing with someone whose own adult social, emotional, behavioural or academic skills may not be appropriate for a classroom setting too (Appendix B, p. 226).

On occasion, Social Services is involved with various families. This adds another level of concern for teachers.

If Social Services is involved, I am sometimes the last person to know that. You eventually find out about it, but you might not find out about it right away. I won't expand anymore. I think if you know our clientele, I probably can write a book about most of the people in my class. When you speak of parental involvement I can barely keep the load straight with who is doing what of the kids in my classroom, you add the parent factor and I think it would just overload everybody. . . that's why we just try to keep things simple (Appendix B, p. 246).

Not all teachers have experienced unstable parents, but they are well aware of their presence:

Over the years I've seen some pretty crazy parents in the school, who are maybe a bit mentally unstable, that you would have to be really careful about but none of them have been parents of my students who I would feel uncomfortable with. No, I can't say I've ever had any bad experiences or even uncomfortable ones. I guess I've been really quite lucky (Appendix B, p. 194).

The issue that tends to underlie the comments contained within the theme of stability is that teachers often choose wisely not to include parents to better support the child. However, Epstein (in Brandt, 1989) estimates that only about 2-5% of parents are "unreachable" (p.26) and Comer (1986) proposes that regardless of socioeconomic status, parents can be successfully involved in the schools (Comer, 1986). What needs to be asked of these statements is what is the role and responsibility of a teacher? How much time should a teacher invest to reduce the percentage of parents that are

“unreachable”? When do teachers stop trying before they realize that the effort is not worth the return?

Availability

Although the intention or willingness to include parents in the process of educating children exists, the availability of parents is another area that hampers the degree of involvement. Often it is an issue of language, or an inflexible work schedule or the way parents see their role and the teacher’s role. The first quote demonstrates the ESL issue as well as the inflexible work schedule:

We have such a large ESL population and most of those parents are taking English courses themselves and a lot of them are in school from 9:00–3:00 so I think there just aren’t that many parents who are available. I think for an occasional trip they would rearrange their schedule or whatever to try and come but I think a lot of the families are really families in stress and the parents don’t have that much time to offer (Appendix B, p. 187).

Other teachers have commented that some parents’ personal experience with school may prevent them from becoming available:

I think a lot of the parents work and they can’t be involved. If it’s involvement in the classroom, they can’t be involved. Some don’t speak the language so they don’t feel comfortable being involved and for some, school wasn’t a positive thing so it’s hard for them to be involved (Appendix B, p. 233).

I think some parents are scared of school. Maybe they didn’t play the

dragon. School was hard for them. In particular a lot of parents who come from another country maybe haven't had the educational opportunities we have here. For those parents, school is almost a scary place (Appendix B, p. 145).

Yet another teacher highlights that some parents simply don't make themselves available because it is not their job to teach, nor has it been worth the effort to enlist their support:

Some parents just figure that it's our job to teach kids and that's OK if that's how they feel. And lots of parents can't volunteer because they are working full time. Other ones have little ones at home and I used to allow them to come in . . . but it upsets the whole process, babies crying, them wondering around. It's too distracting. There are some conditions where it's not really helpful (Appendix B, p. 175).

(Our neighbourhood assistant) always used to send home questionnaires for the parents to fill out like which areas they would like to help in, what is their area of expertise, is there anything they are able to teach or would like to teach students and that type of thing but the response has been low and has hardly been worth doing (Appendix B, p. 179).

The availability of parents as they struggle to earn a living, their inflexible work schedules, their experience and comfort level with schools and not considering "teaching" as part of their job are factors of "availability" that contribute to less involvement.

Dependability

When parents make themselves available to assist at school, the issue of dependability emerges. The implication for teachers is that they need to be very flexible:

What usually happens is, people have a sense that they'd like to volunteer. And then I think they realize that Tuesday morning is free so they'll come Tuesday morning. So I'll set things up. . . and it works really nicely while volunteers came regularly. But then what happened was of course, you know, Christmas comes up or Thanksgiving dinner or things like that. So people wane. As so what I've tried to find is the structure that's loose that satisfies the kids that keeps the volunteers busy. But it would be easier to have the type of structure . . . and someone who is really capable, who's not challenging and very consistent (Appendix B, p. 162).

As with any volunteer they are going to show up when it's convenient for them but I've got it set up so they can come in any time and just get started because it's one to one reading tutoring which they can do while we're (teacher and student teacher) teaching the kids, it doesn't matter (Appendix B, p. 171).

Along with understanding the importance of being flexible, a teacher also recognize that a back-up plan is often needed, which results in extra work for the teacher:

If you know that you have someone every Tuesday, it's a bit easier to plan for that and it's not a big issue; whereas you don't want to go out of your way to plan something for a parent who won't always show up. It's more work in a way. Then you almost have to have two things ready. One if the parent shows up and one if the parent doesn't. It becomes one extra thing to do (Appendix B: p. 183).

The following comment links safety with dependability:

It's really important if I am expecting somebody to come that they do come or that they let me know if something has come up. Two of us took our classes swimming at the Aquatic Centre on Friday. The other teacher had five parents who said on the notice they would be there. When we went to leave the school, the teacher had three parents. We got to the Aquatic Centre and two parents, husband and wife who said they would be in the water swimming, just suddenly left and said it's too nice a day to go swimming. I didn't see them go but the other teacher came over to me and said so and so they just left. I said, "Well, go back and get them, we need them . . . I think it's important that they understand, for some things, their presence is absolutely necessary (Appendix B, p. 196).

In addressing the issue of parent dependability, in order for teachers to involve parents in their classroom program, flexibility and a back-up plan is essential.

Capability

Teachers are also looking for capable and flexible parents – those who have knowledge or some level of expertise to share as well as those who have innate teaching skills. Parents who are capable of adding to the classroom program are more likely to be called upon. As Late French Immersion teacher said, "I'm not going to train parents how to teach the kids in my classroom. That's not something that I'm interested in doing. I'm interested in them sharing their knowledge with the kids when their knowledge is superior and more detailed than mine in certain specific areas"

(Appendix B, p. 149). On the other hand, one teacher who works with an ESL reception class recognizes the benefit of accepting the “imperfect” volunteer:

I know a lot of ESL parents are worried that their English isn't good enough and I even had a Korean student teacher who did her twenty-hour ESL practicum with me and some schools refused to take her because English wasn't her first language and I just said to the faculty associate, “I just feel she's a wonderful model for my students and the fact that she has the courage to be in Canada only a year or two and be pursuing her studies. To me, that's the most wonderful thing of all. I just thought it was great and she was wonderful with the kids and they had a hard time placing her and I just feel that a lot of teachers are quite critical and that if we just wait for the perfect person or that perfect volunteer, we'll miss out (Appendix B, p. 189).

Teachers have different criteria for deciding what they are looking for in those willing to contribute to their classroom program. Regardless of a volunteer's knowledge base, a teacher's view of one's capability is linked to the volunteer's ability to be flexible and to display good management skills:

I think they have to be people that are willing to take charge, to assert themselves, to be able to see the situation and know what needs doing. I think they have to be people who are good listeners. Well, same qualities that we (teachers) all try to exhibit, like patience, I think they have to like kids (Appendix B, p. 161).

The parent has to be flexible; the parent has to understand that we might have a fire drill in the middle and that their time is as the school needs it. Once they come in and they ask me what the daily plan is and I say I think you will be doing reading and they walk in and we're doing math and they're just going to have to live with the

fact that we're doing something else; that we don't work around their schedules. They're not there to make it more rigid. They're there to help make it more flexible (Appendix B, p. 169).

The first set of challenges that contribute to preventing widespread parental involvement within the school is the teacher's perception regarding a parent's level of stability, availability, dependability and capability. What was also noted in the research, is the degree of comfort that is needed by teachers to include parents in the classroom. The following chapter addressing the theme of teacher comfort level.

CHAPTER 5

Teacher Comfort Level

Are You Sure You Want a Job There?

As the end of the school year was nearing, so too was the end of my temporary teaching contract. I knew that I could not afford to be selective in my job search as a number of teachers with continuing contracts were also given lay off notices and few positions were being posted. I applied for the sparse positions for which I was eligible, and hoped that I would be one of the lucky teachers to be granted an interview.

As I was tidying up my classroom at the end of the school day, I was called to the telephone. I was invited to attend a 4:30 interview at Linden Elementary the following day. I had attended an interview there the previous year; therefore, I knew a bit about the school community. Linden Elementary was a partial inner city school with a population of three hundred students. There was a high percentage of English as a second language learners. Many families were financially strapped, worked with inflexible schedules and were unable to offer academic support to their children. The school population was transient and the students came from

various difficult situations and backgrounds. I was somewhat unexcited about the possibility of working at Linden; however, since jobs were few and far between, I was grateful for the possibility of a potential job offer.

I went back to my classroom and, within minutes, was called to the telephone again. This time, I was asked to attend a 3:15 interview at Maple Elementary. Before applying for the job, I was informed by my current administrator that Maple Elementary was a four-year-old public school of six hundred students, established through the lobbying of community members. I was curious to find out more about the school before my interview the following day.

Around 6:30 that night, I drove to Maple Elementary to familiarize myself with the location of the school and to get "a feel" for the school and community. I noticed that the school was situated in a newly established middle to upper class neighbourhood. As I turned the bend towards the front of the school, I noticed the community announcement board congratulating the parents for the fundraising efforts. I glanced into the well lit classrooms, drove along the south side of the school, passed the busy field, drove into the full parking lot and noticed adults standing at the back entrance of the school enjoying a conversation. The school appeared to be a very active place even at night. I had accomplished what I intended to do

and was satisfied knowing where to park the following day for my interview, as I would be rushing to make my appointment. It was time to go home, make dinner and prepare for my interview.

That night, I spoke to a colleague who had a friend, Julie, who worked at Maple Elementary. She informed me that Julie often needed to justify her classroom program to parents and wrote a weekly newsletter as a means of keeping them informed. I also learned that same grade teachers planned cooperatively to combat parents comparing programs. Although Julie felt more pressure from the parents of Maple Elementary than she had experienced from the parents at other schools, she also recognized and appreciated the support.

By 3:30 the following school day, I parked the car outside of Maple Elementary and approached the school with confidence. I noticed a group of mothers sitting on a bench chatting. The front doors were open and a man in a suit was standing greeting parents and children as they were leaving the school. As I approached, I was greeted by the man who introduced himself as Don, the school principal. I was greeted with smiles as we walked down the corridor toward the office, where I was led to a chair in Don's office. He was the only staff member to interview me. We began our

conversation and before I knew it, it was 4:10, time to leave for my next interview.

By recess of the following day, most of my colleagues discovered that I attended an interview at Maple Elementary. The teasing comments began. "So you went to an interview at 'the private public school.' I went there during the day once and there were more parents in the hallway than children. The parents are involved in everything."

"Parents run the school you know. They even choose their child's teacher."

"I hope you are prepared to be teaching with the parents." "The parents in that community put a lot of pressure on the kids and the teachers."

"A special kind of teacher needs to work at Maple in order to cope with the demands of the parents."

The following day I was offered a teaching position at Maple Elementary. How would I prepare myself to teach at this school? What challenges would I face? What implications would it have on my teaching? I accepted the position wondering how well I would cope and wondering if the parents would be accepting of me.



Teacher Confidence

A teacher's confidence level is a critical component of involving parents on an instructional level in the classroom. As one teacher commented, "If you are not confident in yourself, then you are not confident to have anyone else watch you or be with you in the classroom" (Appendix B, p. 205). The following comments add to the discussion of a teacher's comfort level by addressing the flow of adults in the classroom:

I've worked with a number of people who feel very self-conscious in front of another adult; very self-conscious, to the point it's inhibiting them. I think that it's a factor for some people just having another person there, they feel uncomfortable with that because we don't have a flow. I mean, I think people would feel differently if it was such that their schools had other adults that were around all the time moving in and out, but that doesn't happen. It happens a lot for the kids moving in and out, but very seldom is there a flow of adults moving around (Appendix B, p. 159).

This sense of isolation is also captured in a comment about the nature of the teaching profession:

I think in this profession we work in a room with four walls and a door. A lot of people shut the door . . . and we do our own thing. Teaching to me is performing. I think we are quite comfortable acting and performing in front of people who are younger than us, but I don't think we are willing to drop our inhibitions and become a teacher in front of other people, especially ones we don't know. There are certain people who can work together and drop the inhibitions but for a lot of people, teaching is very insular. You are inside these four walls, you shut the door and do your magic (Appendix B, p. 221).

The second set of comments regarding a teacher's confidence level are linked to the classroom program and the possibility of being challenged or criticized when a teacher opens the classroom to parents:

I think I am pretty open about my program. I tell them why I do what I do and I also say why I don't do the things I don't do. . . If somebody ever did confront me, which I've never had happen, I'd be OK with it. We are human like everybody. I think that is the thing that some teachers are afraid of. They are afraid of getting parents involved because they are afraid they are going to get criticized. I don't worry about it. And the thing is, I guess maybe they talk about me on their own, but it doesn't hurt me (Appendix B, p. 134).

I am confident that what I am doing with kids is meaningful. I see kids excited about learning. That's important to me. And so I can do what I do and not worry about if I miss something else (Appendix B, p. 134).

Although the above teacher's confidence in herself and her program is high, there are teachers who worry about the implication of having another adult present because, "Whatever you say, there is going to be someone else hearing it and reflecting on it. Maybe that aspect might turn some teachers off in having parents in their classroom or other people to help" (Appendix B, p. 241).

Trust

Another component of a teacher's comfort level is their ability to trust parents. Obviously, the greater the trust, the more receptive teachers

are to involving parents. However, some teachers raise a concern about the “true” intentions of parents:

Be careful of the bullies or the ones who want to be in the classroom for the wrong reason (Appendix B, p. 158).

There are those that look for what’s wrong (Appendix B, p. 167).

When I first came here, I was told that the hot dog ladies got their kids in the rooms where they wanted them. So, although they were helping the school, they had a reason for doing it that maybe wasn’t just to be helpful. And I didn’t like that, but it’s not like that anymore. I think it’s partly because the kind of parents that are helping us don’t have the knowledge that they can manipulate or don’t realize that they can manipulate a bit and that’s good (Appendix B, p. 203).

On the other hand, although a teacher realizes that the perception is that parents are nosey, she understands a parent’s reasoning behind this and believes that parental involvement may actually combat this.

I think some teachers would say that parents volunteer because they are nosey. Well, I am sure there are parents who want to find out what’s going on but it’s because they care about their child. They want the best situation for their child and if you’ve got a classroom in which good educational practice is happening maybe you will be helping to educate those parents (Appendix B, p. 135).

What has been noted, is that teachers are often leery about the true intentions of parents. Even the trust factor between teacher and parent is established, and the teacher feels comfortable involving the parent in the classroom, the topic of student confidentiality adds to the discussion of teacher comfort level.

Student Confidentiality

It is accepted that students can freely discuss the students and the goings-on of the classroom with their parents daily. However, a student's perception of what is happening differs from an adult's perception of what is occurring. In order to have parents in the classroom, parents need to shift their focus for the benefit of the child having difficulty:

I think children need to be able to talk to their families about problems that they're having or how situations are played out. But the parent role there is, "How can I help my child?" it's not the problems that this other child is having and how do I think that should be managed. And I think if you allow a parent to stay in on problems solving sessions, then their attention should shift on that role of judging how that child having the difficulty should or shouldn't be treated (Appendix B, p. 151).

Parents knowing too much can be disadvantageous to a child and could result in a misuse of information. A teacher voices her concern:

A parent was volunteering in the class and used the information against a child and I had to speak to the parent and said that she wouldn't be allowed in the room if that happens again (Appendix B, p. 152).

I think that within the group, there should be a privacy that belongs to the group about sorting out problems . . . You have to be careful how much information leaks out of the classroom about a child, so that I don't think that it's legitimate to do real problem solving around issues that child has with another adult who isn't part of the sort of school support system (Appendix B, p. 151).

The privacy that teachers are continually seeking to maintain for their

students is likely to be compromised more when parents are involved in the classroom. Sometimes, parents overstep their bounds and actively seek out information to compare their child to others in the classroom.

What sort of upset me a bit was how parents would come and look at this book of reading records that parent volunteers keep when they are working with kids. They would not only look at their own child's records but they would read other child's records as if it was a competition between the parents . . . I think it's great they want to see how their child is doing, but I'm not real fond of them looking at what the neighbours' kids were doing (Appendix B, p. 174).

Because education is in the public domain, we often forget that we are dealing with private lives. Teachers feel uncomfortable when unable to protect a child's privacy. Involving parents in the classroom can infringe upon this privacy.

Defining Boundaries

Another challenge that comes into play when discussing a teacher's comfort level, is the enormity of the job and the importance of setting limits. The teacher of an inner city school feels that she has enough of a workload managing the students in her classroom and to involve families is simply overwhelming.

I think that we are so involved here with children that if we got involved with their families it would be too big a job for me to handle . . . The kind of students we have takes 100%. If we have to extend ourselves to parents, it would probably take another 100%

and I don't know if we can stretch that far . . . We have so much to do with the kids, I don't think we can stretch it to all the parents here (Appendix B, p. 243).

Involving parents to help meet the needs of students may not be a priority when considering the amount of items on your daily "To Do" list. Schools have various school wide goals and teachers have their own program goals for any given year. A teacher acknowledges that demands are enormous and prioritizing is essential.

We know there is more we should be doing and things we want to try but I think it's such a demanding job and between demands from our colleagues, demands from parents, demands from our administrator, demands from our union, no matter how good our intentions are, you just can't do it all. We know that we should be involving parents more, we know we should be going on more field trips, we know we should be doing all these things and there's just not enough hours in the day to do it all. I guess what we're having to do all the time is prioritize. We all have different goals and different things we put at the top (Appendix B, p. 197).

Even if there may be a focus to involve parents more, the momentum is often not kept over time as school and teacher priorities change.

I was thinking in my head, you could have a "raw, raw parent involvement" push. Does that ever get sustained though? It's like a burst of activity but then the person who directs it or runs it moves on, priorities change, it dies out (Appendix B, p. 222).

An aspect of defining boundaries is to acknowledge, accept and feel

comfortable setting limits.

I think I know my role, my job, after all these years and I state what my role should be in this situation or whatever situation and that's it (Appendix B, p. 225).

Organize in your mind what the boundaries are and what the limits are and state that before anyone comes in the room . . . set those limits so people know what to expect. I think the problems come up when the parent's vision of their contribution is different from the teachers (Appendix B, p. 158).

In summary, in order for teachers to consider involving parents in the classroom, several issues or concerns must be addressed. Firstly, teachers should have a relatively high level of confidence and the ability to accept challenges or criticism well. Secondly, teachers need to trust parent intentions. Thirdly, a teacher's concern regarding student confidentiality needs to be acknowledged. In addition, a teacher's ability to establish well defined boundaries for the given year, affects the amount of involvement occurring in their classroom.

CHAPTER 6

Teacher Professionalism and Parent Power

Teachers Can't Fail Children Anymore, But Parents Can!

Our class was reviewing a study guide for a social studies test when I noticed one of the students, Brenda, making a comment to her base group. By the facial expressions of those around her, I knew that her comment was worth knowing, so I curiously asked, "Brenda, what did you just say?" She paused, then replied, "Why do we even have to take tests or do anything in school? Everybody passes anyway! I hear that at our school, the only way that kids fail is if their parents fail them."

Intrigued, but worried that I may be opening up a can of worms about the retention and social promotion dilemma and the power of the voice of parents, I inquired, "What do you mean by that?"

Brenda's response stirred a lot of emotion: "Teachers can't fail children anymore, but parents can!"

What message was her statement sending to the rest of the students? Was she saying that teachers do not have the authority anymore to make educational decisions and that the decisions rest in the hands of parents?

How can parents know more than teachers about what's best for their child educationally? Eyes glued on me, I did not know how to respond.

Last year, near the end of the school year, I was perplexed by the social promotion dilemma. I had Billy in my kindergarten class who had a twin sister, Jenny, in another kindergarten class. Although Billy had many behavioural challenges, he was academically solid. Jenny, on the other hand, was "age three appropriate." Jenny's teacher, principal, speech pathologist and psychologist, in consultation with the parents, were in the process of discussing Jenny's academic needs. The school was for retention and the parents were not.

Personally, I was disturbed about the possibility of Jenny remaining in kindergarten. Why did this bother me so? My first few years of teaching I worked in a school division that was strongly against student failure. I searched my research files for articles on social promotion and retention. I felt I had to find a compelling article in Jenny's defence. I thought, "How can a twin be kept behind and another be promoted?" I couldn't stop thinking about the consequences of that decision. I chose a one page article, "Not Being Promoted from Kindergarten Is Like the Death of a Parent." "This should make the point," I marveled. Then I chose a longer article which also supported social promotion, "What Doesn't Work: Explaining

Policies of Retention in the Early Grades.” The major premise was in bold: “Retention is not good for children; it has negative effects on achievement and adjustment. A number of alternatives better address the needs of students.”

I wondered what I was supposed to do with these articles which I felt could not be dismissed. Are my colleagues going to think of me as “the one that sticks her nose into everybody else’s business” or as “the know-it-all?” I hesitated, then placed the articles in my daily planner and thought, “I’ll decide what to do with them tomorrow.”

The next day, when Billy entered the classroom, I thought of Jenny. I wondered if the articles would have any impact on the decision that was being made in consultation with a number of players (one of which, I reminded myself, was not me). I grabbed a blank paper and wrote a note that read, “Came across these articles and thought of Jenny.” I placed the articles and the memo together with a clip and walked over to the principal’s mailbox to deposit them.

After a couple of days, the principal sent me a note that read, “Need to discuss.” I eventually went to his office, we spoke briefly about the articles and he asked me for my perspective. My point was, “Without parental support, Jenny will not succeed in kindergarten, nor grade one,

two, three or four. You really have to work at getting the parents on your side. If they do not support the decision, it will be hard on everybody.” The parents were strongly against retention, and decided to get an independent assessment by a “renowned pediatrician” at a hospital. I gather they did not trust the school’s judgment. I realized that my own actions and doubts send the same message to my colleagues. Jenny spent numerous afternoons in the hospital daycare under observation. The teacher, principal, child guidance clinicians and the doctor eventually persuaded Jenny’s parents that it was in their child’s best interest to repeat Kindergarten. However, had Jenny’s parents insisted she be promoted to grade one, it would have likely been a reality.

What was it about Brenda’s comment that bothered me anyway? Last year I was promoting the importance of a parent’s decision, but now I was disturbed by the reality of the statement. Was it because I felt it implied that students no longer need to try their very best? Was it because I felt students shouldn’t know the reality of the situation? Was it because I felt it placed parents at the top of the educational decision making hierarchy? Maybe I was troubled by the notion that parents and children think that what parents say holds more clout than what teachers say. Are teachers not the educational experts?

I was forced to return to reality. Brenda's voice rang clear. "Well, is it true that the only way kids fail is if their parents fail them? Teachers can't fail children anymore. Right?" I posed a challenge, "Does anybody want to take a chance and find out?"



Parent Power

With the formation of Parent Advisory Councils and their mandate well established, what parents say and want is given careful consideration by school boards, superintendents, administrators and teachers. According to Manitoba's *Renewing Education: New Directions* (1995) document, the Advisory Councils are allowed to:

1. advise the principal on school matters as they pertain to school improvement, policies, organization, and activities, including the following: curriculum and programs, cultural and extracurricular activities, student discipline and behaviour management policies, community access to school facilities, fundraising, school closures
2. provide recommendations to the school board with respect to the process of hiring and assigning principals

3. participate in the development of the annual school plan
4. participate in the development of the school budget proposal, prior to submission to the school board
5. participate in school reviews and receive feedback on actions taken
6. promote community interest, understanding and involvement in the school and in its governance
7. establish ongoing communication with all parents of the children enrolled in the school and with community members. The council is representative of their priorities and concerns
8. establish a means of regular accountability to the school and community for involvement, activities, expenditures and recommendations (p. 24).

As parents become more aware of their rights, they become better able to assert themselves. As parents assert themselves by articulating their concerns, teachers have had to adjust and become increasingly cautious in addressing parent concerns. A teacher with thirty years of experience cautions new teachers:

A few years ago, I know that if you had a conflict with a parent you could expect the parent to win if they knew how far to go. I think that had a negative effect on the whole system, but I don't know

what it's like now . . . I guess up until this year (change in administration) I would have warned new teachers to really think how far you really wanted to push something (Appendix B, p. 213).

The relationship between teacher and parents and the distinction between the roles often becomes murky and may cause a level of frustration for both parties. Following, teachers voice their concerns regarding parents and curriculum.

Parents and Curriculum

In support of the statement from Manitoba's Ministry of Education regarding advising the principal on school matters as they pertain to curriculum and programs, King (1996) makes an even bolder statement in support of involving parents with curriculum. He believes that "schools need intimate parental involvement with the curriculum: helping to decide and develop it; taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it; and enforcing participation of the student in it. This is parental involvement that increases student performance" (p. 2). Comments that arose from the teachers interviewed, in light of this comment, relate to the concern teachers have about parents' lack of understanding and misperceptions about curriculum. Teachers comment:

You can't be a para-professional because you're a parent. If you want to be involved in curriculum development, then you go and learn about childhood development and you go and learn teaching

techniques and then you go and practice it. Just because you've birthed a child doesn't give you the insight into other children's needs at all and I think that's one of the areas that is really difficult for parents – understanding that learning isn't just what they've experienced or what their child's experienced. It's very individual (Appendix B, p. 164).

There's this group pushing for a traditional school and of course they have their grounds . . . Do they really know what we are doing in schools? Do they have an informed knowledge of what's happening for them to say that? Do they think we are letting kids do whatever they want in school now, is that why they are demanding that kind of teaching? So if we let parents decide they may say, "We want 3Rs, we want uniforms, we want discipline, we want teacher directed instruction." As teachers, we probably feel differently about some of these issues. I would hesitate to have parents tell me what I should do (Appendix B, p. 208).

Parents probably understand how things were when they went to school so they want us to go back to twenty years ago and I've gone through it. I've been teaching all these years. Do you want me to go back to twenty years ago? Then I don't need to prepare. Turn to page two today, page three tomorrow. Do I need to plan? Things are so different. We are teaching them to meet the challenges of today's world, not twenty years ago. So parents may not know what they are talking about if they start telling us how to teach (Appendix B, p. 208).

Along with the concern that parents are unaware or have misperceptions about the goings-on in the classroom, is the concern over parent knowledge.

They do not have the background to do curriculum, and even if they do, it's in a narrow sense. We have parents who have wonderful science background for example, in varied, varied ways, varied specialties or areas of expertise, but that doesn't give them a composite sense of the whole of the demands that go on here (Appendix B, p. 164).

I think parents can add to but I'm not sure that they can develop curriculum, I'm not sure that we have the time to work with them. We are educated as educators, we know the philosophy behind children's learning and so on. Naturally there are parents who are born teachers and who can add to, or maybe they are educators themselves and can add to the curriculum, but we do not have the time to start teaching the parents and to work with the parents in that way. I think it's almost impossible (Appendix B, p. 138).

Parents may have a good knowledge base on an aspect of curriculum but teachers are cautious about the knowledge parents can contribute and the effect on students:

I only encourage parents to go and sit and read with the kids and give them support when they read. Leave the teaching to me. So often you can get the kid turned off even more if parents don't know how to do it and they say, "Sound it out, do this," and you can have the opposite result (Appendix B, p. 208).

It was made clear that teachers view the role of parents and curriculum with caution, as they believe that a parent's view of curriculum is limited. Besides the danger of a narrow view, involving parents with curriculum also undermines the job of a teacher and the notion of the teacher as the expert.

Teacher as Expert

Teachers are concerned about sharing their professional status with parents:

We've been trained for many years to be teachers and be good teachers and we have a more global vision of what's going on in the class and I think that this assumption that parents can just walk in and instruct children in the same way as a teacher would, I think that's assuming a whole lot . . . I don't think that parents are teachers. They're not instructional curriculum teachers. I don't think that we should assume that a parent coming in that role would be beneficial (Appendix B, p. 152).

I don't want parents to decide what I'm going to do in my classroom because I think that I'm the professional. There have been situations, I think, where parents can question what you do and if you have a good answer for them, I think that's all they need to hear. . . I don't get too involved with my own two daughters. I leave it up to the experts, the teachers in the classroom (Appendix B, p. 238).

Parents can help teachers but they're not trained teachers. They haven't gone through university education to be teachers. I think that although they may be knowledgeable, including knowledgeable in different areas, I think on the whole, just the skill and technique of keeping a class with you and keeping them focused and on task and interested and keeping the activities varied, I think that teachers do that successfully, whereas parents may not be able to (Appendix B, pp. 148-149).

Besides feeling that the role of teacher is somewhat undermined by the assumption that parents can help to decide and develop curriculum, teachers fear losing control over their classroom.

Teacher Control

One male teacher commented on his responsibility to ensure that the prescribed curriculum was being taught.

Basically, I am being paid to do a job in this room. I've used this with my class sometimes. "OK this is the binder. This is the IRP

(curriculum guide). It's my job to teach this to you this year. That's what I have to do. . . I've got to be coordinating this because my name, three times a year, including the end of June, my name goes on the report card. I'm the one ultimately responsible for that in this room. So I have to be in charge of all that (Appendix B, p. 227).

Another aspect of control is that of not knowing exactly how a child is doing with the parent volunteer:

I think sometimes it's hard for teachers to not always be the one who works with kids. I think that's hard to do sometimes because you do give away a little bit. Like you don't know what that kid exactly did for the last twenty minutes. You don't know how they did with the reading or the sounding out. You lost that a little bit. Somebody else has done that and even if you have the time to get over and ask how it went, very often the parent will do it in terms of, "Oh yeah, it was really good. She worked really hard and it went really well." Well, what went really well? Could she hear final sounds? You know, I would be more specific in what I would be looking for because I have a sense of her progression. And it's not realistic to expect parents to do that. So I have to let go of that and think it is good for her to have that one-to-one. It's good for her to have that practice time. And I'm going to have to let go of being the one that was there that day. And I think that's hard (Appendix B, p. 160).

However, another teacher suggests that, "anytime a child can work one on one with someone, I don't care what subject it is, I don't even care if they are just sitting talking to the person, I just feel so much more can be done for them than I can do for them in the group" (Appendix B, p. 191). She continues by noting the value of experience for the volunteer: "I think it's

important to see what you are doing for the volunteers as well. I think often you are giving them meaning and a whole new dimension to their lives (Appendix B, p. 191). Although this teacher stated the benefit to the child and the parent regarding their time together, she later states the importance of maintaining control over what is done:

I think that for the sake of the kids and to make better use of the parent's time, it is important that they understand what you want them to do. I think you have to help them but I still think you need to be in charge. For example, if for some reason a kid really needs help with fractions and the parent is taking them to the library, I think it's really important that you get them back on task right away; not in a negative way, but so that you are still in charge (Appendix B, p. 195).

The feeling of having control is a definite need of teachers. Sharing some of that power with parents can cause some concern for teachers, not so much because of their need to have absolute control, but their need to ensure they are doing their job and addressing the child's academic needs to the best of their ability.

Teacher as Educator of Parents

If teachers choose to involve parents, the question of spending time to educate parents raises another level of concern and challenges the boundaries teachers set for themselves as they try to come to terms with this

added responsibility. On one end of the pendulum is a teacher who is not at all interested in educating parents.

I'm not going to train parents how to teach the kids in my classroom. That's not something that I'm interested in doing. I'm interested in them sharing their knowledge with the kids when their knowledge is superior and more detailed than mine in certain specific areas (Appendix B, p. 149).

Another teacher recognizes her role in educating parents, but also believes it is a responsibility that lies beyond the classroom teacher:

I believe it (educating parents) is a role that I should play. I think that the administrator should do it, too. I think that the school board needs to take a much more proactive role than just responding reactively and responding to criticism. I think we need to educate and I think it's a big gap (Appendix B, p. 135).

The gap that exists is also recognized in the following comment along with the benefits that result in educating parents:

I think that's part of our role these days. We need to educate parents because if you think back to your schooling and certainly my schooling, it's so different than what the kids are doing today. If we take on that role and help them to understand about education today and why we do criterion-referenced evaluation or why we are doing projects instead of filling in the blanks and sheets, that kind of thing, if they understand that, then they are going to be greater supporters of the education system and not critical (Appendix B, p. 135).

Although some teachers felt it was a part of their role as a teacher to educate parents, in general, teachers felt it was beyond their realm of

responsibilities, often outside of their comfort level and somewhat impossible a task due to the time factor.

I feel like the hardest part now is that you feel you are defending yourself a lot. I've done it (educating parents) in years before during parent-teacher conferences to have groups come and I'll explain my reading program, my math program so I might do it again next year rather than explain myself twenty-five times. You might as well do it once and focus on some of the things that I do that they may not know. This is sort of one way to try to educate them but if you try to do it after school it will be the concerned parents who would come and ask you and it takes a lot of your time to do it that way. I prefer to have it done through the school board, through the media, through other channels to educate parents because it is a big job when you feel you have to explain why you are doing such and such; it is time consuming (Appendix B, p. 212).

In conclusion, with the increase in parent power and because parents are asserting their rights in the education system, teachers question the appropriateness with respect to parent involvement in curriculum. Teachers also feel an "attack" on their professionalism or their role as "the expert." The increase of parent power also attributes to a teacher's sense of loosing control over their classroom program. If teachers choose to involve parents in the classroom, they may need to confront a possible redefinition of their role of teacher in order to train or educate parents.

CHAPTER 7

Key Issues and Implications for Practice

A Discussion of Findings

When I embarked on this action research study, I wanted to improve my teaching practice with regard to parental involvement. I believed I could do so by seeking to understand why teachers decide to involve or not to involve parents and by uncovering some of the challenges teachers face in the hope of coping with and perhaps solving, some of these challenges. By reflecting upon teachers' experiences, I wanted to discover ways of improving the quality and significance of parental involvement in my classroom and to be able to offer insights and recommendations to my teaching colleagues.

In addressing teacher reasons for choosing to involve or not to involve parents, the results of this research suggest that although teachers may differ considerably from their willingness to involve parents on an instructional level in the classroom, there tends to be agreement that this type of involvement is meaningful. As one teacher stated, "Basically the bottom line is the kids and whatever helps the kids to learn is meaningful parental involvement" (Appendix B, p. 178).

An English as a second language teacher maintained that meaningful parent involvement occurs when it “it’s meaningful for the parent as well as the children” (Appendix B, p. 193) by ensuring that the kids are comfortable and that parents are enjoying their involvement. Working with the child directly is also imperative. She states, “I’ve never used parents for the clerical aspects, only to work directly with the kids” (Appendix B, p. 193).

Although the value of parents working directly with children was recognized, the drawback was also noted. As a primary teacher stated in discussing placing parents in the role of teacher, “so often you can get the kid turned off even more if parents don’t know how to do it (teach)” (Appendix B, p. 208) This teacher considered meaningful parent involvement to be caring for your child’s social and physical well-being. The most important type of parent involvement is “if a parent sends their kid to school well fed and that they’ve had enough sleep and that they are clean, that they have a positive attitude to school and to teachers and their friend” (Appendix B, p. 204).

In considering instructional parental involvement, numerous reasons were discussed for choosing not to include parents. The teachers interviewed suggested that factors regarding the emotional stability of

parents, their day to day availability, the issue of how dependable they are with their commitment to the classroom, and the specific capabilities parents have to offer, have a significant impact on a teacher's choice to include parents within the classroom.

In addition, the teachers interviewed also suggest that their willingness to include parents is also based on their ability to address the following personal challenges: a teacher's level of confidence to perform or communicate in front of other adults, the ability to accept criticism and trust parent intentions, and the ability to set well-defined boundaries for themselves regarding the amount of time or information they are willing to offer. Time constraint appears to be a prime deterrent. Simply put, a teacher commented: "Sometimes I don't include parents because I just don't have the time to get it organized. I'd love to have parents more involved but I just don't have time. I would say time is the biggest factor" (Appendix B, p. 141).

The challenges listed above are further amplified by the perceived effect parent power has on the notion of teacher professionalism. Teachers appeared to remain uncomfortable with the notion of parent as expert. They feared that a parent's lack of understanding regarding child development and educational philosophy sets limitations on what parents

have to offer. The sentiment expressed throughout the transcripts is that parents can be a valuable resource to teachers in schools by following the direction of teachers in working with students and by contributing a special talent, skill or knowledge to enrich the classroom program.

However, it was also made abundantly clear that the decisions teachers make are because of their understanding of curriculum and child development, as well as the wisdom of their experience as teachers. As a twenty-four year veteran declared, "You can't be a para-professional because you're a parent", nor because "you've birthed a child," (Appendix B, pp. 163-164) nor because parents have attended school themselves. Much has changed since parents were in school. A colleague interjected in the discussion by stating that parents have not had "the same experience, involvement, and evolution that people trained and experienced in teaching kids have had," (Appendix B, p. 164) and thus, parents without the formal education cannot make curricular or instructional decisions on behalf of teachers. Another teacher with thirty-four years of experience uses the analogy of telling a lawyer how to argue a case. It seems less acceptable to tell a lawyer or doctor what to do, and more acceptable to tell a teacher. A parent cannot have the same understanding a teacher has of a child's learning.

Discussions between teachers and parents regarding the purpose and part they are to play in the classroom and the concerns that may arise needs to be explicitly communicated to parents. Parents helping in classrooms will not automatically gain an insight into what needs to be done and how things are to be undertaken. Investing time with parents prior to their involvement may result in them being more careful with the responsibility they choose or are being asked to undertake. In order to exchange this information, sufficient time is required. Besides informing parents of the purpose of their presence in the classroom, sessions also need to exist to effectively inform them about the curriculum and teaching methods. A school which wished to achieve this goal would need to develop ways of making such information widely available.

A teacher's availability also needs to be explicitly communicated to parents and the limitations of that access acknowledged. To avoid disappointment on behalf of the teacher and the parent, it is critical for teachers to express the process parents are to follow when wanting to discuss issues or concerns. This process needs to be supported by administrators and clearly defined for the parent community. If teachers state that they have an open door policy then the meaning of the phrase and

the limitations of that access need to be acknowledged. Does an open door policy truly mean what it states? Can parents drop by *any* time?

Most importantly, teachers need the skills to work effectively with parents and parents need the skills to work effectively in schools. The spirit in which the contact is made by teachers when approaching parents and by parents when approaching teachers is vital. Both sometimes fail to appreciate the practical problems faced on a daily basis. A pleasant and welcoming approach by both parties is essential. Training is critical.

Training Educators

Educators will have to learn to work effectively with adults, a situation that may require new skills. They need to impart to parents an overview of the research that supports involving parents. Educators need skills as leaders and problem solvers. The emphasis must be on prevention before issues become problems. More specifically, they may need help in running effective meetings and supplying parents with materials to assist their children with their learning.

If teachers and administrators are better trained to deal with parental involvement issues, teachers' experiences are likely to be more positive and they may be more willing to involve parents. It has been alleged that the most effective point at which to encourage teachers to think about and form

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university level would prove to be beneficial, and ongoing in-service education and training for teachers in the field are imperative.

Providing staff with time to develop ways to include parents in their classroom program by providing teacher on-call coverage and by offering professional development training may prove to be useful. Having available materials and resources for teachers to refer to is a key to success. Parents may not have five years of study in educational principles and practice, however, by developing resources and clearly and concisely articulating how parents may be of assistance to their children, would prove to be more successful than not. The role of resources in the implementation of work with parents needs careful consideration and time for development. Working with colleagues in their school and in other schools may prove to be beneficial. It may be beneficial to form clusters of schools with similar parent populations, so teachers can work together in developing an initiative involving parents. The pooling of experience and the preparation of materials within these groups can prove a productive use of time and skills. One teacher in the study suggested mentoring with a teacher who actively involves parents. She suggests the validity of such a process while acknowledging the lack of opportunity teachers have of discussing the goings-on in their classroom.

I like the idea of buddies. If you had one teacher who was really comfortable with involving parents and another teacher who is not you might be able to partner them and have one observe what the parents are doing in the class and consequently then, maybe take some risk taking themselves. Talking about it is one thing. I think that is one of the biggest problems we have, that we don't have time to talk. That we get two forty-minute spares and you end up having a spare when nobody else does or when you've got a million other jobs to do and we don't get enough opportunity to talk to one another about what we are doing in the classroom, how things work (Appendix B, p. 137).

It is important for teachers to be provided with the necessary time and support to foster successful and significant parent involvement. Allocating time for school-wide discussions is necessary. Sharing one's knowledge with colleagues and learning from the experiences of others makes perfect sense. In order for these sharing sessions to occur and for any practice of parent involvement to be successful, it is vital that any practice be carefully planned, implemented and reviewed regularly in order for modifications to be made.

Although the various ministries of education are encouraging parental involvement, of the teachers interviewed, none felt any pressure to include parents from the ministry of education, the school board or school administration. One male teacher acknowledged the absence of any pressure: "I think it's always stated that they (parents) are always welcome

but there is no pressure from anybody. There's no pressure" (Appendix B, p. 222). No time was set aside by the administration to ensure that work with parents is adequately being addressed and planned. The teachers saw the principals in the role of supporters rather than leaders. Strikingly absent from the discussions undertaken with teachers in this research is any mention of the tone and importance the administration sets on the level of involvement occurring in schools. Yet, it was recognized that change is difficult and a teacher needs to be in control of the decisions made in the classroom because "if the teacher is not comfortable with it, it won't work" (Appendix B, p. 198). However, one teacher wished that if she had a magic wand she would "help teachers understand the importance of getting parents involved in significant ways" and to "use parents to their potential" (Appendix B, p. 144). The lack of teacher training and school leadership no doubt affects the "hit and miss" element of effective parental involvement.

Educating Parents

An issue that recurred frequently throughout the interviews centred around the extent of a teacher's responsibility to educate parents on how to work with students in the classroom. It was clear that most teachers in this research did not feel comfortable adding the responsibility of educating parents to the role of a teacher. However, they spoke highly

of parents who were educated about schools.

I wish the educated parents would have more say because the educated parents appreciate education. Educated, not that they've been to university, but educated in that they've been in the school and know what's happening in their child's school and know what their child is doing in school. I wish parents like one I had this year could be on BCTV and tell the public what their children get at school, get out of school and what they think it's done for their children instead of the negative (Appendix B, p. 211).

The above teacher's colleague contributes to the discussion of the benefit of having well-informed parents.

When parents come to school and are involved then they really understand our philosophy of teaching because so much of it is what parents hear is happening at the school – that there is not enough discipline or there is not enough of phonics taught, there is not enough of the basics taught and it's all fun and easy. But if they are involved parents, they likely don't have those types of misconceptions (Appendix B, p. 204).

As for whose responsibility is it to educate parents, one kindergarten teacher interviewed believes that educating parents is the responsibility of the teacher because the teacher is "the only person that knows what they want. It would be useless to have someone else come and train someone to work in my classroom because it might not be what I want or it might not be what we are studying at that time. Things change depending on what you are studying" (Appendix B, p. 181). This teacher further contributes to the difficulty of this occurring unless a

teacher is a strong supporter of parent involvement on an instructional level:

It puts a lot of onus on the classroom teacher unless they really believe in it. It would be really hard to reinforce it. It's hard to defend something that you don't think is a pretty good idea (Appendix B, p. 181).

The time constraint is by far the number one reason for teacher's not wanting to take on the added responsibility of educating parents and suggest the school take on that job.

I prefer to have it done through the school board, through the media, through other channels to educate parents because it is a big job when you feel you have to explain why you are doing such and such. It is time consuming (Appendix B, p. 212).

Ideally, if each took on an aspect of responsibility, success would be imminent. Two letters of example of offering workshops to parents are included in Appendix D. A workshop evaluation form eliciting parent responses can be found in Appendix E.

Establishing Purpose and Clearly Defined Goals

Much of the work undertaken with parental involvement in schools occurs haphazardly. Indeed, there exist Parent Advisory Councils that are mandated by the Ministry of Education. However, very little school-wide planning occurs to address the challenges each school faces when dealing

with parents. Despite the fact that some work has been undertaken at various schools with success, a considerable re-thinking of the position of parents in schools is needed to address the challenges clearly articulated by teachers. More thought needs to be given to the purpose of parental involvement. If the goal of researchers is to encourage more widespread parental involvement because of the recognized benefits, then schools must develop an effective dialogue with parents and staff to address the profound issues stated by teachers. Teachers must challenge their current practices and preconceptions. Parents must do the same. Both must consider what has already been undertaken and challenge the assumptions and attitudes that limit future developments. To ensure progress, work with parents must be supported with time allocated for school-wide planning and inter-school sharing. A firm commitment from administrators and school staff is required, as well as initial training in teacher education programs with continued training and support in schools.

In order to avoid the “hit-and-miss” element of effective parental involvement, schools need to establish a set of principles and a clear sense of purpose to guide their work with parents. Key characteristics of ensuring more positive contacts between home and school include a “thoroughly considered rationale with explicit aims, a well-designed and realistic strategy

to achieve these objectives, and effective communication to parents” (Jowett et al., 1991) The aims need to be precisely identified and realistically set within a school-wide approach. They need to be effectively communicated and widely endorsed if they are to avoid the problems frequently perceived by teachers interviewed in this research.

During the process of undertaking this research, I have come to recognize that parents have only one trait in common: their children. We must stop thinking of parents as a collective and recognize that each family unit is distinct. Prior to involving parents, careful consideration and reflection must occur on a case specific level. In the words of a wise teacher, “Parent volunteers are there to make it easier and not there to cause more stress. I think there’s a personal limit. If you know a parent is available to work in the classroom but as the teacher you don’t feel so good about that, you have to monitor your feeling and decide that maybe it isn’t worth the work to involve that parent in that way” (Appendix B, p. 168). In order to discover if the parent should be involved in the classroom, the following questions should be considered by the teacher:

- 1) What is the school’s experience with this parent thus far?

- 2) What skills, abilities or expertise does this parent possess that would enrich the classroom program? (see Appendix F for a sample survey)
What is the purpose of the involvement?
- 3) Will it overstep my comfort level as a teacher or the parent's comfort level?
- 4) What are some possible limitations to this involvement? What can be done to overcome these limitations? Is it worth the time and within my control?
- 5) Am I able to explicitly state how the parent is being asked to do? Am I willing to assist in training the parent if they are willing to be involved?
(see Appendix G for information a teacher could share with parents prior to working in the classroom)
- 6) Should I proceed with involving this particular parent?

Questions like these might be asked of each family member in order to make an educated decision on whether to pursue or not to pursue parental involvement in the classroom.

A teacher must be well-trained in undertaking any level of parent involvement, especially instructional involvement. Ongoing support, resources and leadership is essential for educators and parents to succeed with any type of partnership.

Concluding Remarks

The conclusions and suggestions based on the experiences of nine teachers at six Vancouver schools with an accumulated 184 years of experience suggest a number of ways to address the challenges teachers face in light of the increase in parental involvement. It is appropriate to be cautious in regard to the generalizability of these findings. The sample of teachers was drawn from a single school division and sample sizes were quite small. Nevertheless, there is nothing to indicate that this sample is in any way atypical of other schools in such urban, multicultural settings. In this respect the existing research supports my own findings with respect to the challenges inherent with parental involvement in the classroom.

My research has given voice to teachers and has highlighted some of the complexities that exist as teachers use the wisdom of practice to decide whether to involve or not to involve parents. I will conclude with the voice of one teacher whose teaching career has spanned over thirty years. She states:

I think that parents are a very rich resource that isn't tapped. I think that we are in an educational crunch in that we are short of resources and this is one we should look at and figure out ways of somehow involving them. But, I think a lot of work has to be done to accomplish this (Appendix B, p. 145).

By addressing the complexities highlighted here through the stories and anecdotes of the teachers, and by taking steps to plan more purposefully and carefully may help teachers rake the leaves with less frustration and with more success.

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APPENDIX A

Setting the Context

In order to broaden the context in which to view parental involvement, I believe it is essential to enter teacher voice into the discussion. A lot of research exists, informing teachers of the benefits of parental involvement and providing examples of ways to involve parents, but, little attention has been paid to the challenges and implications of making parental involvement a reality in classrooms and schools from the point of view of teachers. This interview will provide you with an opportunity to speak about the challenges teachers face.

I would like to thank you, ____, for agreeing to an audio taped interview to share your insights on parental involvement. I would like to remind you that the tape recording of our conversation will remain in my possession only. To ensure anonymity, I will assign you and your school a pseudonym. Once I transcribe the conversation, I will give you a copy and you will have an opportunity to make any changes that you wish.

Do you have any questions?

Interview Prompts

Reminders:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| ◆ You said that . . . | ◆ In what way . . . |
| ◆ .So you say . . . | ◆ What was it like . . . |

Background

- Years of teaching experience; Primary/intermediate
- Years at school? School community? Cultural and socio-economic make-up of your school?
- What does parental involvement at school look like? (scale of 1 – 10)
What do you think contributes to the amount of involvement occurring in your school?

Assumptions

- What are some assumptions parents make about teachers or teachers make about parents in regards to parental involvement?

Defining Meaningful Parental Involvement

- How would you define meaningful parental involvement?

Some of the ingredients of a meaningful parental involvement program?

Instructional and non-instructional forms of parent involvement

Research states that there is little evidence to suggest non-instructional parent involvement affects student learning in the school. Whereas there is much evidence supporting parent involvement in instructionally related activities at home and/or at school benefits children. Many researchers are advocating that schools need to involve parents with the curriculum: helping to decide and develop it; taking on defined responsibilities for

portions of it; and enforcing participation of the student in it because this type of involvement increases student performance (King, 1996: 2).

Personal Experience

- Can you comment on parent involvement in your classroom?

If so, in what way? If not, how come?

- Do you put a lot of thought into your classroom parental involvement program? Why do you choose to do that?
- How did the idea of involving parents in your classroom program first arise? Was it a real planning kind of decision? Did you always assume that parental involvement would be a part of your classroom program?
- Have you felt pressured to include parents in their child's education?
- Are there times when you consciously choose not to involve parents? How do you make that decision?

As Epstein (1995) states, "most schools have some teachers who conduct some practices of partnership with some families some of the time" (709).

Challenges

- How does parent involvement affect teaching?
- What are some of the challenges teachers face in light of parental involvement?

- From your experience, is there one story that highlights the challenges teachers face in regards to parental involvement?

How can teachers set up meaningful parental involvement in student learning while satisfying the needs of both parents and teachers?

- But research is beyond dispute. The more involved the parent is in the education of his or her child the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement. Yet, teachers continue to choose not to involve parents in their child's education. Why isn't parent involvement a reality in all classrooms?

As Epstein (1995) states, "most schools have some teachers who conduct some practices of partnership with some families some of the time" (709).

- How would you sell parental involvement to other teachers who aren't necessarily interested in initiating parental involvement practices?

Change

- If you had a magic wand and could change one thing (or a few things) about parental involvement what would you change?
- What would you like parents to know?
- What advice would you like to share with a new teacher about parent involvement?

Closing Statement

Is there anything you think I should know that might help me to better understand your views on parental involvement? Thank you for taking the time to share your insights.

APPENDIX B

Insights on Parental Involvement Kate (Blair Elementary)

R: Can you tell me a bit about your teaching experience?

K: My career has been spread over 30 years but I have only taught about 15 years, half primary, half intermediate. I did a few years of teaching full time. I had a family, lived in England, taught in a hospital. I've done all kinds of different things. Didn't come back to full time teaching until I guess it was 1986. I had done part time contracts before that but not full time because my kids were old enough for me to be back. I have worked full time since then and I have taught Kindergarten, all the primary grades, I have been an Enrichment teacher, I have taught kids with learning disabilities of many different kinds, including working in a hospital where there were residential children, and I've taught Art at the secondary level and I have been a consultant. Before this job I worked as an intermediate consultant for the school board for three years.

R: How many years have you been at Blair?

K: This is my second year.

R: Can you tell me a bit about the school community?

K: The school community is affluent. There are mainly two parent families and that would be the majority, which is unusual. They may be a new family, second family, but they are usually two parents. They are affluent. They are involved, often both parents. In some families not both parents work. Mothers are at home, very unusual as well. That might be 50/50 at work and at home. Lots of professionals. I have mothers who are psychologists, mothers who are doctors, mothers who are dentists as well as housewives. I have fathers who are academics and lawyers and that kind of thing and firemen. So a real diversity.

R: And culturally?

K: About one third of my class is ESL. From Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan.

R: Are the rest Caucasian?

K: Most.

R: What does parental involvement look like at Blair?

K: Well, I think it looks different in different classes. I am a person who has always had parents totally involved. I speak to the parents at the very beginning at Meet the Teacher night in which I say that I would really like for you to be involved, you may come into the class at any time, I have a form that I give out in which I ask for their help in everything from being a speaker to helping with art projects. I don't ask parents to mark or run off xeroxes unless I am really pushed. I don't think that's good use of their time. It's not stimulating for them. I know that they feel that they can help but I'd rather have them more one to one. I have had them do things like be part of my editing program, my writing program working as editors, or reading with kids. Although, I'm not doing that this year I have quite proficient readers but I don't always. Next Monday we are going to Barkerville and I am taking 5 parents with me so they are helping in a major way. Those kinds of things.

R: So you tend to use parents more on an instructional level rather than the non-instructional clerical type of involvement. You said that you want it to be stimulating for them. Are there other reasons why you choose to use them on an instructional level?

K: I really like the idea of parents being in the classroom observing their child in a social context. I think it's a very beneficial thing. So I'm encouraging that. Sometimes if they are doing something that is fulfilling they tend to be more involved. They'll do their token volunteering, running off xeroxes and then they might not volunteer again. But if they do something that they really like they will volunteer again and again. I enjoy having them in here. They get to observe their child in a social context which is a very beneficial thing for them. They don't often get that opportunity. I mean they get it in a small group but not in a large group.

R: Are there any complications or challenges with having them in the classroom?

K: I have never had a problem. I guess it could be if people didn't like what I did. But they tend to be supportive. I think I am pretty open about my program. I tell them why I do what I do and I also say why I don't do the things I don't do. Every teacher has strengths and weaknesses and children may miss something in my class and pick it up in the next or the last class and so as long as they are getting a very positive educational experience I don't consider myself a wonder person and so if they said to me why aren't you doing something it's because I am doing this. If somebody ever did confront me which I've never had happen I'd be OK with it. We are human like everybody. I think that is the thing that some teachers are afraid of. They are afraid of getting parents involved because they are afraid they are going to get criticized. I don't worry about it. And the thing is, I guess maybe they talk about me on their own but it doesn't hurt me.

R: Do you think teachers have to have certain qualities to involve parents in the classroom?

K: Well, I think teaching is like acting. I think that we all either have that ability to be a bit of a showman to sell, whether it's a science project or whatever. You have to act and so I think that some people are more confident than others and I think that confidence makes it easier for me. I am confident that what I am doing with kids is meaningful. I see kids excited about learning. That's important to me. And so I can do what I do and not worry about if I miss something else. What other qualities? Well, I think there are teachers who are shy and there are teachers who aren't maybe as experienced or who like a lot of control and they are comfortable with children but maybe not comfortable with adults.

R: Do you think there are certain qualities that parents have to have in order to come into the schools?

K: I think that there are parents who want to come in and run things the way they think that they should be run and that could lead to real conflict. I think that parents have to be open. I think that they have to ask questions so that if they understand why they are being asked to do something they might feel more comfortable doing it. To ask a parent to do something that they really do not like to, or is against their philosophy, or something might be a difficult situation. I think they need to be good with kids and have some management skills of some kind if they are used in a particular way. I

guess it depends on how a teacher uses them. So yesterday we were running three centres here in preparation of Barkerville so we had a sluice box and kids were putting gravel and gold through and trying to pan for gold and I had the parents running that centre. I had two moms for that, one mom who didn't speak English very well with another mom who did so those two worked together while I was running two other stations. It makes my program richer. I asked them to do it, they read the material, I asked them to come fifteen minutes earlier, I prepared them, I had some material for them to read, I showed them how to do it and then I didn't go near them. They did it all by themselves downstairs. I guess that too is something. I trust them. I think as teachers we have to believe that parents want the best for their children and believe they are competent and so give them tasks that aren't menial.

R: So we have to have certain assumptions about parents and those are two that you just said. Could you think of other assumptions that perhaps teachers have of parents?

K: I think some teachers would say that parents volunteer because they are nosey. Well, I am sure there are parents who want to find out what's going on but it's because they care about their child. They want the best situation for their child and if you've got a classroom in which good educational practice is happening maybe you will be helping to educate those parents. I think that's part of our role these days. We need to educate parents because if you think back to your schooling and certainly my schooling, it's so different than what the kids are doing today. If we take on that role and help them to understand about education today and why we do criterion-referenced evaluation or why we are doing projects instead of filling in the blanks and sheets, that kind of thing, if they understand that then they are going to be greater supporters of the education system and not critical.

R: So are you saying then that it's the role of teachers to educate the parents?

K: Well, I think it is one thing. Yes. I believe it is a role that I should play. I think that the administrator should do it, too. I think that the school board needs to take a much more proactive role than just responding reactive and responding to criticism. I think we need to educate and I think it's a big gap, personally.

R: Could the school board or other people actually run workshops for parents when there are so many different teaching styles and so many different things going on in the classroom? Could they speak on behalf of all teachers?

K: I was just recently talking to a group of people, it was actually a university professor who was saying when I see science or math that is being done in the elementary school and then somehow the secondary school hasn't caught up. That they are still teaching math in a very old fashioned way and that they need to get on board so I do think we can learn from one another. I think that if there were workshops, sort of that proactive approach where we expect that parents are interested. I think there are a lot of parents who are interested and so that we feed them. If you have a kid in your class that is keen on something you feed them and if a parent is interested we should help them to learn more about the education system and understand more why things have happened. So when I speak to my parents I tell them about people like Howard Gardner and Multiple Intelligence. You can see parents say, "Oh ya, I understand that. That makes sense to me." Then when I do something I have their support because they are saying, "Oh, yes, she is giving the assignment the way she is because she wants to meet the needs of the artistic child or the kinesthetic learner." They then are more supportive of my program if they understand where I'm coming from. There was something else I was going to say but it's gone.

R: But how do we get parents involved in the schools if teachers don't want that involvement within their classroom? In hearing what you've said so far you don't believe in involving parents in photo-copying unless there is a total necessity. The research says that supporting parents in instructionally related activities provides benefits for students that we need to increase student achievement by having parents involved instructional parental involvement. But yet it's not happening as much in the schools as it could be happening? Why?

K: Maybe teachers need to be taught. To get parents involved involves risk taking because it could be a problem, it could blow up in your face. A parent might be critical or they may not be able to do what you ask so you let go a little and maybe what we need to do is have teaching buddies. If you had one teacher who was really comfortable with involving parents and another teacher who is not you might be able to partner them and have one

observe what the parents are doing in the class and consequently then, maybe take some risk taking themselves. Talking about it is one thing. I think that is one of the biggest problems we have, that we don't have time to talk. That we get two forty minute spares and you end up having a spare when nobody else does or when you've got a million other jobs to do and we don't get enough opportunity to talk to one another about what we are doing in the classroom, how things work.

R: Having a mentoring program?

K: That might be the way to go because if somebody sees your program works how can you do what you do, well you do it because you have parents and parents make things simpler.

R: How about parents and the curriculum. That's what researchers are advocating in schools. That parents should be involved in curriculum - helping to decide and develop it, taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it and ensuring participation of the student in it because that is the type of involvement that increases student achievement.

K: Well, right at the moment I could say that that is almost impossible with the load that we have on. I have one third of my class ESL, I have Tourette's Syndrome and a Downs Syndrome child in my class and although they go to the Resource Room, the resource room teacher doesn't come here so I'm dealing with so much as far as planning and so on that to ask me to meet with parents and develop curriculum with them and work with them, that is a hard one. That is really a hard one. You've got to give more time to teachers.

R: Should that even be happening you think?

K: Yes, I do think it can happen. Right now I am doing inventions. My parents all know we are doing inventions because the kids are making inventions and asking questions about inventions and doing all sorts of stuff. So then we have a parent phone and say I have a friend whose job it is to take the inventor, find somebody to patent his invention and find somebody to market his invention. So this morning that man came in and spoke to the class. That parent really took our inventions unit in a different direction by making the connection with what their child was doing at school, which they were aware of, and their own life. I do that kind of

thing all the time. That's part of that form that I give at the very beginning of the year, "do you have any specialties?" So we have a graphic artist, who does this (pointing to a poster he made on Barkerville) who is going to speak to the kids about his art company and how he goes from the drawing to the finished product. We have another parent who races cars, go-cart kind of thing and they are going to bring that in so those are the kinds of things that they can add to the curriculum. What I do is I get them to tell me at the beginning of the year and I call them in when I can weave them in and it makes connections with things we are doing. I can see them adding to it but I'm not sure I can see them designing it. I mean developing in some ways. What that parent did this morning was developing a whole aspect that I had not intended to include but I mean kids sat here for an hour and asked questions of this man and were totally fascinated.

R: Do teachers not have certain requirements that they need to fulfill, like the IRPs and the training so how can parents possibly decide and develop curriculum when teachers have the expertise in delivering the knowledge?

K: I think that's a very hard one. I think parents can add to but I'm not sure that they can develop curriculum, I'm not sure that we have the time to work with them. We are educated as educators, we know the philosophy behind children's learning and so on. Naturally there are parents who are born teachers and who can add to, or maybe they are educators themselves and can add to the curriculum, but we do not have the time to start teaching the parents and to work with the parents in that way. I think it's almost impossible.

R: Are you saying that you can involve parents in curriculum but more as experts who come in and add an aspect to your curriculum but not from the developing stage because that's almost an impossible task.

K: I would say at this point the way the system is designed where we have so little time in preparation. There is some curriculum development that we are doing, say this inventions unit, the grade 5 teachers got together and met and planned.

R: Is that what you are teaching, grade 5?

K: Yes. So if we knew that somebody has some expertise in that area we might call them in to consult with them as a resource but if you were doing

a unit on whales and you had a marine biologist you might call that person in, or an artist if you are doing some type of work with screen printing and you've got a parent who does that. I can see calling them in but I can't see trying to teach them how to develop curriculum.

R: Out of curiosity how would you rate the amount of parental involvement involvement on a scale of 1 to 10 in comparison perhaps to other schools in the division. Might it be different for primary and intermediate?

K: I think it might be different. There's more involvement at this school than has been at other schools that I've been in and it's because the parents' schedules are a little more flexible so for example, we always get parents to drive for fieldtrips rather than taking the bus. Parents come along on field trips because they are interested in doing it with their child and a lot of schools that I've been in you've gone by bus. You've maybe taken one parent to help you, possibly two but you can't expect to get five parents out to drive. It's hard. In this school, on a scale of one to ten, this is really high as far as if you want a parent for something, you can get them usually. Now speaking of that, I had a meeting this morning with my parents. Because we are going to Barkerville, we meet at 7:00. We have for the last month. 7:00 every Thursday morning, the group of parents who are coming with us so that it's five of us. We meet at a coffee shop, we have breakfast together and we do our planning.

R: How do you involve them in the planning?

K: It's planning everything from when we stay at Wells School, how do we get the meals organized and that kind of thing. It's logistics. In this situation we have five moms who are really involved and then we are billeting in Quesnel for part of the time. Two weeks after we get back the Quesnel kids are going to billet with us. Well, the parents that were there this morning were saying that they had had parents come to them saying, "Well, I'm not sure if I can take anyone now because I'm so busy." And this parent, who is sort of quite meek and mild got really angry and she said, "Don't talk to me about a busy schedule. We all have busy schedules. But you have to do your part here." And I think that is a little bit of an issue in that, in my situation, there are a lot of parents who do a lot to support what we do in the classroom. There are a few who don't. Who would be quite

happy to send money but they don't want to give any time or effort and that causes a bit of friction.

R: Does that place you in an awkward situation or an ethical dilemma? Ethically, do you find you have to be careful?

K: I don't want to create a difficult situation and one thing that I will be very sure to do, I mean, my parents are all coming to a meeting tonight at 7:00 where we are discussing the last minute details of this trip so I will be very sure, I feel that I can be the go-between and I am going to make very sure that everybody understands how much these people are donating who are coming with us because they are taking a week off work, some of them. They are putting lots of effort in the planning part of it. One of them said, "I really feel I shouldn't be billeting the child that comes back. Some of the other parents could pick that up." So we'll see if we get some offers. So I am going to be the go-between.

R: Are there other times when you've had parents in the classroom that have caused some complications. Complications may not be the right word. Do you prepare them before they come into the classroom so that you are avoiding certain potential "dangers"?

K: In this situation, in preparation for the trip, I did actually say today, there are some children who need to know boundaries and these are their names. And I said, "If we are very clear, and I have already sent a letter home saying I expect a certain type of behaviour, if it doesn't happen there will be a half an hour time out, if it happens again there will be an hour time out. I've been quite explicit about the boundaries that the children will have, and I said to the parents I will expect you to also be part . . . we are working as a team. We will all be looking after the children. We will all be mothering the children because for some children they have never been away from their home for five days. I have talked to the children about that and said, "There are five wonderful moms, or six because I'm a mom too, you can talk to any of us if you are feeling homesick" and all that kind of thing but I also said, "If a mom says to you, 'don't do that' it's the same as me saying it or your mom saying it and there will be consequences to behaviour."

R: Are you at all ever concerned about confidentiality when parents come into the classroom?

K: No, I haven't been. There are some special needs children in my class. The kids know who the kids are. They learn differently, they behave differently and the kids pick that up so the parents do too. They recognize that these children are different. No, I haven't worried about it. Maybe I should.

R: Are there times when you choose not to involve parents?

K: Well, sometimes I don't include them parents because I just don't have the time to get it organized. I'd love to have parents more involved but I just don't have time. I would say time is the biggest factor.

R: Can you think of how the idea of involving parents in your classroom first arose? Did you always just assume you'd have parents involved or was it a real kind of planning decision?

K: My children went to a community school. As part of a community school they encourage participation but I guess it's been a natural thing for me right from the beginning. The very first school I taught at there wasn't a parent around. It was an inner city school. There was usually only one parent in the family and that parent was working very long hours. So I didn't have the opportunity but I got my friends involved. I guess I am a person who likes to work with people rather than working on my own. I think maybe that's something, maybe that style is important. I remember moving to a school and I'm thinking, "OK you haven't been working full time for a long time. You are going to work in your classroom, you are going to close your door, you're not going to get involved in planning things." This is what I do. I get involved in orchestrating events and things. Well, I couldn't do it. We did something called, "You've gotta have art" in which the whole of the primary department was working on art projects at the same time with me organizing it. That's my teaching style. That I am a collaborator. I like working with other teachers. Maybe style has something to do with it.

R: I wonder, as I'm interviewing the various teachers, if that's a factor with all the people who have agreed to be interviewed by me. It's been hard finding people. I'm wondering if a certain kind of teacher is agreeing to speak to me. I wonder if you can give me a few primary names at this school.

K: I can give you a name. Ellen who is at Waterby Elementary. She is one who taught my son in kindergarten. I think she may have grade four now, a three four but she's been a primary teacher for years and she would be one. She taught at the community school and maybe that's a factor. You are right. It might be someone who has a certain style.

R: Speaking about primary, I'm wondering why there just tends to be so much more involvement than at the intermediate level? I'd like to get your perspective from an intermediate teacher and you've also taught primary. Why do you think there is more involvement at a primary level in comparison to intermediate?

K: I think there are a lot of people who think that once they get into the intermediate years they don't need as much hands-on experience and if you get parents involved at the primary level you are maybe doing centres and you have four centres running and you just can't do it on your own unless you are very organized. If you are running an art program and you've got four centres you need some help. But when you are at the intermediate level you can tell those kids to be quiet or they could be doing reading while you are working with a hands-on thing and maybe intermediate teachers don't do as much of that type of teaching. Not that we shouldn't but maybe that we don't.

R: So it has to do with classroom environment, independence and the way you choose to teach?

K: Maybe when your children get into the intermediate grades you go back to work. You're starting to work part time or think about, I have a few parents who go to school so that they have less freedom. Your babies are out of the nest.

R: Is the fact that you are a parent have a bearing on the amount of involvement that actually occurs in your classroom with parents?

K: I think so. I can see their point of view and I think it does make a difference. I've been at home volunteering in classrooms.

R: So you come from that perspective as well?

K: Yes.

R: When you were there as a parent what did you want of teachers?

K: You mean what did I want expected of me by volunteering in their classroom or what did I want from my own children?

R: If you are a parent in the parental involvement program, how did you want teachers to . . .

K: I didn't want to run off duplicating because if they knew I was a teacher I would like them to trust me that I could do something significant rather than just duplicating stuff.

R: Which leads me to asking you what is your definition of parent involvement or what are some of the ingredients?

K: One thing is making a contribution that maybe a teacher couldn't make. I could take a small group and I could only do what maybe only could be done in a smaller group than thirty. I would like to be able to use some of my expertise whether it is because I'm an artist I could teach something and add to the program, I could augment the program because of my expertise.

R: So meaningful parent involvement would be adding something to the program?

K: It would also be helping to make the classroom an interesting place, helping to make the teacher's job a little more easy. Personally I would love to add as an example, we lived in England one year and the children went to a fairly traditional English school. I volunteered once a week. They were right next door to the Church and the churchyard where there were gravestones from the sixteen century so I planned a little unit where we went and studied the gravestones in small groups. I took a small group out. We learned all kinds of things like when there were epidemics and all the children died just from reading the gravestones. We did some work on the history and found where the dump was, did a dig and found all kinds of old bottles. The teacher couldn't have done that probably with 35 kids or however many he had so with the small group it made it possible. So that was something, because of my interest and my background in Social Studies and history I could add that.

R: What advice would you give to a new teacher about parental involvement?

K: Start slowly. Maybe one person at a time and give them a little job and build your confidence in their ability and your confidence in having someone there and just performing in front of someone. Do involve them in significant ways. I guess I feel strongly about that. I've said it a few times.

R: And what would you like parents to know about parental involvement?

K: To respect the teacher. Maybe they don't understand. Ask questions. If you don't understand why something is being done, be discrete but ask questions.

R: Yesterday a parent phoned and wanted to interview the grade one teachers to see where she thought it was best to place her child. Does asking questions sometimes pose problems? What's your thought on that?

K: I want parents to know my philosophy. At Carnarvon when I was there, there were some very traditional Greek families who wanted to have their child sit in a seat and learn in a particular way and if those children were in my classroom where I had a lot of hands-on, a lot of group work, a lot of oral presentation, discussion and so on, the parents were frustrated for a whole year and to me it was better that they chose the situation that they were more comfortable with than having a whole year of angst because they didn't like my philosophy. Parents know their children. Sometimes they know that their child works best in one type of a situation or another and sometimes they don't so it's hard. That's a really hard one.

R: If you had a magic wand and could change something about parental involvement what would that be?

K: I think that it would be to help teachers understand the importance of getting parents involved in significant ways. I think a lot of teachers do not use parents to their potential, so that would be one thing. I think I would get teachers to ask parents to assist. A lot of people complain about not having time to do things and they don't ask parents and they don't realize

that parents are willing and I'm a person who asks. I figure adults know how to say, "No". If they can't do it, they'll say no. But if you don't ask you don't get either.

R: Do you think that teachers often assume that parents don't have the time?

K: When parents would really like to be involved. Also I think some parents are scared of school. Maybe they didn't slay the dragon. School was hard for them. In particular a lot of parents who come from another country maybe haven't had the educational opportunities we have here. For those parents school is almost a scary place. If you think of say, the people from Guatemala, so there's a lot of work that needs to be done and it could be a really strengthening thing for the child. If the parent were more comfortable with education and schooling they might be more supportive and then the child would do better so in that kind of a situation where the parent has had very little education and really doesn't know how to support the child or possibly thinks, "Well, I've managed and I've only gone to grade 6" well, they don't do the encouraging at home. At Blair school they are all supported one hundred percent and make the education of their kids a top priority. I sort of went around in circles.

R: I understand what you're saying. I think we've kind of covered most things but I'll end asking if there is anything that you think I should know would help me to better understand your views on parental involvement?

K: I think I pretty well said it. I think that parents are a very rich resource that isn't tapped. I think that we are in an educational crunch in that we are short of resources and this is one we should look at and figure out ways of somehow involving them. But, I think a lot of work has to be done to accomplish this.

R: Do you think that if you do tap into these parents the way teachers are viewed might change? The perceptions . . .

K: It's interesting. As an example of this we decided at Carnarvon to have a Grandparents Day to help grandparents know what's going on in school or elderly neighbours and so we had a little bit of an open house. Our classrooms were opened up and the teachers planned something a little bit special so I was teaching Owls in the Family, Farley Mowet's book and we

had owl pellets. The kids were dissecting the owl pellets, taking the whole skeleton out and so on. We had this elderly gentleman who was somebody's neighbour come in and he could not believe what was happening. He just went on and on and said, "I had no idea. School for me was sitting in a row, trying to learn and he said this is so interesting and it's so good for the kids and I pay taxes all the time for school and I didn't know that this happened and I feel much happier about my tax money." That little event did a lot of good in the neighbourhood.

R: I love stories like that and we as teachers don't share enough stories like that. I don't think we gloat and talk about certain things as much as we should and perhaps parental involvement is one of those areas we don't talk enough about.

K: Yes.

R: Thank you very much for sharing your insights with me.

Insights on Parental Involvement
Pat and Joan (Ferris Elementary)

R: The first question is just getting a sense of the years of teaching experience at the intermediate level and the primary level.

J: I've taught 24 years in Hope and in Vancouver; all except this year was primary teaching. This year is 3/4. In most of those years I've had parent volunteers and people in the classroom.

R: And how many years have you been at Ferris, Joan?

J: I have no idea. I don't think chronologically.

R: Oh, okay. Maybe when I transcribe it, then you can just jot down the amount of years or whatever.

J: You know what. I have no way – I know when I got married; and I know when I met Phil; and I know when I was born. Like those are my... And when I graduated, I actually don't know. It probably has been 10 or 11.

R: How long have you been here Pat?

P: I'm busy calculating my years of teaching experience. I've been here seven or eight years. No, no, six or seven.

J: Well, I'll say 10 to 12 then.

P: Yeah. And I've taught all grades from 5 to 12. My first 2 years were in high school in Manitoba, and then I moved out here and taught in junior high out in Langley. And then I've been in the elementary school system for maybe 12 years.

R: So what does parental involvement look like in your classroom or in the intermediate classroom?

P: Well, it's, I think that in the program I'm in, it's different than it would look in another program because I'm teaching in the immersion program and a lot of the parents don't speak French. So for a start, they don't have

the language of the classroom, but what parental involvement has looked like is, on different occasions, parents have come in. If they have a specialty, like I've had artists in the class doing lessons with the kids. I've had chemists, biologists. I've had different parents come in to do cultural presentations and then because we have a strong component of our program as outdoor education, we take the kids out on hikes and camping trips, and we always bring parents along with us for those.

R: So is it basically using parents as experts, using their expertise within the classroom whatever their strength may be?

P: Yup. Yup.

R: Okay. Before you had asked me about involving parents in the classroom, and now since Joan stepped out I can respond by saying there are two types of parental involvement, actually there are a lot of types of parental involvement but there are two categories - one is the instructional type of parental involvement where parents are working with kids, and then there's the non-instructional where parents are more volunteers, volunteers within the school, helping with clerical stuff and what not. Do you see challenges in having parents working in the classroom on an instructional level?

P: The one thing I find is that the parents really depend on me also being there and intervening, minimally, if they may be having trouble getting the kids attention; more classroom management kinds of things that they are not skilled at or trained at or don't know quite how to get all the kids focused. So I think that's the main thing. Also organizational things when you have to have materials for 30 kids and get them distributed quickly and things like that. Sometimes that kind of intervention on my part just speeds up the process.

R: So do you think parents have the skills to teach and be involved in curriculum matters?

P: I think parents can help teachers but they're not trained teachers. They haven't gone through university education to be teachers. I think that although they may be knowledgeable, including knowledgeable in different areas, I think on the whole, just the skill and technique of keeping a class with you and keeping them focused and on task and interested and keeping

the activities varied, I think that teachers do that successfully whereas parents may not be able to.

R: Do you think that teachers can do something to assist parents in those areas?

P: Well, that's what I meant when I said there are times when I intervene to help out in those areas. I'm not going to train parents how to teach the kids in my classroom. That's not something that I'm interested in doing. I'm interested in them sharing their knowledge with the kids when their knowledge is superior and more detailed than mine in certain specific areas. I think that's wonderful for the kids.

R: Do you think that a part of the role of the teacher is to educate parents at some point?

P: Well, I think that teachers, students and parents are partners in education. But I guess that would depend what you mean in terms of educating the parents. I think that it's important for us to talk with parents about where the kids are at working with us in class and things that parents can do at home to reinforce what's going on in school. I think that partnership is important.

R: And how would you go about doing that? How would do you go about communicating the needs of the children?

P: Well, I guess that's really not what I meant I think in terms of parental – the kinds of interviews that I would have with the parent around things they could be doing at home that would be supportive of what's going on around the school. That's just the regular interview that we have with parents and most of the time with the kids there too. So just figuring out what kinds of things could be helpful for the kids in their learning development.

R: So just during the regular interview sessions but not having separate sessions for parents or different opportunities where you meet with parents so that they can learn about a certain aspect of the program.

P: Well, I know Laura did that with Quality Schools, right? And I think that, I think that was really hard. She really had a good presentation all

prepared and then two parents out of like 26 times 2 showed up. She didn't have a big success rate in attracting parents and I think that's because after parents have had their own day of whatever they do, and then comes evening it's not that easy for them maybe to get back to the school. So I think that's a barrier to try and (quotation marks) educate parents on different techniques that we use. It's just the lack of availability of the parents makes it difficult.

R: Do you think it's solely a parent issue or do you think it's a teacher issue as well?

P: Do I think what is a parent issue?

R: Is it difficult solely because of parent availability?

P: Well, I think that depends on the teacher's situation. If they've had a hard day at work and are going home to little kids at home too, they're not going to be doing education in the evening for parents after a full day of school. So I think that it just depends on the situation of people involved. But I know that we're going to camp in June and we'll be taking parent volunteers as we always have, but we've decided that this year, the parents that volunteer to come with us, we're going to have a session with them before we go to just make sure that they understand why they're coming to camp with us. You know it's not just a good time out in the field for four days basking in the sun. There are specific things they will be doing and that's why we're taking them along with us. Okay, so in that instance, that's a specific instance where we will be wanting them to do specific things. And hopefully, you know if they volunteered to go to camp, hopefully they'll be able to attend the session on expectations and just how they can fit in as to what is going on.

R: Are there ever times, Pat, where you choose not to involve parents?

P: Most of the time, if they want to be involved, the opportunity is there. There are some parents that, for various reasons, maybe they haven't been that successful in being involved. And I think that it's more if there's, if they come in organized and they know what they're going to do and go for it you know. For example, a parent came to go hiking with us with her dog and the dog just totally got in the way. Another time a parent, this is years ago, came camping with us and had her little child with her and her child

was very demanding and it just took more of everybody's time. So these are little isolated incidents but they happen. (Joan re-enters)

R: Joan, we're just talking about times where you consciously choose not to involve parents?

J: Oh yeah. Well, if we're having a class meeting, then I might ask them to leave because I think that it intimidates children too. Well their own child for example, it could modify how they'll respond. And I think that within the group, there should be a privacy that belongs to the group about sorting out problems. And I've also had, with one child, who has an established reputation, you have to be careful how much information leaks out of the classroom about a child, so that I don't think that it's legitimate to do real problem solving around issues a child has with another adult who isn't part of the sort of school support system.

R: Do you not think that information travels from the kids to the home?

J: I think it might.

R: Does it make much of a difference if an adult is there or not?

J: I think that's a part of the child's relationship with the parent. But I think, and what the parent gets then is their child's perceptions of what happens which I think is different from a parent's perception of what's happening. I think children need to be able to talk to their families about problems that they're having or how situations are played out. But the parent role there is, "How can I help my child?" It's not the problems that this other child is having and how do I think that should be managed. And I think if you allow a parent to stay in on problem solving sessions, then their attention should shift to that role of judging how that child having the difficulty should or shouldn't be treated.

R: So how do you go about asking parents to leave?

J: I just usually tell them ahead of time. You know if I sense that something is coming up that it might not be appropriate for them to stay. I think that maybe only once or twice that that has occurred that I actually had to. You usually can plan things around it, right. Like it doesn't have to be when the person is there. But if some urgent issue came up, you just do it. I had a

reversed situation though when a parent was volunteering in the class and used the information against a child and I had to speak to the parent and said that she wouldn't be allowed in the room if that happens again.

R: So that's one of the implications then of allowing the parents to come into the classroom.

J: Yes.

R: Can you think of other concerns that may arise from a teaching perspective from a teacher's point of view. I guess what I'm getting at is all this research tells us about the benefits of involving parents on an instructional level and they tell us what we should be doing and then I wonder why it's not really happening within schools? Epstein who is a guru on parental involvement says, "most schools have some teachers who conduct some practice of partnership with some families some of the time." Is this a negative thing or is it a positive thing?

P: I think that there's some danger in just assuming that a parent can walk through the door of a classroom and assume the same role that a teacher would have. You know we've been trained for many years to be teachers and be good teachers and we have a more global vision of what's going on in the class and I think that this assumption that parents can just walk in and instruct children in the same way as a teacher would, I think that's assuming a whole lot. And I don't think that's particularly beneficial. I mean I could see that if parents came in and did one-on-one reading with the kids or helped out just doing some art project where more hands were useful, but I don't think that parents are teachers. They're not instructional curriculum teachers. I don't think that we should assume that parents coming in that role would be beneficial. I think that partnerships, and people working together and teaming in many ways are beneficial, but not that the parents have an equal role as the teacher in instructional matters.

J: I'm not quite sure what your question is though.

R: Well, here's one statement. I guess when you left the room we spoke about instructional parental involvement and non-instructional parental involvement and you know, the non-instructional being clerical work and helping and the benefits are in involving parents on an instructional level because that's what supports student achievement. But yet, that's not really

happening in schools very much, and if it is happening it's very sporadic. And I guess what I'm trying to get at is why isn't it happening if research is telling us that parents do want to be involved?

J: Well, this lady that I worked with was really good at organizing and she saw parent involvement as parents who did the busy work that she didn't have time to do and so that would release her to focus on instruction. And she was really good at that. So she would have parents come in, have them work and off she would go and work with the kids. I feel less comfortable with that, just because, I don't know. I guess because I think parents want people contact that that's one of the reasons they're there. I'm certainly not reluctant to ask the parents to go to the store and get something we need but I usually don't set aside work for them to just sit and do. I think the parent needs are basically met to some degree. And like what Pat said, I think there are really simple ways that parents can support instruction that they give children more confidence. For example, there's one child in my room and we sat one day and made a list of things that she wanted help with so whenever I got a volunteer in the room I would just ask Emily if she wanted to work on her spelling, she had already identified what she wanted to do. I think that's nice for Emily, for her to feel that control that she can dictate how she needs to be helped and for her to be able to give permission about whether or not she wants to be helped. So I see them as fitting in and that strengthens students and that strengthens their role as a minor and having volunteers makes that more possible. For example, with her spelling, usually what I do is I just give little mini lesson with the parent and the parent would be the student. I'd just take them through 2 or 3 things that I was planning to do anyway. And then the parent would go off. So they have a sense. I don't have to write up a bunch of stuff. And then I would often keep the same pattern so the next time that person wants to come in and do spelling, they'd probably do the same pattern so I don't have to re-teach the lesson each time. But I think that that way it satisfies the parents that contribute to the children and it gives the children the opportunity to recognize that everything can't be easy for them and that that's okay and they could do something about it.

R: Okay. Is it fair to say that there is more parental involvement occurring in primary than intermediate grades?

J/P: Oh yeah.

R: Okay. Why is that happening? Why is there more involvement in primary grades than in intermediate grades?

J: Well, I don't think that they like it intermediate kids.

P: No. In the intermediate grades, they're looking for independence from the parents. And they see, I think they see their school as something different from home, there are different people at school. And sometimes I think that the kids think if their parents are there, it makes them seem more babyish or you know they don't see their parents as being there for the whole class. It's just that they feel maybe a bit spied on.

J: For example, for camp, I have at least 11 parents who have volunteered to go and help with camp, being over there at camp with us. I don't know about you guys, but I talked to Joan before and others, and they find it really difficult to get parents to come and support. Not that the parents didn't want but just because the children want that extra bit of independence there. So for example, like Sam Bronson, he used to schedule his holidays so he could come camping with the class.

R: He came last year in grade 6.

P: Did he? Oh okay. Not all kids mind. Some are really happy if their parents want to come along but I had a note just today saying if you're stuck I'll come along but my son really doesn't want me to. I mean wonderful son, wonderful mom. It has nothing really to do with anything. It's just that the boy wants to be away from his mom.

R: So you are saying then that teachers consciously make a decision in intermediate classes not to involve parents for the sake of the kids?

P: The kids tell the parents they don't want them, the parents to come. They say, "Don't come camping with me."

R: So then the teacher then chooses not initiate parental involvement as much?

J: No because I think of people like Robyn and Danielle really encourage parents to come. And I don't know this but my sense is that they would welcome that kind of support.

R: Like go camping.

J: No, no. Like helping out in the classroom.

R: So one reason is that they want to be more independent of their parents. Can you think of some other reasons why it might not be happening or won't happen or shouldn't happen.

J: I think, specifically?

P: That depends on the task that the parents feel that they're going to do and maybe as you progress up through the grade levels, I don't know, this is just a maybe reason whereas they might have been able to help out with Math in grade 3, maybe in grade 7, it might seem like they can't quite remember how to do those integers or whatever. I don't know.

J: I also think another issue, at least with parents in this school, a number of the families I find, usually the mothers stays home if they can afford it, at least for the early years. And then as the child goes through school, the mom can sometimes take on more work so that by the time the child is a semi-independently learner, there is an increased work load.

(Joan called out of room)

P: So less availability. I find too though that there are other kinds of volunteers. You know I have students that want to come volunteer in the class and they really seem to enjoy working with smaller groups which in the second language learning is very useful.

R: How do you think parent involvement affects teaching?

P: Well, I think that it can often be useful. We wouldn't be able to do a number of things we do, not if we didn't have parent volunteers. So that's one thing.

R: Could it impact on teachers in a negative way?

P: I suppose if the school board started using volunteers instead of hiring proper intermediate people, I think that would be one way. If they saw a volunteer as a substitute for a teacher, that would be negative.

R: Have you ever felt pressured to involve parents, Pat, within the school system?

P: Well, it's again as I say because the program I'm in, not that many parents really feel that... They're more hesitant to come in because you know they're apologetic, "Oh well I don't speak French". Right?

R: Have you seen a greater amount of parents though wanting to be involved in schools and being around schools and hanging out in schools now than perhaps 10 years ago? Has there been, have you notice a shift in the amount of involvement that occurs?

P: Uh, let's see. I don't know if I've noticed a shift. I don't really think I have. I think one thing that is different in terms of parental involvement, I think there was a whole switch to student led conferences or to teach your parents student conferences that I think is a really positive switch, where the parents can come in and see what the kids, have a specific look at what the kids are doing and have the kids explain and teacher facilitate that. I think that's a positive switch but that's not really volunteer is it?

R: No. Do you not think it's parental involvement?

P: It's parental involvement. Yeah, yeah, it's parental involvement.

R: Is it a way that teachers perhaps educate parents about what's going on in the schools?

P: Or that the kids educate their parents about what they're doing at school. Yeah.

R: They do it through kids. There's one quote here that I want to read to get your input.

P: Do you want Joan.

R: Ya, I want her to be here. Maybe I'll wait.

P: Do you want me to get her.

R: No. She'll come in. Let me think. How did the idea of involving parents in your classroom first arise? Was it a conscious kind of decision or did you just assume that parents would be involved?

P: Well, sometimes we send home letters asking for parent volunteers or parent involvement. Sometimes parents offer. It's always nice to take them up on those kinds of things.

R: Do you remember the first parent volunteer that you had working in your classroom?

P: No. And again, the parent volunteers, they haven't sort of come in on a regular basis. Whose come in on a regular basis are students in French or in education. So it's not like every week so and so's mom or dad coming in to do reading with x number of kids. We don't have that.

R: Why do you think you don't have that?

P: Language. And also I think kids are more reluctant to read out loud to a parent. By the time they're in the upper intermediate grade, if they're having problems with reading, they're probably looking more at assistance to see them along.

R: In that regard, they would get help from a trained LAC teacher.

P: Yes.

R: What advice would you give a student teacher about parents?

P: I think student teachers are in a more vulnerable position. They don't have the same kinds of protection or responsibilities that we do. So if I had a student teacher in my class..

R: As they become a teacher, they should know about parents. Any words of wisdom for them?

(Joan enters)

P: Oh. I think I would give them the advice that it's nice to keep open, to listen to what people have to offer to what they want to do. Also, I think that it's important for the teacher, him or herself, to have an idea why they might want parental involvement in their class, I think if you approach it with tact, where you know what you want and you feel there's specific ways your students can benefit from having parents involved in the class and that's helpful. I think I would give them a word of warning and be careful of the bullies or the ones who want to be in the classroom for the wrong reason.

R: Did you want to add something to that Joan. What advice would you give to a new teacher about parents and parental...

J: I think what you should do is really organize in your own mind what the boundaries are and what the limits are. And state that before anyone comes in the room. And that makes it so much easier than having to confront after someone's in the room. You (Rosa) actually have a letter? I've never done it as a letter and I think it's really a good idea. Or you had a notice or something. Remember you showed me at the beginning of the year. I think that's a really good idea. One of the things I would say is you're not there to teach your child, you're there for all children. That's been an issue I've had to work on a little bit this year. Not because the parent doesn't want to help all children I think it's just because they're so in love with their own child; it's very hard for her to move away from him and so I've had to say to her, "You know, you're here for everyone so come help this child and she does it. It's not a tense situation but it could have been. So I think that the parent has to realize they are not there for their own child, they are there for everybody. And we respect the privacy of children and to respect that learners have different needs and not to make assumptions by making comparisons so that the child who struggles feels as respected as the child that it's easy for. And also just little personal limits, like mine, if there's a class meeting. You know you're likely to be asked to leave because the discussion is private. That kind of thing. Set those limits so people know what to expect. I think the problems come up when the parents vision of their contribution is different from the teachers. Pat's issue on the bullies is a really good point. Like I've got one parent in the classroom and I really do not like the way she sees children as learners. And I have involved her and I have found her to be so negative about the children and about what they're curious about that I've made the decision not to encourage her to

participate anymore. But I haven't had to confront her on that but I have decided that if she wanted to go to camp with us that I would say "no" because of how uncomfortable I would feel. I guess because it happens rarely when it does happen it's really horrible. And I don't know how to handle that well.

R: So to really know your limits and what you're comfortable with, let them know what your expectations are.

P: And that they're not coming in on their own agenda.

R: Do you think that may be one of the reasons why a lot of teacher just don't wish to have parents in their classroom?

P: I don't know if I agree with your statement though that a lot of teachers don't want to have parents in their classroom.

R: Well maybe it's not that they don't want to but that they don't have parents in their classroom?

P: I don't agree.

R: That's fair of you to say.

J: I think teachers are very isolated people. There are very few situations in which you get to team teach. And I mean that two people in one place at the same time. And I think that, I mean I've worked with a number of people who feel very self-conscious in front of another adult; very self-conscious to the point it's inhibiting them. I think that it's a factor for some people just having another person there, they feel uncomfortable with that because we don't have a flow. I mean, I think people would feel differently if it was such that their schools had other adults that were around all the time moving in and out, but that doesn't happen. It happens a lot for the kids moving in and out, but very seldom is there a flow of adults moving around.

R: What other types of characteristics do teachers have to have perhaps in order to involve parents. One may be self-confident or be comfortable in front of others. What other qualities do you think teachers need to possess in order to have parents involved in their classroom?

J: Flexibility, I think. And to let go of everything. I think sometimes it's hard for teachers to not always be the one who works with kids. I think that's hard to do sometimes because you do give away a little bit. Like you don't know what that kid exactly did for the last twenty minutes. You don't know how they did with the reading or the sounding out. You lost that a little bit. Somebody else has done that and even if you have the time to get over and ask how it went, very often the parent will do it terms of, "Oh yeah, it was really good. She worked really hard and it went really well". Well what went really well? Could she hear final sounds? You know, I would be more specific in what I would be looking for because I have a sense of her progression. And it's not realistic to expect parents to do that. So I have to let go of that and think it is good for her to have that one-to-one. It's good for her to have that practice time. And I'm going to have to let go of being the one that was there that day. And I think that's hard.

P: I think flexibility and maybe patience. You know being able to let go of and not just always being self-conscious or self-aware all the time. Just letting it happen.

R: Do you think it's a power issue that is at work? Could it be power?

P: It could be.

J: Well, and there's also, you can't control, for example, the parent is over there and it's getting a little noisy. Well, you know, you sometimes hold back a little longer. For one thing, to see if the parent will assert and another thing is that you don't really want for that person to feel that you're controlling. You know, again, you have to go by what your limit is and then impose if you need to. So it does add that level of stress I suppose. Now I never really worked much with parents that needed that but I never really worked with parents that minded if I went over.

P: Yeah, they usually seem to be quite relieved.

J: But it is something you have to manage.

R: I guess it goes back to your comment about classroom management. How they don't have a lot of that or perhaps

P: The same experience.

R: Yeah. They almost would expect us to kind of take that on.

(Joan is called out of the room.)

P: I think too that some teachers might feel that they're being judged a bit. I'm not sure. Again I think if that was the case, then the parents have the wrong ?? (inaudible)

R: If the teacher is feeling judged?

P: If you're feeling that way, there's probably some element of judgement going on. Not necessarily, but

R: Which brings us to the next question.

P: Is this the one that you were waiting for Joan and now she's gone?

R: No. We were talking about teacher qualities which leads to parent characteristics of volunteers.

P: Hmm. Oh sure. I think they have to be people that are willing to take charge, to assert themselves, to be able to see the situation and know what needs doing. I think they have to be people who are good listeners. Well, same qualities that we all try to exhibit like patience. I think they have to like kids.

R: If you had a magic wand, and could change one thing about parental involvement, what would you change?

P: I guess the one thing that maybe I think is sometimes problematic is that some parents, they're so focused on their own children that they would want to spend 3 hours a day with us talking about their kid, and their kid's progress or lack thereof. So I guess, if I could wave my magic wand, it would be that parents realize that we're dealing with 30 kids a day, and that all of the children need our time and energy. I would ask that parents just respect that fact and not always take up more of the time and space than is there for them.

R: Yeah. I almost feel like we need to make that statement at the beginning of the year very clear, somehow, because it's just so emotionally draining dealing with the same family daily.

(Joan enters.)

R: Well, if you had a magic wand Joan and could change one thing about parental involvement, what would that be?

J: You know what is actually hard, it's actually hard for people to commit the time they want to commit. So I guess that would be it. You know some of that's my fault too because I do say just come in when you can.

R: So to be able to free the parents a little bit more, is that what I'm hearing?

J: What usually happens is, people have a sense that they'd like to volunteer. And then I think they realize that Tuesday morning is free so they'll come Tues. morning. So I'll set things up. Like one year, each child had a file, and on the front of the file, the child identifies areas that they wanted to work on with the volunteer. And so inside the file, the other has examples of work they wanted to be doing or the book they wanted to read or whatever. Finally I copied it. So what'll happen is we'll just rotate the files. So whoever files is at the front, that would do. And it works really nicely while volunteers came regularly. But then what happened was of course you know, Christmas comes up or Thanksgiving dinner or things like that. So people wane. And so what I've tried to find is the structure that's loose that satisfies the kids that keeps the volunteers busy. But it would be easier to have the type of structure in a way. Because the kids once a week would have liked that but it doesn't work like that except in the rare cases where you get them. Like if you get someone, like a friend of mine whose going to SFU and she wants to get into PDP, so I knew Debbie would be there every Monday. And the same with Dawn; I know Dawn will be there and this year I have been so lucky, I've had really good ones. But there have been years where I've started off with 3 or 4 and by this time, it's waned. And then January, they're all keen and come back you know. So it falls off. So maybe that would be nice. To have the Dawns all year - someone that is really capable, who's not challenging and very consistent.

(Interruption in the staff room. Joan called to the door.)

P: Do you have volunteers in your class Rosa?

R: Yeah.

P: Good ones?

R: I've had superb ones over the years. This year because of the class composition, I've chosen not to have many which is really a rarity because last year I had a phenomenal amount of parent volunteers. Three days per week I had parents in my grade 4 class. The year before in kindergarten, everyday I had parents in my classroom. Every minute of the day I had a second body because I was in a very affluent community and parental involvement was a big thing. They were always around. It was kind of like a Kerrisdale-type community where they were able to be around, lots of professionals with flexible hours. Actually it was quite a religious community as well. And they were just there all the time, willing to help and really nurturing but this year, I didn't want volunteers. I was really concerned about what people were going to think of certain kids and I wasn't comfortable with the philosophy of the school either. And I really needed to feel comfortable with the philosophy of the school before I could allow parents to work in the classroom.

(Joan re-enters.)

R: Anyway, this is one of the things that I wanted to ask. I want you to listen to this statement I am going to read and tell me what you think, okay? Many researchers are advocating that schools need to involve parents with the curriculum, helping to decide and to develop it, taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it and enforcing participation of the students because this type of involvement increases student achievement. That's the comment. So helping to decide and develop it, taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it and enforcing participation of students. So do you think that is possible within the school system, to have parents involved in the curriculum, helping to design and develop it.

J: I would totally be against it. Totally, because you can't be a para-professional because you're a parent. If you want to be involved in curriculum development; then you go and learn about childhood

development and you go and learn teaching techniques and then you go and practice it. Just because you've birthed a child doesn't give you the insight into other children's needs at all and I think that's one of the areas that is really difficult for parents – understanding that learning isn't just what they've experienced or what their child's experienced. It's very individual. And I think that parents can be actively involved in how to help schools become comfortable spaces for their children and they can be actively involved in supporting the school in ways that the staff feels they're important. Things like the Christmas fair, things that build the community of the school. But they do not have the background to do curriculum, and even if they do it's in a narrow sense. We have parents who have wonderful science background for example, in varied, varied ways, varied specialties or areas of expertise, but that doesn't give them a composite sense of the whole of the demands that go on here. And if you look only at learning through, for example, what you want as a scientist for children to be doing, it really limits the perspective of what children need in the arts and what children need physically and what children need socially. It has to be impossible for us to deal with that. I think some of the statements you made regarding involving parents, that gives parents a sense that they can make decisions in curriculum isn't practical or workable.

P: I fully agree. I feel that same way. In my experience, when parents push certain things it's because that's their interest area. That's their agenda. And there are so many different ways of learning and of growing as a person. I find too often parents look at how they learned when they were in school and you're to do this, this and this. Even though they haven't had the same experience, involvement, evolution that people trained and experienced in teaching kids have had. I think too, teachers have a sense of the child's whole learning scope. You know if parents are involved in planning curriculum, they want to know why didn't you do that particular – suppose it was chemistry – “Why didn't you do chemistry everyday? What do you mean there was a play at Kitsilano School? What do you mean special interest groups?” I think they don't have a global sense of what the whole picture of the kids education is. I don't think there is any need to be involved in curriculum planning.

J: Well, they can be a resource.

P: Oh, of course, anyone can be a resource.

J: Dawn, she's got a lot of outdoor background. And so I went to her and we have discussed. But that's because I saw her as a resource. But I think your question implies the reverse, which is that the parent could initiate curriculum.

R: Helping to decide and develop it. That's what it says.

J: Well, for example, this parent and I planed this house project, right? Well, that's a parent helping. She was there as my resource. And I think that's a fine balance because the same parent last year approached a teacher here, and her attitude was very different. And she had ideas of what she would do. And the principal spoke with her and said you can't do it that way. You can't, you cannot impose, but you can be a resource. So it was interesting watching her with me this year because I was aware of that situation and she was very different. I would like to be able to help, you know, and what do you think? And I said, "Oh, that'll be okay". And then, we talked about some ideas. But to me that's not her planning curriculum. It's that she is providing support for the stuff that I was doing with the kids at the time.

R: I guess that's one of the qualities that you would add to a parent because we were speaking about, you know, teacher qualities or characteristics of teachers in order for them to involve parents in the classroom. And then we went on to talk about parents and some of the qualities that they kind of need to be helpful. And one perhaps, might be what you just said, to go in and say, "I would like" rather than "you should be".

J: Or how can I help you? This is what I know well. Is there a way I can help you with that? And I think if it's done in that light, then people feel comfortable. But I think if it's done in the light of, well that little meeting, I don't know if you were there Rosa, the Parents for Science person and she spent a lot of time being critical of other teachers and being critical of the people she works with and being critical. And so she set it up that she wouldn't be someone that you'd want to go to because it is implied criticism.

P: That's what I meant about judgment when I said earlier if you feel judged, there's a reason for that.

J: But you also said that sometimes people come with their own agenda. And I think that that's an issue too. I think if the agenda of the parent is to be supportive, that'll come through. But I don't think they initiate curriculum.

P: And I think it makes more sense to have the kids help initiate curriculum or looking at how we're going to deal with learning experiences.

R: When you said something, I was reminded of some of the assumptions parents make about teaching or about school. What assumptions come to mind of what parents think?

J: I remember going out to an Orton Gillingham meeting. It's an approach to reading that's based on a rigid phonics approach. I mean for some kids, they find that beneficial. And they would make statements like, children are climbing the walls, that perception of things that are out of control. And I've worked in a few situations that I have felt that maybe the teacher wasn't necessarily (did not say anything), but very few. So there's that perception. I think it's the perception sometimes that it's a 9 to 3 job and not a lot of thought goes into it and anyone could do it.

P: Wrong.

J: And my favourite is that a parent, after a birthday party, very often will come up to me and say, "You know, how do you do it. All I had were 10 kids and I couldn't figure out what to do with some of them." And so I think people over generalize the simplicity of the job and I can't really remember how I started on this now.

R: Assumptions about . . .

P: The school . . .

J: And also that because you work on a concept, it doesn't mean that it's been learned and retained. It means that the process of learning for people had begun. Well some people learn and retain very easily and some people learn and retain for a while then they need lots of support so that comprehension builds up. And so sometimes you'll hear a parent, "You know they don't do that." My neighbour says to me the other day, "My daughter was never taught the times table." So I say, "You know. That's a

little hard for me to believe. But maybe she hasn't memorized them or maybe she's learned them and she's forgotten some of them." In her mind, her daughter never learned that, was never exposed to it. And I think she doesn't understand that maybe that's something her daughter didn't work at or maybe that's something that's hard for her daughter and she hasn't retained it well and she needs to review before it's something that is easy for her to retain.

P: Yeah, I think that is an assumption that the child has never been exposed to a certain concept.

R: Is that maybe one of the benefits of having parents in schools to squelch their perception of what they think is actually happening?

J: I think that that's true. And I think that most parents who work in classrooms come away with a much stronger sense of the kind of structures that are needed, even for an environment that seems loose. You know, you can't have kids doing 10 different things in a classroom and doing them without some structures. And so I think most do. But there are those, who look for what's wrong. I've got one who looks for what's wrong. And those people I kind of see the structure new to them. She's not a volunteer, one that I don't want. I think it depends on what your motives are for going in the first place.

P: I wouldn't like to see a parent volunteer just so they can come in and you know sort of spy on what's going on in the classroom. That doesn't seem like the right motivation to me. I don't know if that's what your question implies.

R: It implied whatever you wanted it to imply. But that's how some teachers might feel having parents in the classroom. As though they are perhaps being watched.

P: Well, again I think that they're not going to feel that way unless there's reason for feeling that way. I mean personally I wouldn't want people to volunteer, become involved in the class, just so that they could, so they could sort of check up on how the system is working. I'd much rather have them come in and look at the kid's work and talk with the child and talk with me and you know, that kind of approach to see how their own children are learning.

J: I had a parent once who wanted to change the way kids learn to read to capital letters because that's how comic books are written because that was a major reading resource for children. So in grade one, children shouldn't be introduced to lower case letters. And he was quite adamant. I did try to involve him, I did try to encourage him because I thought well, it might help him to understand that children are capable of reading lower case letters and that there actually are books besides comic books. In the end, it wasn't possible for him to understand. When he was in the room, he did things such as noticing where I hung his daughter's picture; if it wasn't in a prominent enough spot, he would get upset and I realized eventually, that it wasn't possible for him to have a balanced view. I also think that parent volunteers are there to make it easier and not there to cause more stress. I think there's a personal limit. If you know a parent is available to work in the classroom but as the teacher you don't feel so good about that, you have to monitor your feeling and decide that maybe it isn't worth the work to involve that parent in that way.

R: I know I have kept you here long enough so... . Chatter.

R: Well, what would your definition of meaningful parent involvement be or what are some of the ingredients in a meaningful parent involvement program. You can look at it two ways?

P: I think that if a parent is involved in a meaningful way, they will see the growth in the children that they're working with. They'll be aware of the learning process, they'll become engaged in what's going on in the classroom. They'll initiate certainly things that go on or they'll initiate things that the teacher, something that's already there. I guess maybe engaging in what's going on makes it meaningful.

J: I think it's meaningful if the kids trust them, if they feel safe and therefore want to go with them. And usually in my experience, the first day someone shows up, there are a couple of tentative kids that you don't know about but if they see how that person works and they like it, then the next time, then I'll usually put up a list and then beside the list what each child wants the volunteer to do with them. And usually someone who is established in a group, the list is so long they can't get through. And to me, that's a sign that the children see as something that they want, and that they like that person there. So that's important to me. And the parent has to be

flexible; the parent has to understand that we might have a fire drill in the middle and that their time is as the school needs it. Once they come in and they ask me what the daily plan is and I say I think you will be doing reading and they walk in and we're doing math and they're just going to have to live with the fact that we're doing something else; that we don't work around their schedules. They're not there to make it more rigid. They're there to help make it more flexible. So I think that makes it more meaningful. And I also think that I know they like to work with children, but if there are other things that need to be done, that that's okay. That I can say, "Oh, I forgot the sugar, do you mind going to the store to get sugar?" Or one day we opened the flour and it was full of moths, and the parent ran up and got some more flour. Just that kind of thing.

P: Initiative.

J: Initiative in being it's okay just to be asked to do a favour. So I guess flexibility. And then again, that business of accepting children where they are not striving to make them better. Instead, helping them make 5 ways of it becoming easier for them to learn. Not trying to cure or coming with some missionary agenda.

R: Oh no. I'm thinking, "Is she talking about me?" Laughing.

J: No, no. There is one volunteer who one of my children asked not to go to anymore. And then another child has come up. Then Denise and I had to meet with her and say, "You know, you are too harsh with the children."

R: Was this a parent?

J: This was a volunteer. She thought, "I've got half an hour and all of this can be accomplished." And I thought, "Well, maybe a part of your half an hour can be asking the child how their day went, or how it's been going or what's exciting in their lives." And she said, "Well, but I only have half an hour". I thought, "Yeah, that's half an hour of Emily's life."

Tape cut off because one hour was up.

Insights on Parental Involvement
Silvia (Stave Elementary)

R: Can you tell me a little about your teaching experience. How many years you've taught and has it been in primary or intermediate?

S: Full time teaching has been since 89 in primary, learning assistance and ESL for four years and since then Kindergarten. Before that it was subbing but that was highschool, so anything from pre-school to adult Ed.

R: How many years have you been at this school?

S: Since 89. Nine years.

R: Can you tell me a little bit about the school community so it sets a context.

S: In the last couple of years it's been mostly Eastern European. It changes every few years. In the last three or four years it's been a large percentage of Yugoslavian from Serbia-Croatia because of the war. Russians, Czechoslovakian people, Polish; we've had a few Chinese, not many Orientals and Philipppines.

R: Is it quite a stable community or is it quite transient?

S: Quite transient. There's a core of people that have been here for a long time but it's a small core. The class that I usually have in September is half gone and has changed by the end of June. It's the same amount of kids in June but half of the kids have left and half have been replaced by other children. So it's not the same class picture.

R: There must be a high population of ESL at the school?

S: Yes, very high.

R: I think I got a pretty good sense. What does parental involvement at the school look like?

S: Well, as far as the whole school goes there's a lot of parents who help in the library, a lot of parents who help in the office with the safe arrival

program, there are parents that help be a part of parent organization, parents that come for coffee with our neighbourhood assistant and basically then the ones that help in each classroom. A variety of different people. In my class I have a lot coming into the classroom, for fieldtrips, parties, reading program whereas a lot of the other classes they have more that do photocopying or do errands or work in the library as they get older. There are less parents working in the classroom but they are helping in the school.

R: What I'm hearing is that there is a lot of non-instructional parent involvement like the photo-copying and the instructional kind where they are actually helping student learning. Is that what you're saying?

S: Ya. I go for the other type. Helping the kids learn like one to one reading instruction, tutoring, helping with math book, helping kids who are having trouble learning, to maybe sit still and stuff like that.

R: Do you put a lot of thought into your parental involvement program?

S: Yes, I give a training session well of course it's different parents but I do train them in the reading program on what I expect. How they do the record keeping and stuff.

R: Do they usually pull through or are there complications?

S: Not really complications but as with any volunteer they are going to show up when its convenient for them but I've got it set up so they can come in any time and just get started because it's one to one reading tutoring which they can do while we're (teacher and student teacher) teaching the kids it doesn't matter. They just pull out one at a time so one can go any time and we have grandparents that come and they help in the gym and also the reading program.

R: How did the idea of involving parents in the classroom program first arise was it a real kind of planning decision or did you just assume parents would be involved?

S: At the beginning of the year in Kindergarten everybody meets together and you have a little talk about what kindergarten is about so I talk about it then and then the first week of school for kindergarten each parent or each family comes in for a fifteen minute interview so I always tell them how

they can help in the classroom and have a paper for them to sign if they want to sign up so I actively recruit them.

R: Have you ever felt pressured to include them or do you think you are pressuring them?

S: Oh no, I am probably pressuring them although they usually want to some of them don't want to but I'm always inviting them and then we have lots of parties about six or seven parties a year which are family parties so everybody comes to those. I mean parents take time off work to come to those. They don't have to but their kids expect them to.

R: Are you saying that parents are getting more pressure from the school to be involved more than teachers are getting pressure from the Ministry or authors who are advocating for parents to be involved and empowered. At this school you are saying that you're pulling them in more.

S: I am certainly in my class and in the library and the office. They are always asking for more parent volunteers and help. I find the school just works better that way.

R: Are there times where you consciously choose not to involve parents?

S: I can't think of any actually. No, not in kindergarten. The more help the better.

R: I recall a statement that most schools have some teachers who conduct practices of partnership with some families some of the time. And it was quite a negative statement because this person was suggesting that there are so many benefits for involvement so why aren't teachers involving parents to the extent that perhaps you are involving parents?

S: I think some find it a bit threatening to have a parent in there. I guess it depends on what guidelines you set up. Like the parents who come into my class have a specific job to do so they just get on with it. I mean I'm not that ??? but if they are coming to do the reading tutoring they come down, they know what to do, they look in the book, they look to see whose turn it is they quietly go off to get the child. If they don't know the child they'll come and ask me very discretely, quietly and efficiently. It doesn't upset our normal routine whereas I think in some classes particularly with older

kids where they maybe don't have a job for the parents to do because they're interfering with the instruction, I don't know, I don't know what it is.

R: It doesn't bother you at all?

S: No, because the kids have one their parents come in because it makes them really happy, then the parents know what's going on in the school and the kids do better in school because the parents know what they are learning so they can help them at home and then the kids get one to one help which they wouldn't get otherwise.

R: How do you think parental involvement affects teaching?

S: I think for me it affects it in a very positive way because there are so many things you can do with the parental help that we couldn't otherwise. For one thing the fieldtrips like I mean during our community unit which is usually in the fall I do go on fieldtrips sometimes three times a week because we are going to a lot of community businesses. I wouldn't feel safe walking down the street by myself with 22 five year olds so some of the programming would be absolutely impossible without parental help because I wouldn't be able to leave the school ground without another adult and I only have a student teacher part of the year. I am very grateful to have the parents.

R: If you had to give advice to a new teacher about parental involvement what would it be?

S: Just treat them as equals and friends and as coworkers. Don't be condescending or anything. Just treat them as intelligent helpers in the class and it seems to work if you come on their level. I have parents who come back to help like the lady who was just here. Her little girl was in my kindergarten class four years ago and we go out for lunch I mean that's not helping the class but she comes and brings stuff to the class and she helps with the parties. This is after four years. If you become friends with them that's sort of the key. Not treating them like they are a nuisance. Not condescending. Like partners, I don't know.

R: You're mentioning a lot of benefits to parental involvement I just wonder if in your experience there was ever a time where you didn't feel comfortable with a situation in dealing with parents?

S: I think you can talk it out. I guess last year I had a lot of yuppie parents who were really ambitious for there kids. What sort of upset me a bit was how parents would come and look at this book of reading records that parent volunteers keep when they are working with the kids. They would not only look at their own child's records but they would read other child's records as if it was almost a competition between the parents. They would see what the children were reading and they would write out all the words which is fine it might be a good thing because they would practice with their child but it was just the thought that they were comparing like their child was doing against others. I think it's great they want to see how their child is doing but I'm not real fond of them looking at what the neighbours' kids were doing.

R: Did you address it?

S: Probably not directly. I think I made it harder to find the books and things like that unless they were actually coming to help. Not have them on the cupboard, put it away and have it a little bit more inaccessible.

R: Did you address the issue in the beginning of this year?

S: I didn't think it was necessary. Other years I had the principal come in during my training sessions and talk about confidentiality. It's wonderful to come and help in the school to help the kids and work with them academically but you can't talk about it out of the class. I also say don't talk about how well they are doing either because if you are talking about how well this child is doing they'll also think that if she's talking about how well they're doing she's probably talking about how poorly another kid is doing. It's both sides of the coin. It shouldn't really be talked about outside of the school. How anybody else's kid is doing. So I didn't address it as much this year because I guess I didn't feel the need.

R: This thought leads into the assumptions that teachers have about parents. That we just assume that they'll keep things confidential. Can you think of some other assumptions that perhaps teachers have of parents.

S: Positive or negative?

R: Both.

S: I can't think of any.

R: Or even what teachers have of parents. For instance in my own experience I assume all parents want to be involved and that's perhaps a big assumption I have.

S: I wouldn't really say that. Some parents just figure that it's our job to teach kids and that's OK if that's how they feel. And lots of parents can't volunteer but want to because they are working full time. Other ones have little ones at home and I used to allow them to come in, I allow them to come in at the parties, but for the field trips and for the one to one reading I ask that they not bring their brothers and sisters because it upsets the whole process, babies crying, them wondering around. It's too distracting. There are some conditions where it's not really helpful. Like I say, we have seven parties a year where everybody comes, grandpas, babies, everybody but for other things I've tried and it could be a disaster because mom is taking care of baby but it's not helping anybody else.

R: You involve parents a lot in your classroom, clearly you are seeing a lot of benefits to it. Do you take the liberty of sharing what you discover about parental involvement with other teachers?

S: They don't seem as keen. They just figure it must be a kindergarten thing. I don't know.

R: How can you get other people on board to see and experience for themselves the benefits?

S: Some of them have. I mean I know that one of my mom's that I trained last year is now helping a lot in her daughter's grade one two class. She started in easy. She wasn't quite sure if she should go in. The teacher wasn't quite sure either. Then she started working in the office and in the library. Gradually I noticed, I was teasing her the other day she should be on our payroll. She is getting into the classroom and helping a lot. I talked to Barb, the teacher and she said she depends on Yvonne so much. In some

places they are getting more involved but you have to make sure the teacher wants them and the teacher has ??? them.

R: How does one help teachers see the benefits. If there's a parent that wants to be in their child's education in the classroom and at school what would you recommend the parent do. If the teacher is closed to the idea?

S: Maybe suggest a few things. Like the mother who was here just a few minutes ago she is doing a novel study with the enrichment kids in her daughter's grade 3 class and that's working out really well. I am not sure how it came about. The kids that need extra help usually hopefully get it one way or another whereas the top end, the enrichment kids often their OK they have no problems. So she's taking them in the hallway and they are reading a novel and doing a novel study?

R: Did she initiate that?

S: I think that they talked about it and it sort of evolved from their conversation. And then another parent got in by saying she would help with the class fundraising and that's also in the grade 3 class. Helping with raffles and selling cupcakes. They made Christmas cards and sold them. She's involved in the fundraising aspect of it which because the kids make things for it I guess it's sort of instructional rather than non-instructional. When they made Christmas cards it was a great art project. They made tons and tons of Christmas cards using these prints that they had made and sold them on the street corner for two dollars each. The one parent took charge of the whole project and she's done a number of fundraising projects in that class and it's been a benefit to her because now she's decided she likes working with kids so much she wants to go back to college and become a become a special education assistant which is great.

R: So sometimes non-instructional parent involvement actually becomes instructional parent involvement.

S: With the Christmas cards it was both because it was an art project plus fundraising.

R: How would you sell parent involvement to teachers? Should we suggest that it's not a choice because the benefits outweigh the drawbacks?

S: No. If you say anything has to be done will be met with mega, mega resistance. I think it needs to come slowly and through example and suggestions and just being helpful. It's quite a slow process. If some teachers prefer not to involve parents I don't think you can make them do it because it wouldn't be a positive experience for the parents or for the kids.

R: What would you consider to be a meaningful parent involvement program? What are some ingredients that you would throw in there to make it meaningful?

S: They would have to feel part of it. Have some ownership of it and some pride where they felt. Even with this reading program it's pretty structured so they are not having a lot of ownership but the more they come the more they want to come because they become more involved most of the time because they see the progress but they have to be able to see a purpose to it and everyone has different ideas of what they want to do. It depends on their strengths because some may want to come in and do some story telling or reading a story. I have one grandma who likes to come in and teach science lessons or teach in the gym and those type of things. She will do the reading program but she finds it kind of boring.

R: Do you survey the parents?

S: Usually when I do the interviews in the beginning of the year and ask in what areas they would like to help or are interested in. For field trips I have a waiting list all the time. I never run out of names for that. I can only fit two parents on the bus.

R: You actually have a school bus?

S: Gordon Neighbourhood House lets us use their bus for free. They charge us but I don't think it's ever been billed. You have to of course have a class 4 licence which luckily I do have so I can take them whenever I want. That makes it great.

R: Why do you think it's so successful in kindergarten and as we work through the years and the grades it becomes less successful?

S: There are a couple of reasons. One pretty obvious to me is that Kindergarten kids in this school and in most schools only come half a day

and one parent almost has to stay home. It's hard to hold down a job when you're kid only goes to school two or three hours a day so you have more free time, probably and you might have little ones at home too which means you're probably more around at home whereas when you're kids get older most parents are both now working and don't have time plus in kindergarten the kids are proud and happy and excited. It's a big thing when mom or dad comes to school or grandma. When you're in grade 5 it's not real cool to have your mom see how you act with your friends. Those are just from parent and kid point of views. For the teacher point of view by the time you get older you are doing more seat work and quiet work so there isn't as much for the parent to do, I would think unless you are going to work with a small group on a small project. It would have to be more structured and set up. It would take more planning for older kids whereas with little kids, the reading program, there are at least ten or twelve kids who are going to need help at any given time with whatever they are doing so you just walk around and help them. I can't see ten year olds needing quite as much help.

R: Would the classroom environment then lead itself more to parental involvement in early years, perhaps because it's more centres based?

S: I think so. There are more things to do and they are more needing of adult help. In the older grades you give them the assignment and they do it or if not, well if they're really not doing it, the parents probably couldn't do much with them anyway.

R: What would meaningful parent involvement be to you?

S: I guess anything that really helps the children. Basically the bottom line is the kids and whatever helps the kids to learn is meaningful parent involvement. It isn't the photo-copying. That's clerical.

R: Some researchers advocate that schools need to involve parents with the curriculum, helping to decide and develop it, taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it and enforcing participation of the student in it because this type of involvement increases student performance. Knowing that that's what meaningful parent involvement means to researchers what can we do to get this type of meaningful parent involvement occurring in schools.

S: You would need a lot of organization because you would have to find out what the parents were good at. Parents would have to have some fluency in English unless they were going to do the instruction in their first language which probably would be OK too but things like my friend is doing novel study she's getting involved in setting the curriculum. I don't know if she chose the novel or not but she's asking the questions and directing how it's going without intervention from the teacher because the teacher is teaching other groups in the class.

R: What kinds of parents do you need to have them involved meaningfully in curriculum?

S: You can involve almost everybody in some way or other. Definitely. You can involve them with music or whatever their forte is, but you have to kind of have to know your parent to know where their strengths are. If you have someone in to do a novel study that can't read English that won't work very well or if you got somebody to lead the singing, who sings like I do, that wouldn't be very good either even though I do it all the time. You know what I'm saying. They have to have some level of expertise. I think our neighbourhood assistant has done that to a certain extent although she hasn't had much response, she always used to send home questionnaires for the parents to fill out like which areas they would like to help in, what is their area of expertise is there anything they are able to teach or would like to teach students and that type of thing but the response has been low and has hardly been worth doing.

R: The neighbourhood assistant? What's that?

S: We're an inner city school so we have her. She's a liaison between parents and teachers. She does a lot of interpretations. I think she speaks something like seven or eight languages. That really helps you know. We call on her for report card interviews or any time we need to talk to a parent.

R: Do you feel that the school has initiated involving parents in the curriculum through the surveys and there hasn't been much response?

S: The parents have actually started a fair amount of things. They have donated the science books and are in the process of making science bags for the classroom. So each classroom would have activities that the kids would

sign up for the weekend like simple science experiments that would be in a bag that they would just do at home and bring it back on Monday.

R: Who organized it?

S: The parents from the school?

R: Is it the Parents 4 Science group?

S: Whoever wants to join up. I guess they call themselves parents for science. I'm not sure. I don't know.

R: There are actually Parent 4 Science groups at schools and wondered if it was one of that group.

S: I don't know if they have a label or not but I know that they are doing this anyway.

R: Some good has actually come out of it?

S: Ya. Definitely. They are still collecting supplies. Before we had a very active parent group. The one parent, I think she has a full time job now so we don't see her as much but she started an earthquake preparedness thing, she was coming to give earthquake drills and making sure that we had the earthquake emergency packs.

R: Who oversees these projects.

S: The neighbourhood helper might be somewhat involved but in some schools more so than others. I know they have a Project Teacher at the annex school which is six blocks up and she does a lot with parents in helping them do a lot of home project things, activities in a bag like our science projects but this is more loose. I don't think it's as organized as it should be but it's a start.

R: Do you just assume that parent involvement is going to be a part of your classroom program.

S: Definitely.

R: Regardless of the grade you teach?

S: Mmmm. I taught K/1 and I know I didn't get as many people coming. I had more K parents coming than grade 1. Somehow, when parents see that their child is going into a numbered grade as opposed to kindergarten they seem to want to step back. There weren't as many that year. Personally I think it's great to have parents in any age. No matter what grade I taught I tried to recruit them.

R: How can teachers set up a meaningful parent involvement program while satisfying the needs of the teacher, students and parents?

S: You mean in a higher grade. The novel study, science experiments. It would be a lot easier to do science experiments with each small group. They wouldn't have to do very much just making sure they got the experiment right and thinking about their conclusion to their hypothesis and then again it would take a fair amount of training for the parent to know what to do.

R: Whose responsibility is that to train parents?

S: It has to be the classroom teacher. They are the only person that knows what they want. It would be useless to have someone else come and train someone to work in my classroom because it might not be what I want or it might not be what we are studying at that time. Things change depending on what you are studying. It puts a lot of onus on the classroom teacher unless they really believe in it. It would be really hard to reinforce it. It's hard to defend something that you don't think is a pretty good idea.

R: So if the teacher just doesn't believe in involving parents, is it futile?

S: Well, it would be tough. Put it that way. Unless the parent was very persuasive in a nice sort of way. The parent could usually benefit or if someone could convince the teacher that it would be a worthwhile benefit to go into the trouble of training them, explaining what they needed.

R: Do you think the school board could do something to get the teachers really enthusiastic about parental involvement or more motivated to include them in the classroom?

S: Possibly. Although, generally speaking, things that come from above aren't really well pursued especially if they are "this is what you must do". They already figure there are so many things to do already and it's just one more thing that we have to do.

R: How do you motivate teachers when they don't want to include them in the process?

S: I think it's hard. You've got all these great parents who are going to go to the library which is OK too but they really want to be in the classroom.

R: What would be some of the tips that you would suggest to teachers that haven't really had a lot of parents in the classroom? If you had to share your insights what would they be?

S: That's hard. It's so much easier when you can work with small groups and then the parent can work with a small group. Things like our garden program work so much better if you have parents helping and supervising. Not so many plants get stepped on.

R: But I don't have time as a teacher. I hardly have time to prepare for the students let alone parents.

S: I know. That's a good argument. If you have to you can organize a few days in advance. You can have some small group activities that are ready to go. It takes a little more time but it sure saves time.

R: And then they don't show up after I do all the planning!

S: I know. That does happen.

R: In order to make parent involvement more effective in schools, what would you like parents to know? What would be a golden rule?

S: I guess basically they should be discrete. I guess a lot is just respect both ways. Don't take over the class. Have some initiative, definitely, but know the fine line between initiative and taking over. That's very important. It's what I would say leads to resentment. Teachers would resent parents that try to take over the class before they even know what the lesson is. Sometimes you could be teaching something and they come in the middle of

it and they have a totally different idea about what you're teaching from what you are teaching and if they started explaining it in a way that is totally different from what your whole point was, it kind of messes it up a bit.

R: That definitely a good golden rule. I wonder if we can think of any more golden rules?

S: Nicole (student teacher) feel free to jump in anytime. Nicole's mom teaches kindergarten.

N: Well, you would always want them to follow your lead. I think that goes along with knowing what they're doing. But also that goes along with everything, with management, what you already touched what they are supposed to be learning and doing.

R: Do you think that's why teachers just choose not to have parents in their classroom. Teachers know what they expect because they have all the training but what can you actually expect of parents?

N: I don't think its that as much. Obviously this comes from very little experience, I think maybe the parent isn't reliable. If you know that you have someone every Tuesday, it's a bit easier to plan for that and it's not a big issue; whereas you don't want to go out of your way to plan something for a parent who won't always show up. It's more work in a way. Then you almost have to have two things ready. One if the parent shows up and one if the parent doesn't. It becomes one extra thing to do. (rest inaudible) What can you do about it?

S: I guess you could say you're never coming back again.

R: Have you ever had that situation where you felt some animosity?

S: Ya. I think last Wednesday I said to a Grandma "Thanks for dropping in because she came for just a few minutes. And she said, "Oh, I'll be back next week." She came with her grand daughter and said, "I'm off to the bank."

N: You wouldn't do that with someone who is coming in for the first time.

R: Is there anything that I think I should know that would better help me to understand your views on parental involvement?

S: Nothing at all.

R: Would you like to share a story about why you feel you involve parents?

S: It helps the kids academically, they know what's going on, the kids do better because they know the parents care what they do and they usually help them at home. This year I haven't had as many parents help with the reading program as former years but I've noticed a direct correlation almost between once the parent starts helping particularly with the reading ability, the reading ability goes way up. They practice more at home and they show their kids that its worthwhile to read.

R: Do you think the fact that a teacher might be a parent affects how they deal with parental involvement?

S: Probably. Before I was working I did a lot of volunteer work in the schools. I did reading programs, I did crafts, all kinds of different programs with kids. I had always done it before I started working full time so I just assumed that parents of my students would be involved too? I'm doing for the students in my class what I used to be able to do when I was a parent.

Insights on Parental Involvement
Elizabeth (Stave Elementary)

R: I would like to know how many years of teaching experience you have and how many in primary and how many in intermediate?

E: I graduated from the University of Lethbridge in 1975. I taught three years in Alberta, primary, grades 1 and 2 then I moved to Qualicum Beach and I taught for nine years all in primary, 1, 2, and 3 then I moved to the Bahamas and taught all intermediate 4 and 5 and I've teaching in Vancouver for three and a half years, all of that Intermediate ESL, reception class. I subbed for one year. My subbing was all elementary K through 7, Special Ed., ESL it's quite interesting.

R: As you were speaking I wasn't counting how many years in primary and intermediate.

E: I don't know if I can count that high. Three plus nine, twelve years of primary and about seven and a half intermediate and I'm getting close to my retirement.

R: No way! You look so young.

E: Well anyways, I'm getting there.

R: I think you mentioned earlier that you were at Roberts for three years, is that correct?

E: Yes.

R: Can you tell me a little bit about the school community?

E: It's a great school. I think I'm probably at the best school in the city. I love it because the west end is pretty much a community onto itself. For me the biggest challenge has been that so many of my students are refugees. We have so many kids from the former Yugoslavia and particularly quite a few came in when I first went there and they really suffered severe war trauma because we are getting a lot of kids who come directly from refugee camps and from very difficult situations and having lived several different places. In the last year or so we've had more kids from Russia and more

kids from Asia which for me is a different kind of challenge. But I really like the community of the West End. One of the really hard things is that most of our kids live in very small apartments and they really don't get outside much. So they are going home and there might be four or five of them living in a very small apartment and really the only place for them to play is the school playground and in the winter time their parents aren't really likely to take them to Stanley Park on school days so I think anytime teaching is hard in terms of the kids but in the West End it's one of the most difficult things because the kids don't have much of a chance to just sit outside and play and a lot of the kids we've had, particularly the Yugoslavian kids, because a lot of the families were very wealthy before the war and they're the ones that had the connections and a bit of money at the time to get out but now the parents have been in Canada for years, I've become very good friends with a lot of them, and they are still going through a lot of stress because they are all professionals and they are trying to write TOFEL and write their medical exams. Most of them are about my age, mid forties and they just wonder when their lives are going to start to get easy.

R: What's the percentage of ESL kids at your school?

E: I would think at least half of the kids are ESL.

R: And how many children are at your school?

E: 460 and then we have an annex with 150. The annex is just kindergarten to grade 3.

R: So what does parental involvement at your school look like?

E: It really varies from teacher to teacher. Most will have parents attend field trips. I do a lot of fieldtrips. I have a few parents who faithfully come to my class and they are mostly parents who are also studying English and they want to practice their English and help in any capacity, whether its with an art project or field trip or coming swimming with the kids, or small group work, reading one on one with a child. I've had a few parents help in the computer lab this year so a lot of my parents just want that experience of being in the classroom. They are just very flexible. They are there to help and that's what they do. In our school we have a lot of parents who

help in the office, with the safe arrival program. Quite a few parents involved in the library, that's all I can think about right now.

R: Do you see a difference between the amount of parental involvement occurring in primary classes versus intermediate classes?

E: In our school for sure. I would say, like I'm not sure, I don't know that any intermediate teachers other than in my class, I don't know if they use parents very often except for an occasional field trip. Primary, the two grade 3 teachers use parents mostly for small group reading. One teacher uses them to do novel studies with his more advanced readers. The grade two teacher I don't think uses them at all. The grade one teacher I don't think uses them too much. The Kindergarten teacher uses parents quite a bit.

R: Why do you think that happens? Why is there more involvement in the primary level than in the intermediate?

E: Just based on our school I found that this is the first year, it's my fourth year there, it's my first year that I've had a lot of parents involved. In our particular school I don't think that many parents are able to come and help. We have such a large ESL population and most of those parents are taking English courses themselves and a lot of them are in school from 9:00 to 3:00 so I think there just aren't that many parents who are available. I think for an occasional trip they would rearrange their schedule or whatever to try and come but I think a lot of the families are really families in stress and the parents don't have that much time to offer. But I think a lot of teachers aren't that comfortable having parents in the classroom either and I don't know why, for the most part, the intermediate teachers don't do it as much, I don't know. I'll e-mail you that one.

R: Do you think that it has to do at all with programming? Younger children's ability to do things is different than intermediate's ability to do things?

E: I think for the most part intermediate teachers tend to put kids on one program so everyone's doing the same novel, everyone's on page 16 in math. I think primary teachers tend to be more aware of grouping, ability grouping, cooperative grouping whereas a lot of times in intermediate it's

sink or swim. Do your best. Maybe, partly too, they use more peer tutoring too.

R: Some of the literature that I've read on parental involvement talks about lots of different types of parental involvement but it can be categorized into two categories. Non-instructional parent involvement, which is more clerical like the photocopying and working in the office and then there's the instructional side of parental involvement which is working with children helping to increase student achievement with curriculum? Can you see that occurring in intermediate classrooms and if so what would need to happen for teachers to do that. To involve parents in curriculum.

E: I definitely think there is a need there. When I think of some of my students who have been integrated, I feel a lot of them could use more help and the parents would be a great help. I might need you to repeat the question?

R: And I don't even know what I said! How do we involve parents more in curriculum matters?

E: I think it's just teacher style and I know most of the people I teach with, we tend to have an older staff, and I would say everyone except for one of our teachers in intermediate are over fifty and I think a lot of them are just set in their ways and I think they see any extra person in the classroom almost as a disruption. I think they are very set in the discipline and that's not my style at all so I don't really understand their reluctance. But it's definitely there and I don't know where that stems from but I really don't see these people changing.

R: Someone, who is a big guru on parental involvement made a statement that some teachers in some schools involve some parents some of the time. That parental involvement is so sporadic yet there are many benefits. What could possible be done in the school system to allow teachers to realize what some of these benefits are in order to use parents effectively?

E: One of the reasons why I've always used parents through my years of teaching is that sometimes I feel that as a teacher my job is very, very lonely. Maybe it's partly because I am single and I come home to an empty house but I love having another adult in my classroom even just for that contact with an adult. I guess some of my colleagues don't feel that need. Maybe

they have more of a life after school than I do or something. But I've always felt I could use three or four people all the time and that it would just be to my advantage and I just find it's so much fun to have another person in. But I don't know how you change people particularly other teachers because I really think they are so set in their processes and in their methodologies that I don't know what you can do to educate them. But I will think about that one.

R: Do you think though that parents are trained enough and they have the skills to be working in the classroom?

E: Yes, I have absolutely no qualms about anything like that. I know a lot of the ESL parents are worried that their English isn't good enough and I even had a Korean student teacher who did her twenty hour ESL practicum with me and some schools refused to take her because English wasn't her first language and I just said to the faculty associate, "I just feel she's a wonderful model for my students and the fact that she has the courage to be in Canada only a year or two and be pursuing her studies. To me, that's the most wonderful thing of all. I just thought it was great and she was wonderful with the kids and they had a hard time placing her and I just feel that a lot of teachers are quite critical and that if we just wait for that perfect person or that perfect volunteer, we'll miss out. I just know as a teacher I make lots of mistakes and I love it when the kids notice a mistake I've made or correct me. I have a Chinese student who has been in Canada less than a year, did not speak a word of English a year ago, I was marking a little test and she picked up on a typing mistake and I am usually pretty careful about it. I had typed "in" instead of "is" and she just printed the s on the n and I was absolutely stunned that she could pick up on such a small mistake so I just know that I make mistakes. If a parent is there and makes a bit of a mistake the kids will be the first to let them know and I just think we can learn from each other's mistakes and I think the kind of person that worries me as a teacher is the kind of person who finds everything really easy or is so perfect or has all the answers. They aren't really necessarily such good teachers because they don't really understand the frustrations of the child for whom things don't come so easily and I am very comfortable with that and with everything not being quite perfect and if a parent isn't as happy with one thing then I can pick up on that pretty easily. If maybe they aren't that good at math or don't know geometry or whatever they are working with you can easily adapt their assignment to something else. Particularly in my classroom, I just feel that for my kids to have the opportunity to

speaking English with somebody else, I find my kids live in a very protective classroom with only twenty kids and I just feel that if they talk to somebody or get a few directions from somebody else that person is going to have different vocabulary, different intonation, different ideas than I have and I just feel the more people that my kids can be exposed to the easier it will be for them to cope outside of our classroom.

R: Are you saying then that one of the benefits for the children is that they are introduced to another person's way of speaking . . .

E: Ya, their mannerisms and their ways of doing things and maybe different accents, different sense of humour, different cultures. I think it's just great.

R: And you're providing them with the opportunity to learn to adapt . . .

E: I think I'm there to help the whole community so if I can help some adults in some way. There are two elderly Bosnian ladies, one was over ninety who came to my class for three years and did embroidery with the kids. I have to say that's been one of the highlights in my program and everything stopped when these two women came and the marvelous thing was that it wasn't just the Bosnian kids, every single kid loved these women just like they were their own grandmothers and I just wish I had a video tape of it because it would just be so wonderful. Every kid in my class, even some of the boys who I was sure would not want to sew were interested in the embroidery. There wasn't one kid who didn't want to sew and the kids laugh and share and it was so good for these women because they had been going through a difficult time and feeling so lonesome here, not feeling that they could learn English and the women's whole attitude changed and they just started to learn some English. It was such a two way thing where we got so much from the ladies visits and a lot of my kids don't have grandmothers in Canada, had this exposure to these beautiful women and then on the other hand these women would get out of their apartment once a week and come to our school and just work with the kids. I think it was one of the most exciting things that I've had in my whole teaching career. It was wonderful.

R: Do you have to have certain qualities as a teacher to involve parents?

E: Yes.

R: What would you think are some of those qualities?

E: I think maybe an appreciation. Particularly in our school the different cultures that are there and the different age groups. I think you have to be very flexible because so often you are counting on the volunteers and they don't show up and I think you have to be able to work around that. I am flexible even in terms of, we have a full time volunteer, a man who has epilepsy quite badly and he works in our school all the time and the second he walks into my classroom whether I am expecting him or not I often pull kids from certain activities because my philosophy is anytime a child can work one on one with someone, I don't care what subject it is, I don't even care if they are just sitting talking to the person, I just feel so much more can be done for them than I can do for them in the group. Plus, I think it's important to see what you are doing for the volunteers as well. I think often you are giving them meaning and a whole new dimension to their lives.

R: You said flexibility . . .

E: And openness. I think you have to really like people.

R: I guess earlier you said you had to be a risk taker, well you didn't really use that word.

E: I sort of skirted around that but I think that's very true because you're not always on your best either. Sometimes I think this wasn't exactly my best day, "I hope they don't always think I'm an old bag like them."

R: Do you put a lot of thought into your parental involvement program?

E: No. Because I never know when they are coming. I might do more with our full time volunteer, Garry, because his times are more predictable and for me, particularly my kids who are very new to Canada, with Garry I have him mostly do reading one on one or maybe two kids on one. I have him do quite a bit of remedial math with the kids and it's good because he has them working on the chalkboard so I would try to plan to be teaching certain subjects when he's there but even with him as a full time volunteer he's not always there at the times I'm expecting him. I am very comfortable with that. If somebody was coming in with a specific project, like I'm not very artistic and through my years of teaching I've used parents a lot for art

projects then I would be very well organized for that, just have all my supplies ready and that so if they were coming in for something specific or of course a field trip I am organized when the need is there. I am just always glad to get some extra help. I always need more people and I'd be glad to accommodate them in any way I can.

R: How did you think of involving parents in your classroom program?

E: I've just always used it and yet, when I think about, there were probably never parents in my classrooms when I was growing up. When I taught in Qualicum, my next door neighbour (her kids were very young then) and she was very artistic and at that time we were really into teaching with themes and so even the art projects and that I would try to come up with ideas that would be related to the themes we were doing in our language arts program and Marg would always come up with such great ideas and activities. She hadn't lived in Qualicum all that long and she was anxious to network and get to know people so she was one of the first parents I got really involved and we would have so much fun after school, evenings and weekends just planning art projects together that I think for me it just started off friends helping and then maybe then I was willing to reach out more maybe because I had so many positive experiences in very non threatening situations and I saw how beneficial it was for the kids and for me and I really like being a part of a team and two heads are always better than one. I think it's always been very positive for me and I think it occurred naturally.

R: I'm just picking up on you saying that you were planning with the parents in developing things and I just thinking of a particular quote which says, "Many researchers are advocating that schools need to involve parents with the curriculum – helping to decide and develop it, taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it and enforcing the participation of students in it because this type of involvement increases student achievement." What are your thoughts then on parents helping to decide and develop it.

E: I don't know if I've gone so much as having parents develop the curriculum but I've had them help me with specific projects. Helping to decide and develop it? I think parents should be involved in things like I've often sent notices home to see if parents would recommend certain field trips that I might have not thought of or talking to kids about what kinds of books they like but I do agree that if we can involve the kids it really helps

and I found often if I talk to kids about novel studies, I tell them a bit about certain stories I am thinking of doing and let them vote on which one they prefer to do and often I'll say we'll do one before Christmas and one after Christmas, we'll be doing them both but to me the most interesting thing is that they choose one's I'm sure they wouldn't. I think it's very important to try to make kids part of the planning process. With one of the novels I did with my kids before Christmas was about a Chinese American family trying to settle to life in Seattle and I was sure that particularly my Chinese kids would want to do the sequel about his sister but when I talked to them they wanted to do a book that was totally different next. They all enjoyed the book but it wasn't their next choice. Even though you think they are going to be predictable, they tend to fool you.

R: Have you ever gotten parents to lead literature groups?

E: Other than student teachers I haven't had anyone that was consistent enough to do that. I'd be quite comfortable with a parent doing that but none of them come in on a regular enough basis but no I would be really happy with that. With my experience in the last few years, there hasn't been that possibility.

R: So is the inconsistent schedule of parents one of the challenges in trying to organize parental involvement program?

E: Right. Very few of my parents are available in the morning and I do tend to do most of my language arts things in the morning and have the afternoon more for music, computer and that kind of stuff so it's partly because of my time tabling too. Particularly for kids who that are just beginning English or just learning to read in English I tend to do with them more picture books, beginning readers. That is one of the ways that I would be happy to use parents more.

R: What do you consider a meaningful parent involvement program?

E: Well, I would hope that it's meaningful for the parent as well as the children. Number one the kids have to be comfortable with the parent whose there and really enjoy it and the parent has to feel that they are enjoying it. I've never used parents for the clerical aspects, only to work directly with the kids.

R: What ingredients would go into a parental involvement program? If you're making a great cake you include certain ingredients?

E: I guess you have to look at the parent who is involved. I try to get to know my parents and use the talents and skills of the parents. So if I had a parent who was really good in computers, I would want to rearrange my computer time so they are there for that and mostly I would want the parent to be really comfortable in the classroom and feel welcome, useful, I am not sure if I'm answering your question though?

R: There is really no answer. Have you ever felt pressured to include parents?

E: No. No. I've never felt pressure. Like from an administrator?

R: Could be from there?

E: No. Never. If anything I've just wanted more and more?

R: Has there been any situation where you've chosen not to involve parents?

E: Over the years I've seen some pretty crazy parents in the school, who are maybe a bit mentally unstable, that you would have to be really careful about but none of them have been parents of my students who I would feel uncomfortable with. No, I can't say I've ever had any bad experiences or even uncomfortable ones. I guess I've been really quite lucky.

R: I'm thinking in my mind if it's luck or the way you deal with people?

E: I don't know.

R: Well, I'm ready to make a judgment but I won't.

E: I'm just glad to have any extra help I can get I just feel they are doing us all a favour by being there. I just think it's fun to have another adult in the classroom and we can just laugh about things.

R: What advice would you share with a new teacher or a student teacher about parental involvement?

E: I think if it was a student teacher I was working with I sort of think example is one of the best ways of teaching so I would hope that they would learn a lot from what we've collaboratively done during the practicum. I guess one of the important things is for the teacher to make sure they are the one in charge but not to be authoritative. Trying to get a balance between making the decisions but letting the parent feel that they're not sort of dictated to. Try to give them a bit of input but still within certain parameters. Maybe go a little bit slowly at first, have a parent in there maybe not too often at first and make sure it's working out well before you commit them to every afternoon, gradually increase their responsibilities and maybe make sure you set expectations for the kids in working with volunteers. Let the kids know they are expected to be polite, mannerly and respectful and responsible when they are working with this person.

R: Do you think it is important to set expectations of parents as well before they come into the classroom?

E: That's a good point. I think it depends on the parent and how well you know them but I think that for the sake of the kids and to make better use of the parent's time it is important that they understand what you want them to do. I think you have to help them but I still think you need to be in charge. For example, if for some reason a kid really needs help with fractions and the parent is taking them to the library, I think it's really important that you get them back on task right away; not in a negative way, but so that you are still in charge.

R: If teacher's could let parents know one thing about how to make parent involvement easier on teachers, for parents who really want to be involved, what advice would you give to parents?

E: It's really important if I am expecting somebody to come that they do come or that they let me know if something has come up. Two of us took our classes swimming at the Aquatic Centre on Friday. The other teacher had five parents who said on the notice they would be there. When we went to leave the school he had three parents. We got to the Aquatic Centre and two parents, husband and wife who said they would be in the water swimming, just suddenly left and said it's too nice a day to go swimming. I didn't see them go but the other teacher came over to me and said so and so they just left. I said, "Well go back and get them, we need them." His kids

who are in grade 3 need one adult per every five kids and then I knew that a couple of parents were coming but wouldn't be there til 1:15 but they would be there so we were able to go ahead. So for me, one of the most important things is if they say they are going to be there. I understand things are going to come up but if they could just have the courtesy to phone and let me know. I think it's important that they understand, for some things, their presence is absolutely necessary.

R: Did that teacher approach the parents?

E: I told him I think he should afterwards. I told him right then he should go back and get them and I talked with the kid because he and I ended up at the hot tub at the same time, I mean I don't know his parents but I would be glad to speak to them another time and just said, "You know, your parents could have let down your whole class. We really didn't have enough parents to be here" . . . I don't really like to lay it on the kid but . . .

R: Do you think teachers are very cautious as to what they say?

E: Probably more than I am. I was surprised David didn't say something to these people because it had been a concern for him before we even left. Whereas, for my kids, because they are older, I only needed one other parent and I knew for sure this one was coming. She'd e-mailed me the night before and she could not get there by 1:15 and I was expecting one more so I knew my kids were OK. What were you asking?

R: Are we cautious as to what we say?

E: I think some people worry too much and I really think we have to let the parents know that when we are doing things like that, especially field trips or special art projects that we are doing them for the children and it's a mutual thing. We are doing this together for the kids and that it's not just this teacher directed thing. It's part of that whole community thing too.

R: If a teacher is not doing much to involve parents, and most of them do, what would be the one thing that you think is really critical for teachers to be doing?

E: One important thing that teachers should do to involve parents? I think teachers sometimes should plan more interesting things so we need more parent help and be willing to take a chance and be more flexible.

R: Do you think the fact that some teachers are parents have a bearing on the amount of lack of parental involvement occurring in classrooms?

E: Probably. I think a lot of teachers are just so busy that I think so often we take on so much more than we can do. I know for myself, every year, often at the beginning of a new term or whatever I start off with all these goals for myself and things I'm going to do differently and I think for all of us, we know there is more we should be doing and things we want to try but I think it's such a demanding job and between demands from our colleagues, demands from parents, demands from our administrator and demands from our union, no matter how good our intentions are, you just can't do it all. We know that we should be involving parents more, we know we should be going on more field trips, we know we should be doing all these things and there's just not enough hours in the day to do it all. I guess what we're having to do all the time is prioritize. We all have different goals and different things we put at the top.

R: How do you prioritize?

E: I think many teachers are very resistant to change. There are people on my staff. I can say that if they are teaching one more year or twenty it would be very hard for them to change. Let's say an administrator was gently trying to suggest that, I think a lot of them would be quite resistant and I think it's unfortunate but I guess it's something you could never push on them.

R: Nor can VSB?

E: Unless it's part of our collective agreement. "Thou shall have one parent in the classroom one hour every week."

R: And do you think that would actually work?

E: No. Because if the teacher is not comfortable with it, it wouldn't work. You know the teacher really sets the atmosphere.

R: At your school on a scale from one to 10 how much involvement would you say goes on?

E: I would say in primary maybe 5 out of 10, intermediate 1 out of 10.

R: Personally, do you notice a difference in the amount of involvement you had when you were teaching primary versus now in intermediate?

E: No. And maybe partly because I started in intermediate. My first few years of teaching were in a small community too. A lot of the parents in the school were my friends and I saw a lot of the talents they had that I wanted them to share with the kids. Maybe I'd have a different philosophy if I started teaching in a city. I just know that there are so many things I am not very good at and if I can get somebody to come in and help me I'm just thrilled with it and when I see how much pleasure it brings them and to my students. I just don't think, well maybe there's a few, but I don't think there's very many teachers who just teach everything well from art, and PE and Music and LA and Math. Things I love the best are Language Arts and Math and even to teach those I could see how much more help I need. I think for me, volunteers were always there and I'm just lucky that I was able to gain so much commitment because for me it's always been such a positive experience.

R: Did you say you started off in intermediate?

E: No. But in a small community and I just think that in a small community there's a whole different feeling towards the school. Some of your student's parents become your friends, you get to know more about them and maybe it makes it easier.

R: How about for that teacher that says, "I don't need anymore friends and that's not the purpose for me to have parents. I have enough friends."

E: You don't need them for friends but I just think if you can have more talents around that always helps.

R: One last thing, is there anything you think I should know that might help me to better understand your views on parental involvement?

E: No, but I'll think about it. What I might suggest for other interviews is if you could fax just a few of the questions you are going to ask. I think if I had a day or two to think about the questions I maybe could have made better use of your time.

R: I think you have made good use of my time.

Insights on Parental Involvement
Lori and Angie (Valley Elementary)

R: To begin with, I would like each of you to tell me a little bit about your teaching experience.

L: I've taught for 34 years grades 1 to 7, specialized in phys. Ed. Now I'm the French specialist now. I've coached gymnastics in high school for four years.

R: I didn't realize that. So you've had K to 12 experience.

L: Pretty well.

A: I've got 27 years, mostly primary, I taught a bit of music. I taught kindergarten for years and years, 14.

R: How many years have you been at the school Angie.

A: How many for you Lori and add one more.

L: It's my ninth year.

A: So it's the tenth year for me.

R: Could you tell me a bit about the school community?

L: It's changed a lot since we've been here. I think when we first came it was sort of a middle class, well-to-do middle class, comfortable families where mom was still at home and now its become a lot of the smaller homes have been torn down, a lot of mega homes have been built. A lot of Hong Kong families have moved into the area (we have about 20% ESL children). Then it's been built up down below Marine Drive near the Fraser River and a lot of low income, single parents have moved in there so that's changed the population of the school.

R: Is this still considered more of an affluent community, middle class to . . .

A: I would say so, the majority other than a few of those closer to the river.

R: What does parental involvement at this school look like?

A: It's been pretty good as far as the primary people are concerned. When we need parent drivers, parent helpers, we do have a lot of volunteers.

R: And at the intermediate level?

L: It wanes because a lot of the moms go back to work full time when they get into grade 4 so they don't have very much at the intermediate level. You might have one or two parents in a class that can drive on a field trip or go on an outgoing during the daytime.

R: Do you think that has anything to do with teachers and their choice not to have parents in their classroom at the intermediate level or is it a parent factor:

L: I guess we choose not to have them in the classroom as much to help with things but as far as field trips go, it's a parent factor. It's also a child factor. By grade 7 they don't want their moms to come.

R: You were mentioning the teachers perhaps choose not to have parents in the classroom for factors and one of which would be because students perhaps don't really want them in the classroom?

L: Right. I think the older the kid gets, the harder it is to be flexible with your program. We platoon so if you wanted a parent for a specific thing it would have to be at the exact time, whereas for primary you can work around the parent's schedule.

R: So it's a lot more flexible in primary than intermediate?

L: I think so, don't you?

A: For us too, some of the parent involvement could be utilizing parent expertise. For example I had a father come in and talk to us about the Titanic because he was really interested in that, he studied that in great length. Another parent experienced an earthquake so she came to talk to us about it so it's not really coming to help in the classroom per say but when we know such and such a parent has a certain experience or expertise we

invite them to share with us. This year we have had parents come in and do some planting with us. She's done some growing vegetables from seeds. They've done that to help.

R: Are parents being involved in the curriculum?

A: Yes, and this year we also have parents reading on a one to one with children.

R: Could you, Lori, respond perhaps to the intermediate classes. Is any of the expertise teaching occurring in the intermediate classes? If so, tell me about it and If not, how come?

L: It does somewhat in the art. We have a former parent who still comes back every year and does brush painting with the children. Ski trips, we've had a couple of parents who were pretty good skiers went along and helped out on that. But as far as . . . I guess if a parent had a knowledge of say the Mayan era we'd have them in to speak but it just doesn't seem to happen as much as in primary?

A: We do have parents helping out in the library.

L: And a parent helps out in the ESL intermediate class and reads with kids.

R: What do you think contributes to the amount of involvement that occurs in your school? What are some of the factors?

A: Availability of their time, whether or not they have the time to do it and often when the kids are younger, when they are starting out you have most parents helping out in kindergarten because this is their first year for the kid. Then second year, third year and after that their interest is not quite the same. We find that when we need parent drivers to go skating they are there. They help with skating, they do up the laces and all that. But when they get older they are a little bit more independent. Parents do, like Lori said, they would perhaps go back to work so when they go skating, parents don't drive anymore. They won't be skating with them but with the little ones they are happy to do it because of necessity and because it's still their baby when they are that age.

R: I read a statement that said, "Some teachers in some schools conduct some practices of partnership with some parents some of the time." How would you respond to that statement? Is it a negative statement or is it just a fact?

L: It depends why the parent is doing it. When I first came here I was told that the hot dog ladies got their kids in the rooms where they wanted them. So although they were helping the school they had a reason for doing it that maybe wasn't just to be helpful. And I didn't like that but it's not like that anymore. I think it's partly because the kind of parents that are helping us don't have the knowledge that they can manipulate or don't realize that they can manipulate a bit and that's good.

R: Has the school done something to . . .

L: It could be a change in administration over the years.

A: It could also be the type of parents too, whether or not they help they would still manipulate and want a say as to where they were placed.

L: It's the negative side of parents having a lot of time. Nothing better to do than to sort of worry. They see somebody doing a little thing that they don't like so they don't want their child in THAT class and that sort of thing.

R: On a scale of one to ten how much involvement is occurring at your school?

L: It's not high. I would say about the middle. I'd say maybe like a seven? Do you think there's more?

A: I don't think it's more than that but it's mostly peripheral. They are not in the classroom as much as they might have been before. Now it's more like driving and cooking, making booklets with the kids, playing games (box cars, card/dice games for Math) in the hallway and those types of things.

R: How come you think that's happened where it switched to that peripheral involvement instead of in the classroom?

A: But it's always been like that. It's not always parents right in the classroom because when they come they want to be doing something, if they are helping make something, if they are playing a game with the kids so it's more like they are not in the room but they are somewhere and they do their thing?

R: What do you consider to be meaningful parent involvement? What would be some of the ingredients to making a meaningful parent involvement program?

L: First of all I think if a parent sends their kid to school well fed and that they've had enough sleep and that they are clean, that they have a positive attitude to school and to teachers and their friends. I think that's the most important kind of parental involvement, yet you don't often call it parental involvement but I think it is. I think it's really important. Just like when we got off the ferry from camp Friday the number of parents who came up and shook hands and thanked us. They appreciated the time we had given them. To me that's more important than having them come and drive or do anything else. The kids that I teach have this really positive attitude to learning which they get from their homes. Like they are loved, they are cared for, they feel safe at home. All that sort of thing. I think that's the most important kind of parental involvement.

A: I see when parents come to school and are involved then they really understand our philosophy of teaching because so much of it is what parents hear is happening at the school – that there is not enough discipline or there is not enough of phonics taught, there is not enough of the basics taught and it's all fun and easy. But if they are involved parents they likely don't have those types of misconceptions. They see all the things that are happening. They more likely like our approach now rather than, "We want a traditional school, we want to go back to twenty years ago the way people taught." So when we have healthy parent involvement then they probably have a better understanding of what's going on in the school rather than statements like we want a traditional school and things aren't working well and that kind of talk.

R: Do you think schools can do anything to create a healthy parent involvement program? How can we initiate more of that learning by parents?

L: If you don't appear threatening to parents, if you are willing to listen. Usually when parents ask a question they apologize for asking it and I don't think they should have to because it shows that they are interested and that's what we want, for them to be interested.

R: Can you think of other qualities that a teacher might have to have in order to have parental involvement within a classroom?

L: You have to be confident. If you are not confident in yourself then you are not confident to have anyone else watch you or be with you in the classroom.

R: Anything else besides confidence?

A: Be appreciative. I remember having a parent with three kids helping me do those "Math Their Way" things and she kept on saying, "Give me things to take home. I can't come because I have kids at home but I'll take it home to do it for you." I said, "I don't feel good about that because I'm paid to do it, you're not and if you can take things home I can take things home too for that matter." I think it's us appreciating what they do to make them want to come and help. They have just as much a load.

R: What qualities do you think a parent needs to have in order to come and work in the classroom to help out?

L: I think they have to realize that they are coming to help everyone not just their child and they have to be discrete and not tell the neighbours, "I was in your child's classroom and your child can't read you know." Flexible, be able to take on the tone the teacher has with the children so that the children react in a normal way.

R: Can either of you remember how you involved parents in the classroom?

L: It started when I first started teaching I had a parent who was a fireman so he had time off and they were right near the school and they just sort of gradually, "Well if you're doing this would you like us to come?" and what not. It was such a positive experience with that particular family that it encouraged me. I guess even though I was a beginning teacher I never thought that parents were going to criticize me because of them, so I've

never hesitated. I feel quite comfortable with parents because of the initial experience I had.

R: And yourself Angie?

A: It's mostly bringing in parents for resource reasons – a pregnant mother and keeping track of the baby's progress and what she is going through, the earthquake experience, the Titanic and that sort of thing, making things with the kids, taking them out to read one to one, supervising on field trips is a great help to us for safety reasons. Not just with the driving but being a group leader, taking a group of six otherwise I'll end up with a group of twenty to twenty five. These are times when we need parents.

R: At any time so far in your teaching career have you ever felt pressured to include parents?

L: Once and that was last year when we had a parent who really wanted to come to camp with us and we didn't really want him to go because it was the nature of the parent. It's the only time I can think off hand.

R: So how did you get around that?

L: We were lucky we had a bad back and we needed somebody to carry a child in a wheelchair otherwise I guess we would have taken him because we wouldn't have wanted to hurt his feelings.

A: I didn't have that problem. I mean anybody who wanted to help we could always find something for that person. Most of them here are usually not that pushy. "I'm available if you need me" – that kind of an offer.

R: How about from the Ministry, authors who are empowering parents, administration, etc. have you felt pressure?

L: What did you do with that parent. Did she pressure you to be in the classroom?

A: No. She was just constantly coming to check on the program and what she could do at home and that wasn't a problem. As a school we need parents all the time anyway to do things on a regular basis.

R: Are there times or has there been a time where you have chosen not to involve a parent for educational reasons?

L: Not that I can think of.

A: If in doubt, because sometimes kids respond differently to their parent, I just have the parent go with other children so that her own kid is not in that group so that hasn't been a problem. I do have a lot of parents who can't handle their own kid, they are awful with mother around so I don't put them together unless they are driving in case of accidents. But if it is just grouping them I split them so that they don't go with their parents, if it is a problem with a mother and their kid.

R: Would you say then the teachers may choose not to involve parents because of the interaction between parent and child?

A: Yes, because of the interaction or if we know that they don't respond that well and we get that parent to come and help in the school it's not going to work out that well. I find it that way.

R: There are a lot of different types of parental involvement that occur. One person has categorized them into two types of parent involvement. One is the non-instructional form of parent involvement that's more of the clerical work like photo-copying for teachers etc., and then there's the instructional parent involvement when parents are involved in a way that is helping to increase student achievement. Some of the researchers are advocating that schools need to involve parents with the curriculum - helping to decide and develop it, taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it and enforcing participation of the student in it because this is the type of involvement increases student performance. Do you think that's possible?

A: I think we do that through the PAC meetings, if they have any suggestions. But as far as curriculum goes, say for example one to one reading, because they are not really taught to teach they don't really teach so they are there to read with them to give support and encouragement but not the teaching part of it. Unless they are trained to do that but there is nobody with that kind of time to train these parents to teach. You don't just go in for two sessions and come out a teacher. We give them work where they have a certain routine to do - they listen to them read or they

read with them, they ask them questions and they get them to write something but they are not basically teaching. This is to do with the reading. Anything else, say with my own kids having problems, I only encourage parents to go and sit and read with them and give them support when they read. Leave the teaching to me. So often you can get the kid turned off even more if parents don't know how to do it and they say, "Sound it out, do this," and you can have the opposite result. And then as far as parents giving us more input into the curriculum unless there's a channel like PAC, they have ideas they can talk about in PAC meeting, that's fine but other than that I don't know.

L: It's like I wouldn't want to be on a committee to develop curriculum for law school to advise a lawyer how to argue a case. I might see something that might help him and that sort of thing. Besides which it's hard enough to get the people that are chosen that are knowledgeable in the area to make a decision, if you had the whole world making one you would never have a decision on curriculum.

A: This is the scary part about it. I live in Richmond and there's this group pushing for a traditional school and of course they have their grounds. They want ta da, ta da, ta da. A couple of those things are, "We want teacher directed instruction" so do they really know what we are doing in schools? Do they have an informed knowledge of what's happening for them to say that? Do they think we are letting kids do whatever they want in school now, is that why they are demanding that kind of teaching? So if we let parents decide they may say, "We want 3Rs, we want uniforms, we want discipline, we want teacher directed instruction". As teachers we probably feel differently about some of these issues. I would hesitate to have parents tell me what I should do.

R: This is great! I want this critical stuff. Tell me more.

A: Things are changing so much. Parents probably understand how things were when they went to school so they want us to go back to twenty years ago and I've gone through it. I've been teaching all these years. Do you want me to go back to twenty years ago? Then I don't need to prepare. Turn to page two today, page three tomorrow. Do I need to plan? Things are so different. We are teaching them to meet the challenges of today's world, not twenty years ago. So parents may not know what they are talking about if they start telling us how to teach.

R: What assumptions might parents have. You said that they are assuming things are happening or not happening. Can you kind of brainstorm the assumptions that parents have of schools or teachers?

L: They assume that whole reading is no good. They assume that whole reading means the kid picks up any book and you just expect them to read it. They assume that there isn't guiding or teaching anymore.

A: It's a hit and miss. You do what kids want to do, they only do what they want. It's not systematic like it used to be. You teach this and then you teach that and then you teach that but they don't know that our reason for doing some of the things we are doing is to individualize more now. I can go to page one, I lose this child, I lose that child and I meet the needs of this group. What we are doing is meeting more of their needs and making learning more interesting. But unless you are an involved parent you are never going to know what's happening.

L: They think because the kids are enjoying school they are just playing. They don't think you should enjoy school. They can't understand why grade 7s love coming to school, that there is something wrong. When they were in grade 7 some of them hated school.

A: I talk to my kids too all the time. When we do math I say, "We used to do pages and pages of this. The drill type thing. But now if you show me you understand you don't have to do it anymore. You'll move on to something else." It's the strategy we work on and not just the drill of remembering the number facts. You can use the calculator to do it but it's understanding what you are doing, the thinking and the what not that's important. But parents don't seem to now. They think, "You are using small numbers!" But what's involved, is something you don't see all the time. Not like in the old days with the drill sheets. The 3R's is another misconception that we don't do it, but we do.

L: But there are still some teachers who think they don't do it. It's not just the parents.

A: Or if a parent is saying, "Well, you are saying that my kid is doing well, look at all the spelling mistakes in his writing." I say, "Well, in the old days, twenty years ago when I was teaching, my kids would write, 'I love my

dog. I have a mom. I have a dad. Those sentences are all grammatically correct, no mistakes, that's their writing. You look at their writing now and they are talking about the Titanic, they talk about this, that and the other. The sky is the limit. Nothing would stop them from saying something. If they can't spell it they will still write what they hear so what they are trying to express is ten times more than what they used to do or were able to do or allowed to do or feel free to do whereas now, they feel free. They are free. It's just a way to express themselves. I talk to the parents. I say, "Look at their writing. The spelling would improve almost weekly. If they don't know this word this week, the next week they might now it. If you see the growth then they are learning." In the old days the sentences were meaningless because they were limited by what they could spell then there's no meaning in the writing at all. You almost have to explain to the parents all of these things before they know what you are doing otherwise they think, "This is not good writing, all those mistakes, don't you want to correct them?"

L: At the senior level also parents quite often think if the child doesn't get an "A" that they are not doing well. That's one thing that you have to really educate them about. That not every child is capable of getting an "A" and to appreciate what their kid does so their child isn't afraid to go home with their report card. In fact I tell my kids if they don't want to show their parents the report card until the parent teacher interview they can leave it with me because if they are afraid that their parents will be really upset I can give it to them with them.

R: Are you saying that parents make an assumption that every child can get an "A"?

L: THEIR child can.

R: Do you think schools need to do something differently with public relations to educate parents?

L: I've always maintained that we don't use the media enough and a few years ago when I was on the Physical Education Committee I asked, "Why aren't we using the media, our local TV channel to show the importance of physical education. Why aren't we using former Vancouver students who have gone on to do really well in life, that thank their athletic programs for getting them started not just in the sport but in their attitude, drive and

success because we have lots in Vancouver that we could be using to show parents that these things are really important. The same in the Arts. Same in any subject area for that matter. Things like "Hooked on Phonics" they use the media. We could and I think it would really help and on the multicultural channels we should be using those too. We don't sell ourselves AT ALL! I also think that the parents and the public have the idea that because schools aren't "traditional" that kids are going to misbehave. You get on the public bus. They (the kids) come in, they move to the back, they sit quietly and do all the things that you've already taught them and then people comment, "My, are these children ever well behaved." Which is a nice complement but it's often said in like a shocked form that I don't think should be there.

R: When you were speaking Lori, I was just thinking that the times we are in the media, it is VESTA against the Board, there's that conflict right there.

L: Sure there is and the Board represents parents. Or that some high school team got drunk on a field trip or something like that it's never anything positive.

R: Which leads me to the next question, if you had a magic wand and could change one thing about parental involvement, what would that be?

L: I wish the educated parents would have more say because the educated parents appreciate education. Educated, not that they've been to university, but educated in that they've been in the school and know what's happening in their child's school and know what their child is doing in school. I wish parents like one I had this year could be on BCTV and tell the public what their children get at school, get out of school and what they think it's done for their children instead of the negative.

R: How about you Angie?

A: I don't know.

R: What would you like parents to know?

A: Maybe just to understand what we are doing rather than wishing we'd go back to the old days and what they understand about learning.

R: What could teachers do to kind of start the ball rolling in that regard? Who has control over that – parents or teachers who need to educate the parents?

A: It will take a long, long time. I feel like the hardest part now is that you feel you are defending yourself a lot. I've done it in years before during parent-teacher conferences to have groups come and I'll explain my reading program, my math program so I might do it again next year rather than explain myself 25 times. You might as well do it once and focus on some of the things that I do that they may not know. This is sort of one way to try to educate them but if you try to do it after school it will be the concerned parents who would come and ask you and it takes a lot of your time to do it that way. I prefer to have it done through the school board, through the media, through other channels to educate parents because it is a big job when you feel you have to explain why you are doing such and such; it is time consuming.

R: Do you think that the school board can speak on behalf of all teachers or do you think that programs within different classes vary quite a bit and then it would almost give parents almost ammunition?

A: I think the basic philosophy might not be that different and even if it is different I feel that it's still good for the kids to be exposed to different teaching styles. I know within our primary section we do have a big range of philosophy and approach but things seem to work out all right because you do have a variety of teaching styles so for the teaching styles it doesn't really matter but that we are working towards the same goal. It's when we have different goals that is a little different.

R: What advice would you like to share with a new teacher about parental involvement?

L: I think you have to be confident in yourself before you can expect parents to be confident in you and you have to remember to that parent, that child is perfect, and so it should be and the better you know the parents the better you understand the child. I don't know what our system is like now because we just had a change in the top but a few years ago I know that if you had a conflict with a parent you could expect the parent to win if they knew how far to go. I think that had a negative effect on the whole system but I don't know what it's like now, if it's going to be the same or if

that might change a bit. I guess up until this year I would have warned new teachers to really think how far you really wanted to push something. I guess just to always remember that you have 30, 25 or however many that you care about and that the parent has one or two. I guess like I can find excuses for my friend's kids because I love them right. I can say, "Well, she did that because . . ." and I think it's good for us to have those feelings because it reminds us that everyone makes mistakes. It's very hard to be a parent and no one trains you to be a parent. We see them with a different view at school.

R: Do you think a teacher who is a parent, it affects their decision in the amount of involvement that happens or the lack of involvement that happens in the classroom?

L: Oh definitely. I've known more parents who are teachers who aren't a positive influence than those who are. I would say if I had to generalize there are some wonderful parents who are also teachers but if I had to generalize not from personal experience but just from hearing fellow colleagues talk about their child's school like come on do you do that? How quickly we forget? They have the strings to pull. A lot compare their kids to what they have in their classes and of course they want to compare their child from what they have on top.

R: I am interested in who accepted to be interviewed and what I'm noticing is that a lot of the intermediates actually have had primary experience and they are the ones willing to speak to me. Then another thing that I'm wondering is if teachers are parents is the likelihood that they are going to have parent involvement in the classroom higher, does it matter at all do they actually want parents less in their classrooms?

L: I think it depends what you call involvement. I don't think that parents who I have that are teachers don't do as much I would say in the classroom or helping out because they are working full time. I find that I don't always agree with their expectation of their child or the pressures they put on them and like they are the ones that will ask if they can have so and so because they know that if you do it in writing the principal will look at it. Other parents don't know that, if they feel comfortable with you they will embarrassingly ask if it's possible. They have their demands. We've had one parent who has had every teacher in the school in tears expect for me and I'm not through with them yet so I'll see. Mostly it's the pressure on

their own child. With me they had their child in tears so I would rather it would be me. I was providing the child with the opportunities that they wanted but then she said the child wasn't picking them up so that they were at fault. Now on the other hand you have parents who are teachers who realize the time you are putting into things who realize the time you are putting into things who are very appreciative, positive and supportive. I think it can probably sway more one way or the other with teachers who are parents. I also have friends who are teachers and when they become parents I think, "Man, how soon they forget. How would they feel as a teacher if a child did that. Suddenly it's a different story when it's your own child. I don't have my own children so I am just speaking from friends.

A: Some people, if they are teachers, they try not to interfere too much.

R: You're choosing to involve parents to an extent. If you had children, would you be choosing to involve parents more, less or as much? Do you think it has any bearing on your choice to involve parents?

L: Looking at my friends, no. It hasn't with them. I don't think it changed when they had kids.

R: Is there anything else you think I should know to help me better understand your views about parent involvement?

L: I've never taught in a school that is sort of known for negative parents or known for parents who put a lot of pressure on people. I have one friend who has taught in those kinds of schools and I think she's had to do a lot more explaining than I have on what she's doing but I also know she has a lot more support as far as help and involvement. So you get the good with the bad.

Insights on Parental Involvement
Matt (Cameron Elementary)

R: I just want to know a little bit about your teaching experience. How many years, primary or intermediate?

M: It's been seventeen or eighteen years. The grey hair is creeping up. I started teaching adaptive PE for children who are mentally handicapped. I did that for one year and in the same school I taught (this is using the old terms) the class of severely and profoundly mentally retarded for two years. Then I taught a class of children with autism and behaviour disorders and Queen Mary for about two years and two months, then I was hired to be an Itinerant teacher for the mentally handicapped. Right now they are called resource teachers. Some parents with Down's Syndrome came to our school and basically said, "Our child is coming to kindergarten" and the parents said, "If they are not going into kindergarten, then this is our lawyer" so they frantically hired us, pulled us out of these classrooms so I had about seven schools on the west side to go to. Nothing like the case load they have now. Then Sheila, the principal, knew me here, this is in the old days, I stopped by and she hired me for a grade 3 / 4 class. I think I taught grade 3 / 4 for about three or four years. Then I went to England and taught grade 4 for a year there and then I came back, grade 3, grade 4, grade 2, grade 3 / 4, then I switched to grade 7 two years ago.

R: So most of your experience has been primary.

M: Six years in Special Education, about ten years in primary and just two years in intermediate.

R: How many years have you been in this community?

M: Nine.

R: Can you give me an overview of the community? Who comes to this school?

M: A real mixture of people. On main street there are a lot of people who live over the shops with lower income. Now as you drive up main, with all

the stores that are opening you get quite an eclectic mix than before whereas getting more towards Oak Street, you get all the old homes that have been renovated, you get the old homes that have been torn down, you get triplexes so it's a real mixture of types of people and income levels to. We've had the Director of the Art Gallery, his kids here, Symphony members kids, we have parents who come in dressed totally from their toes to their head in leather with jet black dyed hair, whatever, we get the whole mixture of stuff. People who are very involved in street life, from prostitution to drugs too at the school. Not that huge amount as you would get at other schools like MacDonald or Grandview but there are those kind of cases here. We cover all the way down to Broadway. It's a real odd mix.

R: Whereas, I thought it was more middle class.

M: I think probably 98% of it is. There's a little fringe. Maybe 80 – 90 % of people.

R: So what does parental involvement at this school look like?

M: I think it follows the pattern like in most schools. Where as in the younger grades its quite involved. Having taught at grade 3, 4, 2, having seen that. Now teaching grade 7, the dramatic sort of drop off. Just from things from dealing with field trips. Like having parents come in and read with kids or doing handy crafts with kids or working in the classroom. It happens much more in the younger grades than now. Now as far as our school PAC, I think they tend to be more parents of primary students rather than the intermediate.

R: Do you have any ideas as to why that might be happening?

M: I think the parents might think the students are set, that they've got them started in school, they are settled so they are on their way, so they can pull back more. Secondly, slightly different, but I think they don't realize the academic, social or emotional problems that could be of a whole totally different nature say in grade 6, 7. They don't realize those. They don't become more involved. Does that make sense?

R: Do you think we are doing something in schools that isn't allowing them to realize that?

M: I think in some cases. You know what I do sometimes, you know how we have "Meet the Teacher Night", I don't know if it's illegal, but I tell the kids that their parents don't have a choice to come. That it's mandatory. I need to meet them and it's very important to go over school rules and school matters and that they should be here. Is that bad?

R: I don't think so.

M: My first year teaching grade 7 I was thinking, "Oh God. They aren't going to turn up. I was worried about that."

R: Did you get any parent feedback?

M: I didn't have anyone complaining.

R: Did you get a large turn out?

M: Yes, both years. They jammed in the door.

R: Do you think it made a difference to your program?

M: That they were here? Yes, yes.

R: How so?

M: Because they knew the rules. They knew what I expected from their children. I don't get hung up on rules in the classroom. I have them but I don't get anal about 50,000 rules. I have very few basic ones. They are lovely and nice and generic that I can apply to any situation. The parents then knew the rules, they knew my expectations. I go over everything. This is a notebook. It's kept neat. You have to look at. I hold it. Even just to know the lunch room rules, which in grade 7 can be very tricky because they are allowed to go out of the school grounds if they have a note from home, so all the parents are there and they hear the same message. Your child needs to have a note, to the principal, before they leave the school grounds. It's all spelled out. There's no, it goes from me to a twelve year old, to home, to me, none of this passing it around and getting it all mixed up. It's all totally clear. They need to know. Homework, what my expectations are. My flexibility too. I've always said if there's some reason why they're away or some reason why they don't get their homework done

send me a note, "It was Aunt Freida's great birthday, we didn't get . . ." That's fine. You have to show some flexibility. It's good that I tell them to be there, I think.

R: Do you think there is anything else that you do throughout the year besides the initial contact that you have with parents?

M: One thing I do is, like we're going on a field trip now and it's tough getting people to sign up for it and I tell the kids, sort of indirect pressure, I tell them point blank, "Kids, the same parents come along on the field trips and it's not fair. Now, I know a lot of people work but maybe there are some flexible days, and I explain what those are, and say talk to mom and dad, it could also be grandma or grandpa, I just need another adult, and I make a joke, incase I drop dead, I need somebody to get you back to school. And I say, but seriously, the same people keep on volunteering and its nice to get other people, your parents or grandparents to come along too. Aunts and uncles are fine too as long as it's an adult.

R: What do you think are some of the benefits of parents being involved in the classroom?

M: They see how their kids act in school and sometimes they come in and they are shocked because the child acts absolutely wonderful here. They are horrified, "How do you get them to do this? They are reading a book, why are they reading a book?" They are shocked. That's good for them to see, to see how they act whether it's in the classroom helping out, which there hasn't been any of that, but it's good for them to see even on field trips to see how their kid is looking like. It's wonderful for the kid too. They think they're twelve or thirteen and yes we are very cool and we can't really put our parents, in some cases and at some stage it's like, "We don't have parents. We don't know who those people are." The thirteen year old attitude, well, they are almost on the verge of getting that. This is their one last, elementary school grasp and having their parents come along. It's not a big deal. Next year that won't happen.

R: So you don't think kids in intermediate grades actually mind having their parents involved, over all?

M: Not here. No. I'll say that when I'm asking for volunteers. "Yes, I know some of you are thirteen and some of you are twelve and you are

horrified to admit that you have parents but we do need one of them to come along or we can't go." Just like that.

R: So down to earth.

M: Well, there are some parents who I know will never volunteer for whatever reason but some of them you know will go home and say, "Could you come along?"

R: You mentioned in your last comment that it's hard to get parents involved in the classroom? Can you expand on that?

M: Umm.

R: Do you think it's more a teacher thing or a parent thing?

M: I think it's more a parent thing. I don't think kindergarten, grade 1 and 2 teachers go and solicit parent involvement. I don't think they advertise about it. Never mind. They do. They have their reading time in the morning for the first ten minutes in the morning, the parents come in. The kids take their coats off and everybody sits down and reads. It's lovely. But then I think, "Oh God, I don't think I want that." Besides, at this age, they are all back to work.

R: Why would you not want them to be in the classroom?

M: Oh now I do. But they certainly wouldn't come in and the mom and the son wouldn't sit down and read. No. I just don't know how you would do it I guess. It would be lovely. They are more than welcome to come in.

R: Do you put a lot of thought into your parental involvement program?

M: Not a huge amount. Do you mean like go out and solicit and increase it? No. I'd have to say not. To get them to come in and read with kids or do something. Like even today I had to staple some exams together but I had the supervision aid do that which I guess the parent could do in a way. That's not being involved with a student but it's being involved with your school.

R: There are two kinds of parent involvement. There's the non-instructional type and the instructional. The non-instructional which is more like fundraising, clerical, things that aren't directly related to student performance and there's the instructional which is directly related to student performance. I wonder how schools or teachers could encourage more instructional involvement to assist with student learning because research says that's what benefits the child not the non-instructional, clerical type of work.

M: Right. Working with the kids benefits them. I guess one thing, the first thing is asking for the help. Whether you ask for it through your newsletters or whatever meetings you do have, PAC meetings or September meetings and say I need these people to work with kids whether it be on reading in primary or grammar booklets in the intermediate, or something like that, you can do that I guess. You could directly ask them point blank, when you have them in the classroom for meet the teacher, we need this many people to come in here and warm a seat next to a child and help work on some basic multiplication skills with these grade sevens who don't know it. Ask them point blank.

R: Are we making assumptions about teachers though? About teachers perhaps?

M: In what way?

R: That they actually want parents involved in their classroom.

M: Well, there are some who don't, who are horrified of the idea.

R: Why would they be horrified?

M: Because I think in this profession we work in a room with four walls and a door. A lot of people shut the door, I don't, sometimes I do if it gets loud but no, I think we are very much in our own room and we do our own thing. Teaching to me is performing. I think we are quite comfortable acting and performing in front of people who are younger than us but I don't think we are willing to drop our inhibitions and become a teacher in front of other people, especially ones we don't know. There are certain people who can work together and drop the inhibitions but for a lot of people, teaching is very insular. You are inside these four walls, you shut

the door and do your magic, you open the door and you're gone. Does that make sense?

R: Yes it does. Is there anything that can be done with teachers that feel that way that would allow them to involve parents?

M: You know who I mean. The people who are scared. "Come on, sit down, get to work." I think there are people who are worried. What could you do to calm them down?

R: Could we do or say anything to have them meaningfully involve parents in their classroom not just by sending them out to photo-copy but somehow getting them in the classroom to really help them with students.

M: To work with small groups, one to one, on the computer to help them edit? These teachers who are worried and who just don't involve parents? I don't know. Tell them. I don't know.

R: I read this quote, "some teachers in some school are involving some parents some of the time." It was a very negative comment. With all these benefits of parental involvement, why isn't it occurring in schools to the extent it should be occurring? What are the challenges teacher's face?

M: In getting them out?

R: Have you had any challenges with parents and have at times not chosen to include them?

M: No. Because they would still be welcome today. I think. I have run into a parent who has overstepped their bounds and I think, "Hold it here. I'm still designing this program and teaching. You are working with these one or two students. I just want you to finish this math with them. Help them out." I think people over step their boundaries but in a very gentle, polite and tactful way redirect them. But that didn't turn me off having them in the room. What can you say to the teachers or convince them? I don't know. I was thinking in my mind. Sometimes you get those raw, raw pushes, "OK we are all going to do this. We are going to do Second Step. We are all going to do this." It's all very raw, raw, but underneath there is very little substance. I was thinking in my head, you could have a raw, raw parent involvement push. Does that ever get sustained though?

It's like a burst of activity but then the person who directs it or runs it moves on, priorities change, it dies out. So what? It hasn't really changed anything.

R: That's a good thought. With most innovations, if the person isn't there it dies. Most good innovations are those that radiate through the classes.

M: Yes, when it moves through. When people grab hold of it.

R: That's a tough one.

M: Why don't you ask me questions about Egypt.

R: Have you ever felt pressured to include . . .

M: Besides this interview? No.

R: Do you feel pressure. We could stop.

M: No I don't? Pressure to what?

R: To involve parents? Pressure from the school, administration, Ministry?

M: No. No. No. I think it's always stated that they are always welcome but there is no pressure from anybody. There's no pressure.

R: You must be working in a nice school.

M: Thank goodness. We are on the second page.

R: Actually, I just skip around.

M: Oh no.

R: If you had a magic wand and you could change one thing about parental involvement or you'd like to tell parents something about parental involvement, what would that be?

M: That this is your child's one chance to be in this one classroom in this one grade and that if they don't become involved they are missing out in a really neat opportunity to see their kid at school. Does that make sense?

R: Of course it does.

M: Some of the parents we had come skiing with us, there we go, it was free. We had parents come cross country skiing with us and they had to send back a little slip saying, "Oh ya we'll accompany the kids for one day and join them." It was neat for those parents to go because they were able to see their kids in a totally different light. Up at the mountain in snow, which is really good for some of the ESL Asian kids, it was a totally foreign idea.

R: What advice would you give to a new student teacher on parents and involving parents in schools what sort of advice would you give them?

M: Do as much as you can. Welcome them in the fall. If you see them in the hallways say Hi, have a little conversation with them. Have them feel like they are welcome. Sadly, enough then, don't count on the world. Don't count on a ton of involvement. Especially at this level, in grade 7. Does that make sense? Be warm and welcoming, try and do what you can. Mention that people are always welcome to come in. Be forward and approach them but if it doesn't pan out, it doesn't pan out. Don't expect the world to come rushing to your door, it all depends.

R: What would you consider to be meaningful parent involvement?

M: Probably for me a combination of what you said, when a parent is really, I know Marissa has a parent who comes and helps on the computer editing with kids, he teaches them all computer skills, I think that's great. It's wonderful. So that combination of working on cold, hard skills is really neat. But also that almost kind of fluffy kind of stuff, being able to be in the room and doing whatever with their child is a neat opportunity. When I had the 2 / 3 or 3 / 4 I got myself way in over my head. We were making sock puppets and sewing all the things on well after two days of dealing with needles and thread I said forget it. At recess I photo-copied a big note that said, "Help. We are making sock puppets. We can't handle it. They need to be done quickly can you come tomorrow? Return this signed. Matt" I sent it home and I think I had eight people. Jason's grandma

showed up and she sat there all afternoon sewing. They were the most beautiful puppets in the world and we got most of them done that afternoon. It was nice.

R: So just being able to ask for help and welcoming them is an ingredient of a parent involvement program. Can you think of anything else.

M: Pause. (probably with a very interesting facial expression☺)

R: When you make a cake and you put in all the ingredients to make a really good cake, well, what ingredients do you need for a meaningful parent involvement program?

Interruption.

M: The teacher has to be eloquent, persuasive, honest, you have to have a reason, they want to feel that they are doing something, I would assume so. It has to be real.

R: How about for the parent who says, "Well, I would like to help but I have a lot of skills yet you are asking me to photo-copy so if you want me to come in I'll come in but to do something meaningful.

M: Right. To me I would say. That's fine. I would find something else for them to do.

R: Would you find something for them to do or would you perhaps ask them to design something?

M: No. I would see if I could figure out something for them to do? I am the one that is asking them to come into my room and help so I think it's my responsibility to have them help out in the room. And like you say, if they are not keen on what I set out first of all, I'll try and find something else. Ya, I would. I'm not hung up on that. So they don't like photo-copying it's boring. I'd try and find something else.

R: It's sometimes hard with parents to say things in a way where they are not offended. Sometimes teachers can put up a wall right away. I could see a lot of communication problems because we are sometimes afraid to say what we think. Have you ever had any experiences like that?

M: Sometimes. No

R: Have you had a parent who has overstepped their bounds and has made you feel somewhat uncomfortable?

M: Oh ya.

R: Can you tell me about that?

M: Choosing a winter festival concert to talk about their child's behaviour problems insisting that I do something now about it and the onus is on the teacher to get back when this parent had a whole history with non involvement with the child. I spent days trying to get hold of this person either at work or at home and it was impossible. But by that stage, December, I knew enough and turned it around. I told her that I had observed nothing, I had heard nothing, I will talk to the counsellor tomorrow, I will do this and I won't do it tonight because the concert is on and I will not phone her back that she is to phone me two weeks later. And just following her whole pattern of non involvement she never phoned me back. But I did check it all out so I made sure the child was OK. I don't know. I am the type that won't flip out. I will be firm. I think I know my role, my job after all these years and I state what my role should be in this situation or whatever situation and that's it. For the most, it's always worked out fine. What was the question you asked I have no idea? I was baking a cake how did I get into this?

R: That was about the ingredients you would put into parent involvement?

M: Did you have that written down or did you think of that?

R: Another way that I ask kids when they are thinking about defining a term is to think of the ingredients they need. It's hard to define words. How would you define meaningful parent involvement? The definition of meaningful parent involvement is . . .

M: Is? What? I sure hope you mail me the answers.

R: Laugh. There are no answers. I am trying to get teacher voice. What do teacher's want from parents? There are people who are telling us you should be implementing meaningful parent involvement, you should be

involving parents in the classroom allowing them to work with students in a meaningful way because student achievement is the goal but I'm saying how do you go about doing that? Why isn't it happening in the schools? What is the problem?

M: Parents are abdicating their role of parenting.

R: Do you think that's happening?

M: Why is that they have to come in?

R: The more involved the parent is in the education of their child the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement? Yet teachers continue to choose not to involve parents in their child's education. Why isn't parent involvement a reality in all classrooms?

M: Mind you on the flip side of it, it's the old story too, you have a child come into your room. The child is going to be a handful, socially and emotionally, as well as behaviour and academics and you think, "O.K. I've got my year cut out for me with this one." Then three weeks later at meet the teacher night the parent walks in, that says it all. The apple does not fall far from the tree. So there's that side of it. You're dealing with someone whose own adult social, emotional, behavioural or academic skills may not be appropriate for a classroom setting too, maybe. Now, in this room I can't think of too many parents who are like that to be honest. Most of them who I have met this year have been absolutely charming and wonderful. One of the parents here is the volunteer of that computer, helping the kids learn how to edit things so there are some that maybe I don't want.

R: Aren't teachers the experts?

M: Are you kidding? Who told you that?

R: If they are involved in curriculum matters . . .

M: Oh no, she's back to page one.

R: Many researchers are advocating that schools need to involve parents with the curriculum – helping to decide and develop it, taking on defined

responsibilities for portions of it and enforcing participation of student in it because this type of involvement increases student performance.

M: I think that goes too far. To define curriculum, to teach it.

R: To decide and develop it . . .

M: No. No. That's wrong. That side of it. Basically, I am being paid to do a job in this room. I've used this with my class sometimes. "O.K. This is the binder. This is the IRP. It's my job to teach this to you this year. That's what I have to do." No. If they get into defining and what was it?

R: Deciding and developing it, taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it and enforcing the participation of students in it.

M: Inside the classroom, no. I've got to be coordinating this because my name, three times a year, including the end of June, my name goes on the report card. I'm the one ultimately responsible for that in this room. So I have to be in charge of all that. Now, as far as developing curriculum, say on a provincial wide basis, on that basis, ya, I think that's the place for parent input. That would be all right. I wonder. Some of the IRP's, like Personal Planning, especially teaching grade 7's and the whole family life stuff, I wonder if parents really know what's that, it's crossed my mind. Teaching grade 7s, it's amazing. We have to tell them all this information about their bodies and sexuality and stuff like this and I'm thinking do they really have to know this. Mind you, there are some that need it. They needed it a year ago but there are some of them here that are absolute babies and you can see it on their faces, they are absolutely amazed, obviously they have never heard of or gotten a grasp of this stuff.

R: Do you see complications in that from the parent perspective?

M: Could be. If I have any questions in my head I air on the conservative side. You have to be very careful.

R: Are you then advocating, in a way, with parental involvement with decision making on a provincial level.

M: I think so. I think it's important for them to know and I think from whatever you read in the paper there's a side of it that those parents might

be more keen on the traditional ones, more math, more reading, more science.

R: Do you think they know about pedagogy and philosophies to make educated decisions?

M: I don't know if parents know enough about all those things but you're question was about to develop and that kind of stuff and I'm saying that in the room I have to be in control of that because my name is on the report cards. I think if there's a place where they're going to be involved and learn about pedagogy then probably at the provincial and district level developing something would be a good place.

R: How about at home. Do you think teachers do a fair amount of involving parents with curriculum through a home program?

M: What's a home program?

R: Are they at all made aware of how they can help their children at home with their homework?

M: Are they being made aware of that?

R: Is that not a form of parental involvement?

M: Yes.

R: We don't have direct control over it. They are at home with their children helping them. Is that not involvement in curriculum?

M: Yes. I would say so.

R: Do you think a lot of that goes on in schools?

M: Where . . .

R: Where teachers have to contact parents to get them involved at home to assist the child in completing work.

M: I think in a class of thirty, you might have two or three where it's really active. That's something I learned moving from primary to intermediate. There are much more homework expectations. There are three kids. There was one girl here she had a list of things not done. So I wrote it all down and I put Mom's signature and a line. I said, "Mom signs this tonight and you bring it back tomorrow. If this isn't signed you and your mom come to school tomorrow morning." That was it. I just left it. That's the kind of involvement. Making phone calls from my own home at night and that kind of thing. "Whoever, has ta ta ta to do for tomorrow." And that's about 7:30 by the time I get home. "What? We know nothing about this?" say the parents. So the next day Fred comes to school, having been up to midnight getting it all done. So ya, phone calls and that kind of thing are the last warning. I have this piece of paper, kids almost start to dread them. They dread them. I staple them to anything. To their forehands. It reads, Dear Whoever, this is to inform you that ____ has not completed or handed in _____. Please sign this note and return it to me. Thank you.

M: That's one way of getting them involved, I guess. Usually in September and October I use a lot of these then they figure it out. I show this to the parents. I tell them you may get one of these at home. I haven't used these in quite a while now. But I tell the parents just to inform them what's going on not tattling or whatever but parents have to know their children are not getting their work done so they need a reminder.

R: So communicating with parents . . .

M: Which helps involvement. Write that down.

R: That's what you've been telling me. From the onset you communicate with them from the beginning. You let them know what your expectations are. You send that which is a form of communication, you telephone. All of those things. So if you communicate with parents you are likely to get some benefits?

M: What grade are you teaching now?

R: Grade 3.

M: You know what I did, do you do newsletters?

R: We do one every Friday.

M: Every week?

R: Every Friday they write what they've done?

M: Each kid? Oh here they are. Every year we voted on what the name was and then it came out every two months. So I assigned different articles and they had interviews, what we are studying in class, French class, gym class, the rules are . . . That was with younger kids.

R: The way I did with my grade 4s, I had four teams of seven and the group of seven produced the paper.

M: How often?

R: Every month or two, it depended on production.

M: That kids in grade seven.

R: You are now teaching some of the kids you had in 3/4?

M: And I had them last year for 6/7. There are some kids I've had for four years. And they are wonderful. We know each other very well. I'll show them this tomorrow.

R: I'll ask just one more little thing.

M: Ohhhhhhhhhh!!!

R: If I do have a question that I'm dying to ask you because I'm looking at the analysis, can I phone you to ask you?

M: You are welcome to.

R: This is a quick one about the school. On a scale of one to ten, where would you consider it in terms of parental involvement relative to other schools?

M: Probably 7.5 and I was thinking that in my head as you were talking. I haven't been to a large number of other schools but the other two schools I have been at I would probably say they were 8 at least.

Insights on Parental Involvement

Janet (EastviewSchool)

R: Can you tell me a bit about your teaching experience, the number of years in primary and intermediate?

J: I've taught since 1975. I taught primary until 1989 and in 1989 until present I've been teaching intermediate. I taught grade 4/5, 5/6 and my last assignment before Eastview was Grade 7 ESL so I would say I taught every grade from kindergarten to 7. I taught in an inner city school for close to twenty years, which was Queen Alexandra, then I went to Maple Grove, which is on the West side, taught grade 6/7 ESL for two years and then I came to MacDonald, this is my second year here.

R: Teaching . . .

J: Teaching a 5/6.

R: So you've been here two years. Would you tell me a little bit about the school community, cultural, ESL, socio-economic make-up.

J: I think, generally, it's 60% First Nations and 40% Asian. So I would say, if you including, I know when we do the ESL count we don't know whether we should count First Nations or not, we always have that dilemma whether we should do that or not, so I'm not sure what the ESL count is. We just tested everybody in intermediate to try to confirm that, one way or another. Very few Caucasian. I can probably count them on my hand.

R: Is it partial inner city?

J: No, it's full inner city, probably one of the most inner city.

R: The socio-economic level must be pretty low.

J: There are some on social assistance. There are a lot of single parent families.

R: What does parental involvement in your classroom or at your school look like?

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R: Someone characterized parent involvement into two types. Non-instructional parent involvement, advocates or clerical where they do photocopying and there's the instructional parent involvement where they are actually helping students . . .

J: With home reading or helping with homework.

R: Or working in the classroom one on one. Do you see instructional parent involvement occurring in the school?

J: I am one of the only people that do student led conferences. That involves the parents more and I do the daily planner so that is involving the parents. On the other end, I don't know how involved they are although I encourage my students to go home so when you asked me for a number, that's really hard.

R: Why isn't there as much involvement? In most schools where I go, there tends to be this generalization that in primary there is more involvement and in intermediate there is less involvement.

J: Yes, and in high schools it simmers out.

R: How come that happens.

J: I think in primary I guess they are smaller. Parents think that their children need more supervision. Just like a reading process, when you get older you should be more responsible and you think, "Well, maybe I shouldn't be involved as much." I know by the time they get to highschool a lot of parents don't want to go to high school and get involved as much, do they? I mean I can think of ways that parents can get more involved, like we are trying to do home reading and all the parents can be involved. We try to get all the parents involved, I don't know how successful we are but one of our goals is literacy and we are hoping that one of the goals was to get community and parental involvement. I don't know how far we will get.

R: Why do you say that?

J: Because home reading involved parents reading at home. Lots of people have excuses why not to do that every night. And so I guess it stems from how we present it here. I know I've had home reading before where we were quite successful but it takes a lot of work to get people excited about it as part of their evening. I don't know.

R: Do you see it as more of a concern in this community . . .

J: I think so. Some parents here, I'm generalizing now, may not find that they have time, may not feel that reading is important, maybe too busy after work and think I don't have time for that. I don't know. I'm really generalizing here.

R: Do you think they have the skill or . . .

J: Maybe not have the skill either but they could read in their own language if they can't read in English.

R: Do you ever feel pressured to include parents?

J: I don't feel pressured. I don't have a problem phoning any parents in my classroom. At reporting period I really try to make the effort to see everybody and of those parents I don't see, at least I know who they are. Once you know who the parents are you can be much more successful with the student. I don't know, when I need someone, I have a reaction, right, as to how I'm going to deal with it. The first report card is crucial nearly. I really press for everybody, all parents to come. I'm not doing too bad with student led. That child has to go and say you have to come and I have to go with you. There is a little pressure but its pretty good. Out of the two reporting periods I think there is one or two parents I haven't met. I don't know why but maybe they don't feel comfortable coming during that period but I have met them other times.

R: Do you initiate the contact?

J: Depending on the problem.

R: So are you saying that communicating . . .

J: Yes, I think it is very important. That's one thing I think is essential for parental involvement just to meet the parents. The parents also get to know you and how you operate and you know they go home and say my teacher said, and once they meet you and you can either say I'm comfortable with that person and I'll support them?

R: Is that at Meet the Teacher Night?

J: We have a Meet the Teacher but it is very informal. We have a corn roast. All the parents come and I think what they're trying to there is not how to get the parents there to ask how is so and so doing? By Christmas I find that I have met all the parents and I think that is the first step any ways.

R: Do you put a lot of thought into your parental involvement program?

J: I don't put a lot of thought. Probably, at least once a day, I say, you know, your parents need to know these things. I don't think everybody here has a daily planner, but I do. This is your homework, your mother needs to know this notice, talk to your mother whether they want to come to the computer workshop.

R: Oh, do you have computer workshops for parents?

J: Well, we are having one. I always try to encourage at the end of the day that they have to talk to their mom about this and this. I'm trying to get them involved every night with their child. I have the child bring their book home every day and so then I think its teaching the child the responsibility of going home to show it and so when they come to the first report and say they don't have any homework, I can get back to the child and say well where is their daily planner? It shows what their homework is every night. That way I kind of gradually ease them into our routine. But I don't force it upon anybody. And if I have them a second year, I am much more confident in getting something out of everybody right now because I have set the routine.

R: Do you remember how you thought of involving parents in your program? Why do you even do that?

J: Well, I know at my last school, my ESL class, I involved parents more because parents there seemed to be more interested to get their children to

learn English. So over there I did the three way negotiated report card, where I didn't do anybody's report card until the parent came. So whatever was written that night, was agreed by parent, student and me, before we wrote it down. I really tried to involve the parents there?

R: Did they have enough language or . . .

J: It was interesting. I don't think I used many translators. I think I used the Korean one because I don't understand Korean. It helps to understand another language so I understood Cantonese. They had enough language. Those were within reach and I could also put how parents could assist at home that way I involved the parents in the scheme of the whole thing. I think that was quite good for getting parents involved.

R: So you do a lot of involvement through reporting.

J: Yes, and at the other school we had a different clientele than here. I did a lot of sports so parents were involved with driving and helping me coach and things like that. In two years, I got to know a lot more parents.

R: Do you think parents can be involved in helping with the curriculum? Many researchers are advocating that teachers need to involve parents with the curriculum – helping to design and develop it, taking on defined responsibilities for portions of it and enforcing participation of the student in it, because this is the type of involvement that increases student performance.

J: I don't know if a lot of parents in this school would want to be involved in that. I don't think they would probably feel comfortable. Maybe at some schools I know parents would be comfortable doing that but I don't want parents to decide what I'm going to do in my classroom because I think that I'm the professional. There have been situations, I think, where parents can question what you do and if you have a good answer for them, I think that's all they need to hear. I'm just thinking of my own two kids and my husband's coming back with remarks like, I'm thinking of Sports Day which is just coming up and he thinks, "No wonder we don't have good competitors. Sports Day isn't what it should be. There's no competition in it anymore." So, I'm thinking, he goes over there and says, "You don't have enough competition, I want to be involved . . ."

R: What is your response when people question . . .

J: You know how we do sportmanship counts for our Sports Day now to have fun, and its not for competition; a lot of the Elementary School's used to stress first, second, third and all the other kids were left out and feeling dismal and now we say we are in it together and he doesn't feel that it helps because that's why American's are better sports people because we don't stress that competition so we're not stretching everybody to their limits. I'm thinking if he went over there and started on that it could be quite stressful for the teachers. I think for my 23 years that I would prefer for the parents to not get too involved in the curriculum. I'm in both sides of it. I could get more involved in my daughters curriculum but I think being in the field of teaching I'm leaving it up to their teachers.

R: Do you think being a parent really affects the decisions you make in regards to the amount or lack of parental involvement you have in your classroom? Do you base a lot of your decisions from the mother point of view?

J: I don't get too involved with my own two daughters. I leave it up to the experts, the teachers in the classroom. I mean if parents came and said we want to be involved in the classroom I probably would be one here that would get them involved. I don't have a problem with volunteers. Like Chinese New Year some of my parents get me to cook. If you are asking me about the curriculum I would be leery to get parents involved in deciding what I'm going to do. I am hoping that they would think that I know what I'm doing.

R: I found it interesting how you said for your own child you wouldn't go and tell the teacher what to do because the teacher is the expert but yet, you are an expert too, you're a teacher. What keeps your from going over and being involved in the curriculum?

J: The limit?

R: Yes.

J: I guess if I felt the teacher wasn't doing any of the curriculum or doing any teaching, I hope there's not too many of those, I would probably would get more involved. If I felt they weren't learning anything, so maybe I

would. I don't think otherwise I would get involved. Not very many parents at this school would get involved in what I do in my classroom. They probably feel that I know best, whereas in some other schools parents are too involved. They want to know your justification for everything you do in the classroom. I've had both and I feel that if a parent here asks me, which no parent has, I could justify what I did; it's always better to have a reason why you are doing it.

R: So you are willing to . . .

J: I'm willing to say we are studying horses. We are going to a field trip on a horse and carriage because we want to know how a horse operates. So its not just for fun and I think that's when we get into problems.

R: Are there times when you would consciously choose not to involve parents?

J: I don't think so. I hope that if anyone wanted to come and ask me something that they would. I always have that open door policy. I don't think I have any time when I don't want them to come.

R: Do parents need to have certain qualities for them to be involved?

J: I think so. I think they have to feel confident in coming to a school and a classroom. Maybe they don't feel they can work with that group of students or have the skills to work with a group of students. I think a parent has to have some confidence coming into the classroom. I mean depending on what they are going to help with. If its one to one reading then they may feel I can handle one student reading or if it's a specialty, their specialty, then they feel more confident handling that.

R: What are some specialties?

J: I'm trying to think; Art or something. Some might say I feel comfortable going on a field trip managing a group. But I don't think its for all parents. Some parents wouldn't want to volunteer for any of those.

R: Besides confidence and skill, do you think there are other things that teachers would like parents that come in and are involved in the schools or in the classroom?

J: You know how maybe sometimes they've been helpful. Parents may want to be helpful but they don't understand how to do the job and then teachers are having to support them too.

R: Someone who takes the initiative and is able to work independently.

J: Yes, yes.

R: How about teachers? For teachers to have parents involved in the classroom, so that you can increase student performance, what are some of the qualities a teacher has to have?

J: A teacher has to be the type of person who wants people in the classroom. I know that there are some teachers who just don't want another person in the classroom. They just want to do it themselves so again, the teacher has to be confident enough to have support. People coming in and maybe even other people questioning what they are doing and asking how to do it and feeling comfortable with more than one person in the classroom. At this school, you can't possibly close the door on anybody because someone is coming in all the time.

R: Is it because you have a large support staff?

J: Yes.

R: I wish we could say that.

J: I do FIE's so I have Ms. Sullen come in.

R: What's FIE's?

J: Ferenstein's Instrumental Enrichment.

R: I don't know enough . . .

J: So she comes in once and then I work with the librarian and my Special Ed Assistant, this year I have one volunteer come in on Thursday but last year I had three volunteers. If you are not used to that, it could take some time getting used to it.

R: So you need to be . . .

J: You need to be willing to have people in the classroom to work with you, spend some time assisting them. Most of my volunteers haven't been parents, either a Student Teacher or volunteers who want to get a feel for education.

R: So your volunteers are community members?

J: Yes. One volunteer was in Child Care, one wanted to be a First Nations Counselor. It might be great to have help but if someone doesn't want others in their classroom it would be the opposite feeling. They might just say, "I can't get used to having so many people in the classroom with me." You have to be focused at all times. Whatever you say, there is going to be someone else hearing it and reflecting on it. Maybe that aspect might turn some teachers off in having parents in their classroom or other people to help.

R: Do you think the fact that you have so much support at your school from trained staff and community volunteers, is that perhaps one of the factors why maybe you just don't need as many parents volunteering?

J: We were just talking about that. In our daily book we have about three or four people who want to come and volunteer here. We seem to get a lot of people who want to come and volunteer here, it doesn't have to be our parents. I'm not sure if it's because they think we are a needy school.

R: Well, if you think of a needy school, Eastview does come to mind.

J: Ya right. But these are not our parents. They are either in the NITEP program, whether they want to be an SEA. They are usually pretty qualified help. I guess what they are trying to do is get some experience here, needy right. So they feel if we can do it here then we can probably do it in most places. As far as parental involvement, I don't see very many of our parents in the classroom. They might be doing the parent group and I'm not really involved with the parent group.

R: I know last time I spoke to Darlene she said they have a lot of counseling opportunities at the school, where parents meet and support each other. So there always seem to be parents around.

J: Even though the parents aren't involved in my classroom, like I said, I know all the parents. Even parents of other kids in other classrooms. So they are always either hanging around here, I shouldn't say hanging around, or doing something at the school but they are not right in the classroom.

R: Is there a Parent's Room here?

J: Yes, and it is usually occupied. I think what we are doing is given them the opportunities to come in.

R: So it's a lot of PR? Is that what John was good at?

J: Yes. Say everything nice of Mr. Palm (the previous Eastview principal who is now principal of my school). You love him?

R: I just love him. He's so fuzzy-wuzzy. Anyway, let's see what you think of this. There's this guru on parent involvement who says, "Some schools have some teachers who conduct some practices of partnerships with some families some of the time." How would you respond to that?

J: I think some of the times.

R: Do you think it's a negative statement or simply a fact?

J: I don't think it's negative.

R: This author put it across as quite a negative aspect.

J: So what is she hoping for? For parental involvement for all the student?

R: Yes. For more parental involvement because it's happening too sporadically.

J: That expert is probably not the only expert that has said that. Michael Fullan also says that.

R: Yes. He is the one that classified parental involvement into instructional and non-instructional parental involvement.

J: Yes. I read that book and he thinks parents should be more involved. I think it wouldn't hurt.

R: Why isn't it happening then?

J: I think that we are so involved here with children that if we got involved with their families it would be too big a job for me to handle. That's probably why. The kind of students we have takes 100%. If we have to extend ourselves to parents it would probably take another 100% and I don't know if we can stretch that far. What we are hoping I think, well, maybe I shouldn't say that because there are some teachers who are thinking we don't need the parental involvement, we are doing just fine. Depends on the person's philosophy right. I don't think it would hurt any child to have parents involved with lets say home reading or something to do with their school work. It is reinforcing our expectations. We have so much to do with the kids, I don't think we can stretch it to all the parents, here. I don't know if even at this school all the teachers are willing to do that. I think some teachers would just want to leave parental involvement the way it is.

R: What's "the way it is"?

J: If the parent wants to help they can come in.

R: But not really advertise or advocate parental involvement?

J: No. If we continue with literacy and we advocate it, if our goal is to involve the community and parents then in September we might try but I can't see how far we'd get getting all the parents involved. I think I got 80% involved the last time at Queen Alex but that was a lot of work to get that. That was myself and another teacher doing some research on reading and so we went all out.

R: Are you saying it's best not to advertise for parental involvement and leave it as is because you already have enough of a load with the children and to get involved with the families is just too much, too overwhelming.

J: We are involved with the family in a community way. We have a lot of community events, the opening of the playground, the Carnival, its an annual Carnival on a Saturday so we may not be stressing the parent involvement but we are stressing the community involvement which involves parents and the school and the community.

R: Do you think that's why you are getting a lot of volunteers from the community?

J: I'm not sure why they want to volunteer. I think we've been high focus for the last year and I guess that's a good way to learn or to help. I am saying community involvement is quite high here and parents do come out for that.

R: Going back to teachers who are happy with the way things are and don't want anything else, could you do anything to sell parental involvement to those teachers?

J: I think what you said before, when you are in primary, parents tend to be more interested. I think it would be hard for me to try to talk some of the intermediate teachers to have parents help. I'm not sure if they would feel comfortable with that.

R: Why do you think it's more of a necessity with primary versus intermediate?

J: I'm thinking of that weaning process. When your child is in kindergarten you think I want to make sure my child likes this school, grade 1,2,3 is still their primary and when they get older you don't think they need you as much. I don't think it's anyone's mistake. I think it's a process of growing. And then by high school, teenagers don't want their parents coming to their school unless there's big trouble right.

R: And then they don't want them to come at all!

J: You know what I'm saying.

R: Can you take an intermediate teacher's perspective, "Well, I don't need parents in the classroom as much because . . ."

J: I've taught primary and I've taught intermediate and I think primary teachers tend to do more theme or new activities where parents can help cut out books. I am thinking one of my parents who did a marvelous job cutting out primary frog books. When you get to intermediate, if we are going to study frogs, you draw your own title page, you do your own research, and let's see how well you can do it by yourself being independent. In primary you like to coax them on.

R: So you are trying to encourage intermediate students to be a lot more independent?

J: Yes, and they get to think, "I don't want my mother helping me or helping." I don't know. I think there are more primary parents willing to come in myself.

R: What would you like parents to know about parental involvement? What do you think they need to realize from a teacher's perspective?

J: That everybody can help even though they aren't coming right into the classroom and being visible. That they can help support us at home, supporting the academic program, where's your homework, what did you do today? I always try to tell my kids, "When your mom asks you what did you do at school today?" don't say, "Nothing." Just talking to them about the school day, I think that's being involved. It isn't directly. I guess when some people think of parental involvement they think of parents coming right into your room but I think that you can be involved with your child from home. If there is a problem then involve means phone up and find out about it.

R: What would you consider to be meaningful parent involvement then. You are saying that it doesn't have to be in the classroom.

J: Meaningful parent involvement is being supportive of the child at home. So when you ask me about parental involvement at first, well maybe I'm not sure. Then 80% of my parents do say, "Well, let me see your planner." And maybe a good way to check would be to sign but I think that might be just another pressure put on my kids. That might be something I can get them to do next year when kids are used to the planners. If your mom signs it then I know that you two talked about it. That way I would get the parent involved for sure because if they didn't sign it then I know they

didn't talk about it unless the child says well my mom didn't sign it. That's why I didn't get into that signing thing with them because that's just getting into another fight with them.

R: Are you making an assumption that they are sharing at home?

J: Yes. If it's a field trip notice and everybody brought it back then at least everybody talked to their mom or dad about signing it and what the field trip is about. Usually I go over it or sometimes they say I didn't do my homework last night and at least they took some responsibility in telling you that. I don't put high pressure on it.

R: I gather it's beyond your control?

J: I think a lot of things that happen at this school are beyond my control to tell you the truth.

R: How so?

J: If the Ministry of Social Services is involved, I am sometimes the last person to know that. Well, I am thinking of an example that just happened. I let the child go with a friend and then the worker comes and says, "Where is he?" and then I say, "Well, I didn't know." So I felt I was the last person to know when I should have known about it to support the child. I don't know how often it happens. Lots of things like that or things that happened, you eventually find out about it but you might not find out about it right away. I won't expand anymore. I think if you know our clientele, I probably can write a book about most of the people in my class. When you speak of parental involvement I can barely keep the load straight with who is doing what of the kids in my classroom, you add the parent factor and I think it would just overload everybody. You might have to get involved with other things at home and we hear about a lot of the things at home and usually I know about it but to have it disclosed to the child and to the parent could be difficult and that's why we just try to keep things simple.

R: Do you think parents have certain assumptions about what goes on?

J: Yes. I think a lot of parents have assumptions about how things were done when they went to school and why things aren't done the same way

now. I think usually a parent probably knows how a teacher operates or I'm sure that they have an idea of what we do. I think they probably have a feeling of how each teacher works. At this school we don't get very many people requesting teachers but I know at my last school a lot of people did. No one usually questions here. We get one or two requests and that's all. I still have a feeling that most of the parents here know me from just what I do. I must have some kind of reputation with them. I've never asked them what though.

R: I guess we don't ask, "What's my reputation?"

J: You know what I'm saying.

R: Now, we were just talking about parents having assumptions as to what it is that we are doing.

J: Yes, they probably know so and so is a very strict teacher and they assume.

R: Do you think teachers have a responsibility to educate parents about what is going on in school's today?

J: I think so. With reports we are giving parents information on the type of program we are using and I guess it's their decision whether to investigate that or not.

R: Do you think parents pay a lot of attention to what is written on the overview? We had a couple of teachers who purposely didn't send home an overview just to see if anybody would say anything and they didn't.

J: I think a lot of it is just justifying our job. It shows what we've done. I am thinking with my own children when they bring home the overview I skim it and say oh well that's good.

R: So you are saying yourself that you do that.

J: I will read over it but I don't question anything. Now I'm thinking, if I do that then they do that. Right? So I think teachers do that so they can say look what I've done for the first term.

R: So are you saying one way we educate parents is through our overviews?

J: I don't know if we are educating them or not?

R: There are pushes for traditional schools and parents have these perceptions as to what is going on in schools but if parents aren't in schools that much then how can they know?

J: I think that well educated parents, and this is very general too,

R: What do you mean by well educated parents?

J: Parents that have a degree or are in a professional field or who can afford it, can send their child to a private school because I think they have some assumptions of public and private school differences. I keep hearing in private schools they are firmer in the academics, they do a lot more work, kids are more responsible for their learning. I think in general, people think public schools are too relaxed.

R: People have these perceptions, I wonder if there is anything you think we could do to remedy that?

J: Sigh.

R: If that's not the way we want to be portrayed then . . .

J: I thought we did that at the last school. We got parental involvement by giving them questionnaires to fill. How do you feel about this? How do you feel about that? They filled them in anonymously. I don't think we asked for their name. Do you think your child is getting the best education in the following?

R: And then what did you guys do with the information?

J: I don't know what we did.

R: Was it part of accreditation?

J: No, I don't know what they did. I think in order to get full parental involvement that would have to be a district wide kind of plan. You know

how they have a week for Multiculturalism, then maybe they should have a parental involvement week or whatever; A campaign. Everybody has the same week and it looks or feels like everybody is doing it. It's like this Earthquake thing, everybody was doing it.

R: How meaningful is it though?

J: Remember we had those days, what did we call those days?

R: Community Interaction Days?

J: Yes. That was supposed to involve the parents and then that died out because I don't think it did what it was supposed to. I remember having a workshop where parents went and the teachers went but we didn't interact with them. We just listened to a speaker. The speaker was wonderful but I'm not sure how it got the parents to be any more involved with the school? I don't know. I'm thinking if we really want to get the parents involved, it would have to be quite a big . . .

R: Are we making a lot of assumptions though. One being that teachers actually want parents involved.

J: That's the first one. I don't think so. I don't think so. I don't think at the high school level, they've never had parents involved so we would be doing a lost cause there, I think. What about our District Parent's Representative group? They seem to be involved with some things?

R: The PAC group?

J: The district reps.

R: I see us going around in circles. I am interviewing all these people and I think how can you force anybody to involve parents if they don't believe in it.

J: And a lot of parents are from the thought, "Well, leave it to the experts."

R: And then there are parents who are totally to the other end. "I am an expert. I've gone through the public school system, you should be doing

this. Why aren't you? Let me come in and tell you what to do." How do we respond to those people?

J: I don't know.

R: We're almost through here. What advice would you share with a new student teacher about parental involvement?

J: I'm not sure how much I would get them to be involved with parental involvement. I would emphasize the children's background which could involve the parents because a lot of these children have a problem stemming back from home. Find out a lot about their background and that might lead to some kind of parental, I don't know if you call it parental involvement or non-involvement right. I think meeting some of the parents wouldn't hurt. I don't know if I would press the student teacher to getting anymore involved than I would be in the classroom. I think the crucial point at a school like this is that you have to know the children's background, real important. A lot of things could happen in a week or two and I probably wouldn't press for parents to get too involved. Meeting the parents will help them, that's important at least.

R: And the very last thing, is there anything that you think I should know that would better help me to understand your views?

J: I think it depends at what school you are at. I think there is a difference from east side teachers to west side teachers. I think that when you are on the West parents are much more involved and you have to be much more alert as to how the parents can be involved. Whereas, in a lot of inner city schools I think parents leave that job up to us so I think that that could sway how I want the parents to be involved. Because I know at my last school parents were involved in everything and at this school they are involved in things but quietly. Not in direct contact with me.

R: And which do you prefer?

J: You know how some teachers say we don't want parents to be so involved but it doesn't bother me. I actually enjoyed working with parents.

R: Does it not affect teaching?

J: I don't know. I've only had two years here but I would say I would prefer for parents to be involved. I really think some people would think that I am crazy. Even after all that experience, I still think it's better to have parents involved.

R: Is it because of benefits?

J: I think parents should be involved in some way but right now I don't know how to get them involved here. I think always on the underlying, I believe that parents should be involved but I just haven't worked around here how?

R: Are there just more struggles here than in other places?

J: Yes.

R: Well, thank you very much Janet for chatting with me.

APPENDIX C
Epstein, 1995, p. 704

Table 1 Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement and Sample Practices

Type 1 Parenting Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.	Type 2 Communicating Design effective forms of school-to-home communications about school programs and children's progress.	Type 3 Volunteering Recruit and organize parent help and support.	Type 4 Learning at home Provide information and ideas about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning.	Type 5 Decision Making Include parents in school decisions developing parent leaders and representatives.	Type 6 Collaboration with community Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.
<p>Sample practices</p> <p>Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level.</p> <p>Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each grade level.</p> <p>Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy)</p> <p>Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.</p> <p>Home visits at transition points to preschool, elementary, middle and high school.</p> <p>Neighborhood meetings to help families to help schools understand families.</p>	<p>Sample practices</p> <p>Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed.</p> <p>Language translators to assist families as needed.</p> <p>Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments.</p> <p>Parent/student pick-up of report card, with conference on improving grades.</p> <p>Regular schedule of useful notices, Memos, phone Calls, newsletters, and other communication.</p> <p>Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools.</p>	<p>Sample practices</p> <p>School and classroom volunteer programs to help Teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.</p> <p>Parent room or Family centre for Volunteer work, Meetings, resources For families.</p> <p>Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations Of volunteers.</p> <p>Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information.</p> <p>Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs.</p>	<p>Sample practices</p> <p>Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade.</p> <p>Information on Homework policies and how to monitor and discuss school-work at home.</p> <p>Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments.</p> <p>Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class.</p> <p>Calendars with activities for parents and students at home.</p>	<p>Sample practices</p> <p>Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation.</p> <p>Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for School reform and Improvements.</p> <p>District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement.</p> <p>Information on school or local elections for school representatives.</p> <p>Networks to link all families with parent representatives.</p>	<p>Sample practices</p> <p>Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services.</p> <p>Information on community.</p> <p>Activities that link to learning skills and talents including summer programs for students.</p> <p>Service integration or through partnerships involving school; civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations and businesses.</p> <p>Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others).</p> <p>Participation of alumni in school programs for students.</p>

Table 2 Challenges and Redefinitions for the Six Types of Involvement

Type 1 Parenting	Type 2 Communicating	Type 3 Volunteering	Type 4 Learning at home	Type 5 Decision making	Type 6 Collaborating with community
<p>Challenges Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building. Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs. Make sure that all information for and from families is clear usable, and linked to the children's success in school.</p>	<p>Challenges Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and non-print communications. Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type. Review quality of major communications (newsletters, reports cards, conferences, schedules, and so on). Establish clear two-way channels for communications from school to home.</p>	<p>Challenges Recruit volunteers widely so that all families know that their time and talents are welcome. Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable parents who work to participate. Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognize efforts that participants are productive.</p>	<p>Challenges Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bimonthly) that gives students responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork. Coordinate family-linked homework activities, if students have several teachers. Involve families and their children in all important decisions.</p>	<p>Challenges Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and other groups in the school. Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families with input from and return on information to all parents. Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups.</p>	<p>Challenges Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and location for collaborative activities. Inform families of Community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, Business partnerships. Assure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs to obtain services. Match community contributions with School goals; integrate child and Family services with education.</p>
<p>Redefinitions "Workshop" to mean more than a meeting about a topic held at the school building at a particular time. "Workshop" may also mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read anywhere, any time, in varied forms.</p>	<p>Redefinitions "Communications" about school programs and student progress" to mean two-way, three-way, and many channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community.</p>	<p>Redefinitions "Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time – not just during the school day and at the school building.</p>	<p>Redefinitions "Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life. "Help" at home to mean encouraging listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing – not "teaching" school subjects.</p>	<p>Redefinitions "Decision-making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas. Parent "leader" to mean a real representation, with opportunities and support to hear and communicate with other families.</p>	<p>Redefinitions "Community" to mean not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also any neighbourhoods that influence their learning and development. "Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools. "Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education not just those with children in the school.</p>

Table 3 Expected Results of the Six Types of Involvement for Students, Parents, and Teachers

Type 1 Parenting	Type 2 Communicating	Type 3 Volunteering	Type 4 Learning at home	Type 5 Decision Making	Type 6 Collaborating with Community
Results for students Awareness of family Supervision; respect for parents. Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family. Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework. Good or improved attendance. Awareness of importance of school.	Results for students Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades. Understanding of school policies on behaviour, attendance, and other areas of student conduct. Informed decisions about courses and programs. Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator.	Results for students Skill in communicating with adults. Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers. Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers.	Results for students Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and class work. Homework completion. Positive attitude toward schoolwork. View of parent as more similar to teacher and of home as more similar to school. Self-concept of ability as learner.	Results for students Awareness of representation of families in school decisions. Understanding that student rights are protected. Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced students.	Results for students Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences. Awareness of careers and of options for future education and work. Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with the community.
For Parents Understanding of and Confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school. Awareness of own and others' challenges in parenting. Feeling of support from school and other parents.	For Parents Understanding school program and policies. Monitoring and awareness of child's Progress. Responding effectively to students' problems. Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with schools and teachers.	For Parents Understanding teachers' job, increased comfort in school and carry-over of school activities at home. Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education. Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school. Gains in specific skills of voluntary work.	For Parents Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year. Discussions of school, classwork, and homework. Understanding of instructional program Each year and of what our child is learning in each subject. Appreciation of teaching skills. Awareness of child as learner.	For Parents Input into policies that affect child's education. Feeling of ownership of school. Awareness of parents' Voices in school decisions. Shared experiences and connections with other families. Awareness of school District, and state policies.	For Parents Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services. Interactions with other families in community activities. Awareness of school's role in community and of community's contributions to the school.
For Teachers Understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their Children. Respect for families' Strengths and efforts. Understanding of student diversity. Awareness of own skills to share information on child development.	For Teachers Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly. Appreciation for and use of parent network for communications. Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress.	For Teachers Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school. Awareness of parents' Talents and interests in school and children. Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers.	For Teachers Better design of homework assignments. Respect for family time. Recognition of equal Helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning. Satisfaction with family involvement and support.	For Teachers Awareness of parent Perspective as a factor in policy development and decisions. View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in Leadership roles.	For Teachers Awareness of community Resources to enrich Curriculum and instruction. Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practices. Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services.

APPENDIX D: Letter A: Workshops for Parents

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The teachers and staff of Simon Fraser Elementary School are in the process of planning a variety of workshops for families to attend during the evening of April 28th. However, before any further planning, we would like your input.

Listed below are a number of topics that the staff are able to offer. The age level designates the age of students that the workshops will be geared towards. We ask that you review the options and rate your *top three preferences*. Place a 1, 2 and 3 by your most preferred choices.

Please take a moment to fill out the bottom portion of this questionnaire and return it to your child's teacher by Wednesday, April 13th. A bulletin will be sent home later confirming the topics and the location of the presentation in the school. Child care will be provided by grade 7 students.

Thank you,
Simon Fraser Elementary Staff

Please return this tear-off section to your child's teacher by Wednesday, April 13th. Place a 1, 2 and 3 by your most preferred choices.

AGE LEVEL	CHOICE	TOPICS
8-13		Theme planning in the intermediate grades
5-8		Theme planning in the primary grades
5-8		Emergent reading and writing development
8-13		The writing process
5-13		Inclusion of children with special needs
5-13		New Canadian students share their stories
5-13		Learning disabilities – diagnosis & assistance
5-8		Math tubing: individualized program
5-8		Family math
5-13		School reform: Are we on the right track?
5-13		How parents can assist their child's learning

Child's Name: _____ Division: _____

Child care will be provided by grade 7 students.

APPENDIX D: Letter B: Workshops Being Offered

Dear Parents/Guardian:

Thank you for your valuable input regarding the workshops for parents survey. The number of responses indicate that parents of Simon Fraser Elementary students want to be involved in their child's education.

Due to the results, we will be offering the following five options from 7:00-8:30 on Thursday, April 28th. The location of the workshops in the school will be displayed in the main hall on the night of the 28th. We ask that you indicate the one workshop you will be attending. Also, please indicate if you require childcare that will be provided by senior Simon Fraser students.

Please take a moment to fill out the bottom portion of this questionnaire and return it to your child's teacher by Thursday, April 21st.

Thank you for support your child and the school.

Simon Fraser Staff

Return this tear-off section to your child's teacher by Thursday, April 21st if you plan to attend one of the choices below.

As each session will be offered only once, place the number of adults attending in the space in front of your choice.

Number of Adults Attending	Workshop Topic	Age Level
	Theme planning in the intermediate program	8-13
	The writing process	8-13
	School reform: Are we on the right track?	5-13
	Teaching reading to early primary children	5-7
	How parents can assist their child's learning at home and at school	5-13

Number of children requiring childcare: _____
Child's Name: _____ Division: _____

APPENDIX E: Workshop Evaluation Form

Workshop: How Parents Can Assist Their Child's Learning at Home and at School Parent/Family Comment Sheet

Please comment on this evening's activities:

Did you learn anything new? If so, what?

From the information given tonight, what will you most likely use in your situation?

Is there anything you would like to know more about? (please include your name if you would like any of the workshop presenters to respond to your questions or concerns)

Thank you for attending the workshop AND for taking the time to fill out this comment sheet.

Family Involvement in the School

Dear Parents:

We are interested in taking advantage of the considerable talents, abilities, and interests of family members in order to increase the richness of your child's program. We would like to poll your interests and availability for parent participation this year.

Letting you know some of the probable themes of study for this year may lead to a thought about how you or a friend may be able to add to our classroom program.

Probable Themes of study:

Survival (mapping, orienteering, outdoor education, forces, flight, body systems)

Mystery (scientific inquiry method, science fair, famous unsolved mysteries, local mysteries, detectives/scientists/reporters)

Multiculturalism in BC (history of BC, gold rush, Barkerville, immigration)

If you are able to participate, please check off the appropriate area(s) or jot down some of your thoughts in the comment section (or do both) and return this page to your child's teacher as soon as possible. If you are not able to participate but have a friend who has expertise in any of the above areas, we'd appreciate the lead. If you have an idea about a great field trip, let us know.

1. The world of work

I could share my knowledge about the following profession(s)

AND/OR

I am willing to share my knowledge in the following area of interest:

2. Knowledge of other cultures

I am familiar with the _____ culture and would be willing to share aspects of that culture (customs, folklore and literature, cooking, history, geography, special events and festivals, music, art).

3. Lend a Hand

I am willing to help with:

- ☐ Arts and Crafts (sketching, pottery, sewing, etc.)
- ☐ Computers
- ☐ Drama
- ☐ Camping
- ☐ Music or dance
- ☐ Woodworking
- ☐ going grocery shopping with a group of students
- ☐ reading a novel at home and leading a literature discussion with a small group during class time
- ☐ helping with "odds and ends"
- ☐ driving and supervising on field trips
- ☐ assisting children with their daily learning

Further Information that may be of interest to the teacher regarding enriching the classroom program:

Family Members or Friends Willing to Volunteer at school:

1. Name of Volunteer: _____

Contact Numbers: _____ (day)
_____ (evening)

Check off the appropriate section(s).

I am (or the volunteer named above is) more likely to be available:

	Morning Before Recess	Morning After Recess	Afternoon
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

2. Name of Volunteer: _____

Contact Numbers: _____ (day)
_____ (evening)

Check off the appropriate section(s).

I am (or the volunteer named above is) more likely to be available:

	Morning Before Recess	Morning After Recess	Afternoon
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

Thank you for your support!

Rosa Fazio and the class

APPENDIX G

Pamphlet: The Key to a Successful Classroom Involvement Program

P ARENTS
A SSISTING
S TUDENTS to
S UCCEED

(import appropriate picture)

After the verb “to love,” the very “to help” is the most beautiful very in the world. (B. V. Suttner)

(cover)

The importance of parent involvement in your child's education...

Parents are the child's first and most important and influential teacher.

What parents do to help their children learn is extremely important to a child's overall success.

Research has shown that involvement of parents in their child's education results in direct benefits for the child, the parents and the school.

We look forward to establishing a partnership that has the best interest of the student as its focus.

(page 2)

THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL CLASSROOM INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

CREDIT

Confidentiality Working in a classroom will provide you with new insights on children's personalities-strengths and weaknesses. We ask that you think of the following before sharing any information with other members of the community - Is it a positive comment? Would you like this information to be shared about your child? Please share your concerns with me if you would like them addressed.

Rules and Routines Maintaining consistency in a classroom proves to be challenging yet rewarding for all involved. If you need guidance, ask. If an incident occurs between students, facilitate a discussion but have the children take ownership of their problem.

Enthusiasm "Enthusiasm is like a fire on a cold winter's day, everyone wants to surround it." Just a thought to keep in mind.

Document When you are working one to one with a child, you may be asked to document some of your observations. I will be specific. If I'm not, ask for clarification.

Independent Encourage your child to be independent of you rather than dependent on you. Please remind your child that you volunteer to help everyone in the classroom.

Thoughtful If you are unable to attend your scheduled volunteer time, please inform us ASAP via a note or by phoning the school (713-5403). Also, we expect students to be thoughtful of their needs, of other students' needs and of your needs. Your volunteer experience and their learning experience (as well as yours) should be a positive one.

(page 3)

The Gift of Time

Giving is so often
thought of in terms of
the things we give,
but our greatest
giving is of our time,
and kindness, and
even comfort for
those who need it...

- Joyce Sequichie
Hifier

Thank you for your support!