The Nature of Home-School Relations at the Secondary Level

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ABSTRACT

The Nature of Home-School Relations at the Secondary Level

Rhonda Kantor

While much research is focused on family involvement in education at the elementary level, little attention has been paid to the relationship of the parent and teacher at the secondary level. Family involvement at the high school level is crucial, as it is the time that adolescents make decisions that affect their future, the future of their families and society as a whole. This thesis takes a sociological view that the relationship between parents and teachers is important to the education process, and that this relationship is based on how the roles of parent and teacher are constructed.

This is a small-scale inquiry and suffers from the limitations of such studies. It is the study of four teachers and four parents of students attending public English high schools in the Montreal area. Identified are the elements parents and teachers perceive and experience as important to their, and each other's, role.

It was expected that there would be important differences between parents' and teachers' perceptions and expectations of each other's concerns and responsibilities, however, this was not the case. Parents and teachers largely agreed on the functions and characteristics of the roles: what differed was the emphases they placed on the specifics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Parents Share Their Stories

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

My personal interest in family-school relations derives in great part from my own experience as a parent relating to my children's schooling and their teachers. I am also an educator as are most of my friends and family. I have frequently heard how teachers refer to families and parents when they talk about students, specifically how they tend to attribute the difficulties they experience with students to the family environment and lack of parental support. Likewise, I have often heard parents question the professionalism and competence of teachers.

This thesis takes the view that the relationship between parents and teachers is important to the education process, particularly at the secondary level, and that a clear understanding of the perceptions and expectations that inform the construction of the roles of parent and teacher are necessary for partnerships between home and school. This study explored the gap in research focusing on parents' and teachers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities, towards each other, the school system and the students. It examined how parents and teachers identify their role functions and characteristics, what parents and teachers expect of each other and feel is expected of them.

As parent and teacher are roles that are embedded in the social structures of family and school, this study takes a sociological perspective in examining how parents and teachers navigate their relationship with each other and the school. Role

theory and interactionism provided the conceptual frame for the study, an understanding that there are certain functions, behaviours and characteristics attached to the roles of parent and teacher, and that these roles are constructed, negotiated and re-negotiated, through social interactions. These characteristics, interests and expectations must be understood in order for the institutions of family and school to function smoothly.

A narrative research design allowed for the examination of current perceptions and expectations of the roles through parents' and teachers' rich descriptions of their relationship. Some of the issues the study looked at were how parents and teachers communicated and how factors like changes in the family and the school, may affect the nature of the home/school relationship.

Although it was expected that there would be important differences between the parents' and teachers' perceptions and expectations of the others' concerns and responsibilities, parents and teachers largely agreed on the functions and characteristics of the roles, what differed was the emphases they placed on the specifics. The participants' stories pointed to what seemed to be a lack of institutional support needed to produce collaborative parent/teacher partnerships. From the participants' descriptions, it also seemed that formal parent/teacher interviews were considered an ineffective and insufficient means of communication.

Chapter one provides the historical context within which the relationship between parents and teachers takes place. Chapter two provides the theoretical frame used in examining this relationship, namely role theory and interactionism. It will also particularize my research question and

methodology. The third chapter offers the stories of four teachers and four parents.

The recounting of these experiences provided me the opportunity to gauge the current perceptions and expectations of the role of parent and teacher. My reflections on the parents' and teachers' stories appear in the fourth chapter. Concluding remarks and suggestions for further study and the possible applications of the information gathered in this study make up the fifth and final chapter. The purpose of this study was to collect and compare the stories of parents and teachers and to examine the construction of their roles. The reader must be cautioned, however, that the information herein is restricted to the perceptions and experiences of the few individuals who took part in the study and a specific geographic region of Canada – namely, English-speaking areas near or in Montreal.

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Context

That Was Then

In 1895 the first Parents' Association was formed by Mrs. Alexander

Graham Bell. It was created to address the need for children to spend less time

in the mines and more time in school. Mr. and Mrs. Bell lived in Baddeck, Nova

Scotia and were very interested in the local children and schools. Mothers were

already meeting once a week at the school to discuss their children's welfare.

Teachers would approach the mothers for support concerning education and

the needs of the school (Nova Scotia Home & School Association, 2009). Parents

were very much a co-operative part of, and influence on, the education system

throughout Canada in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

However, by 1935 the sociologist and author of *The Sociology of*

Teaching (1932), Willard Waller, had already coined the term "natural enemies"

to describe the parent/teacher relationship, writing "both, supposedly, wish

things to occur for the best interests of the child; but...the fact seems to be that

parents and teachers are natural enemies" (Waller, 1932, p. 68). This sentiment

does not bode well for the development of stronger relations between parents

and teachers, let alone partnerships. "Natural enemies" referred to the fact

that, by virtue of the responsibilities of their roles parents and teachers had no

choice but to relate to one another. This interaction has been noted as being rife with conflict as early as the 1930s, when Waller wrote and his expression is ever popularly in use today (Ferguson, 2008, Miretzky, 2004).

Public high schools originated from the idea that higher than rudimentary skills and knowledge should be accessible to everyone. High schools were originally situated in large cities and were only later introduced to small towns. This was meant to ensure that the greatest minds from both country and city could be discovered. In addition, it was believed that improving the capacity of local schools increased the overall education of the people and aided in lessening the impact of social inequalities. It was believed that increasing access to secondary education to a larger number of students would provide the less privileged with the same opportunities as the privileged. Public schools were to be representative of the will and needs of the public (Sizer, 1964).

Parents, in their individual or social capacity, were responsible for hiring teachers and setting the curriculum until about 1910 when this function became the responsibility of school trustees. Until then, parents controlled the methods and processes of instruction. Teachers were hired to teach subjects foreign to, or beyond the level of parents. It was clear that while the parents chose the place of the child's education, once there, the teacher stood in *loco parentis*. The parent, in all that concerned the student's discipline, studying and education, was never to be *in loco docentis* (Sizer, 1964, p. 137).

Teachers were unquestioningly an authority figure and role model, expressly so, "the students must be held in subjection by a power stronger than that of any home influence can ordinarily be" (Sizer, 1964, p. 138). Sizer cited John Milton, the seventeenth century philosopher, poet and essayist, to illustrate the popular sentiment "the end...of Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents" (Sizer, 1964, p. 7). Obviously, parents had long been seen as a problem.

The delineation of the roles of parent and teacher were then quite clear, teachers were hired in the capacity of 'professional adults'. Waller claimed teachers had a particular role and a unique responsibility in our society as the guardians of virtue, the inheritors of a certain moral force (Waller, 1935). Teachers were expected to be more 'adult' than the rest of us. They were expected to be more responsible and constant, less impetuous and erratic. This view influenced the parent/teacher relationship. Parents and students were expected to accept the authority and model of the teacher.

The period of adolescence was recognized as unique in the early days of public high school and it was believed that as the education of adolescents progressed, the involvement of parents should decrease. The "party mainly concerned" was the adolescent and not the parent (Sizer, 1964, p. 138). Adolescence was, however, recognized as a key and heavily influential time in a child's development and the goal of public high schools was to provide for this time with teachers that were models of high moral values and knowledge.

Compulsory education began in response to industrialized society's need for workers in the early 1900s. When both parents began to work, the modern teacher was created. Before industrialization the family was entirely responsible for teaching values, morals, kindness, and the concepts of good and bad. Teachers were only expected to ensure that high moral standards were adhered to, by students and themselves and not responsible to teach them (Browman, 1981).

This is Now

That was then. The twentieth century brought with it significant changes in the institutions of family and school. Changes in the structure of families and schools have impacted the roles of parent and teacher, by parents, teachers and society.

The role of the teacher had changed by the 20th century in response to society's increased technological orientation. Knowledge was seen more and more as objective and scientific and there was less emphasis on the humanities and non-scientific inquiry (Browman, 1981). Teachers were still expected to have a large part in initiating children into adulthood, only now they were expected to "be dedicated to teaching the scientific objective curriculum (and) to the raising of culture debased and threatened by the freedoms and the dehumanizing aspects of the technological revolution" (Browman, 1981, p. 13). Teachers were now expected to simultaneously promote the benefits of

technology and its dehumanizing sterility and inspire a culture of peace and humanity.

The different focus of parents and teachers was already well established. Parents were focused on their individual child and family, while teachers concentrated on the class and the school (Sizer, 1964). Teachers remained accountable to parents first, and were expected to address academic and social concerns first to parents.

Teaching has been, and continues to be, a very independent job. The isolated nature of teaching has not undergone any significant changes since the 1800s. Teachers remain very isolated by virtue of the fact that once in the classroom they work independently of other adults.

Browman (1981) explained that teachers in the 1980s felt their lack of professional status and self-regulation undermined their authority. The lack of self-regulation, which is available to other professions, limited the power teachers felt they had in ensuring the quality of professionalism in their field. In my study teachers echoed these sentiments and said the union protected colleagues that are functioning poorly. Today's teachers considered themselves undervalued as the professionals and important socializing agents they are.

Teachers said they have been expected to implement changes, such as the latest curriculum reform and integrated classrooms, about which they had not been consulted. In the last decade or so, schools have been criticized for graduating illiterate adolescents and failing in their responsibilities. This

criticism is redirected at teachers who are now also expected to solve motivational and family problems.

The family structure has changed dramatically in just this last generation. The pervasiveness of the non-traditional family spoken of by participants was striking. In every case, participants reported a childhood where their mother and father resided in the same home with them and their siblings. Now, there are obviously a variety of family situations, producing blended families, same sex marriages and issues pertaining to divorce (custody battles, step parents, step siblings, alternate living arrangements, multiple parent/teacher interviews and persons other than parents taking responsibility for children). Six of the eight participants were divorced, perhaps not a true reflection, but nonetheless an inkling, of the state of today's family. Teachers, parents, families and schools, have no choice but to function within these extended societal circumstances and the challenges they produce.

Changes in the structure of the family present a myriad of new challenges and potential for the home/school relationship, as do other issues such as the number of students leaving school without graduating. More than ever the value of home/school partnerships should be clear.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical and Methodological Approach

Theoretical Frame

Some of the studies that delineate current critical perspectives on the subject of the home-school relationship at the secondary level and informed my perspectives and the analysis of my data included Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler (2005), Joyce Epstein (1996, 2007), Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003), Vernon Storey (1990) and Katherine Nakagawa (2000).

In examining parents' motivations for involvement in their children's education, Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler (2005) found that parents' decisions to get involved in their children's education were influenced by interactions with others, notably teachers and school personnel. Their findings demonstrated that student learning is influenced by the beliefs and behaviours of important adults in the student's life (teachers and parents). The study found that parents' involvement contributed to and complemented student learning.

Their conclusion was that there are four reasons parents get involved in the student's education: role construction for involvement, parental efficacy for helping the student, and parental perception of invitations. They presented a model to increase parent involvement, to enable a process where parents contribute to student learning (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005).

Although they examined psychological motivators for parent involvement and how this involvement influenced student outcome, Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler's study is important in that it highlighted the importance of role construction as a determining factor in why parents get involved in their children's education. The model reasoned that parents decided to get involved when they understand that collaborating with teachers and the school was part of the role of parent, when they believed getting involved would have a positive influence on the student's education and when they perceived that their involvement was encouraged by the student, the teachers and the school (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005). It suggested that parents' decisions to get involved varied according to their role construction. Examining the current perceptions and the expectations of the role of parent and teacher is important to understanding the way these roles are constructed.

Joyce Epstein (1997) presented a social and organizational model consisting of spheres representing the family and the school that may be pushed together or pulled apart by three forces: time, characteristics, philosophies and practices of the family and those of the school.

In this holistic approach to the home-school relationship Epstein explained how these forces may, or may not produce occasions for shared activities between the home and school. She noted that the spheres overlapped to the greatest extent during a student's preschool and elementary years. When

parents participated in their child's education there was an increase in the overlap of their spheres, the same occurred when teachers' activities included parent involvement.

In this model partnerships between school and family were achievable where there existed a program that encouraged shared activities. Epstein considered parent involvement in terms of school-family partnership activities. Parental involvement in home learning, in helping with homework, in encouraging and complimenting the student, volunteering at school as well as involvement in school council were considered parent involvement activities.

The model recognized the student as an important agent in the home-school relationship. It demonstrated that although high school students were less likely to invite parent involvement in their education, they considered it beneficial (Epstein, 1996). Epstein's study emphasized the complementary nature of parents and teachers and the necessity for cooperation and collaboration between the institutions of family and school.

This perspective, where the relationship between family and school is viewed as overlapping spheres allowed for an understanding of the interrelatedness of the roles of parent and teacher. It also allowed for an understanding of potential differences between these roles and the manner in which the many different factors that affect the relationship function.

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) used a narrative approach in her research to collect and analyze the stories of teachers and found that their personal histories played significantly in their function as a teacher. She found

that an underlying subtext existed in the relationship between parents and teachers. This subtext was informed by 'ghosts', a term she used to explain how our behaviours and perceptions are influenced by our personal, conscious and, at times, subconscious, experiences and histories.

In Lawrence-Lightfoot's research the teachers vividly recalled feelings of pain and joy as they recounted their experiences as both teachers and students. They minutely remembered how their parents and teachers behaved and the effects and influence this behaviour had on their construction of the role of parent and teacher. Recognizing and understanding the construction and existence of 'ghosts in the classroom', (a term Lawrence-Lightfoot borrowed from Ghosts in the nursery: A psychoanalytic approach to the problems of impaired infant-mother relationships, written by E. Adelson, S. Fraiberg and V. Shapiro), was accomplished with much reflection and discussion. Ghosts are experiences or perceptions that significantly influence our behaviour:

> Listening to the voices and perspectives of these parents and teachers, we begin to recognize that the complex and treacherous subtext of their dialogue often goes unrecognized and unnamed, but nevertheless has a powerful influence on what is said and not said between them. This subtext is defined by both autobiographical narratives and generational echoes, and by resonances from the broader cultural and historical tableaux. It is both deeply psychological in its content and broadly ecological (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003, p.39).

In Lightfoot's study the use of narrative research design was shown to be a valuable tool to understanding complex relationships. It enabled the participants to offer practical and specific insights and suggestions. It helped both researcher and reader achieve a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that, similar to this study of the home/school relationship, involves personal experiences and interactions.

Vernon Storey (1990), in his study on parent-school conflict, demonstrated the intensity of emotional stress associated with conflict arising between parents and teachers. It was apparent from the case studies he examined that old and new 'ghosts' influenced the parent/teacher relationship on a continuous and ongoing basis. Participants' stories were used to better understand the multidimensional nature of the relationship between schools and families as institutions. Storey presented an analytical frame to show the interplay between parents and the school where conflicts are unresolved. His exploratory study examined the context in which parent-teacher conflict occurs, how it is embedded in the structure of the school.

Of particular interest to my study is the suggestion that parents who are also teachers are most likely to have a cooperative relationship with teachers. After listening to the participants' experiences in my study and from my own personal experiences, I decided to include this as an issue under discussion.

Rollande Deslandes (2001) examined three complementary frameworks of home-school partnership, Epstein's overlapping spheres of

influence model, the model of parent involvement by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) and the enabling and empowerment model (Bouchard, 1998; Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette, & Hamby, 1992). To Deslandes, "the examination of these models contributed to a new understanding of the essential conditions for partnerships between home and school by emphasizing the study of parent-teacher interactions" (Deslandes, 2001, p. 9).

Deslandes recently studied parent involvement in the French-speaking public schools of Quebec. Her findings questioned whether a truly reciprocal relationship was possible. Deslandes suggested that the expectations and perceptions of the different groups involved in education be considered an essential condition to home-school partnerships. She viewed partnership as an ideal towards which parents, teachers and schools must work together and that the development of partnerships is an ongoing process that required continual negotiation (Deslandes, 2001).

Deslandes discussed the negotiation of home/school partnerships in terms of form and bargained contracts. She explained how the difference between the two types of contract lies in the power of the parties entering into the agreement. In a bargained contract both sides have the opportunity for negotiation and, if unhappy, may choose not to enter into the partnership. In a form contract, however, the individual has little, or no power.

She explained that where partnership agreements existed between home and school, they consisted of form contracts and there was a discrepancy between the definition of the responsibilities of the school and parents

(Deslandes, 2001). In other words, the responsibilities of the school were vaguely and broadly described and those of the parents were clear and specific, which gives more power to the schools. This study illustrated the importance to family/school partnerships for the expectations and interests of parents and teachers to be clearly understood and identified.

Katherine Nakagawa (2000) studied the discourse of parent involvement created by policy and other school related texts. She interrogated how families may be marginalized from the student's education by how these texts are constructed and presented. Her study found that family involvement discourse actually decided which families engaged in their children's education. The manner in which school texts and contracts were written and presented made it more difficult for some families to be involved. In this way policy and school texts were found to perpetuate inequalities in education. She concluded that parents, especially disadvantaged ones, found themselves in a double-bind. They were represented as both the problem and the solution to problems in education. Parents were both expected to, and were marginalized from, being involved in their children's education.

According to Nakagawa, parent involvement was encouraged and intended to replace budgetary cuts but at the same time parents were considered a nuisance if they are involved in the 'wrong' way. Parents were to be involved but not too involved, certainly not in administrative or policy issues. In Nakagawa's analysis, school policies and contracts between family and school were directed toward parents' responsibilities and not those of

teachers or the school. In being vague the school is relieved of specific responsibilities and accountabilities. If the parents did not comply with the agreement the school was no longer responsible for the delivery of a quality education (Nakagawa, 2000).

Nakagawa continued, however, to point out that being portrayed as both problem and solution may be an intentional strategy, one used by those with power against those without. By limiting the power of the group experiencing the double-bind, their choices were limited and controlled (Nakagawa, 2000). Although a seemingly sinister explanation, this view may account for the lack of headway in institutional or systematic support for parent/teacher communication and networking in the last one hundred or so years. What, if any, contradictions parents and teachers perceived or experienced in their roles as parent and teacher were of interest to my study.

An essential condition to establishing genuine home/school partnerships lies in a clearer understanding of the perceptions and expectations of parents and teachers as they relate to each other, the student and the school. Narrative design enables the researcher to examine how parents and teachers construct their roles and give meaning to their relationships through the stories they tell of their experiences.

Collecting the narratives of those who have experience in the phenomenon under study, in this case, the parent/teacher relationship, provided the researcher the opportunity to discover new meaning to the collective and personal identities of the roles. It also allowed for an examination

of the representations of the roles of parent and teacher and the institutions that support their relationship.

The relationship between parents and teachers takes place within the confines of a social structure. It is through the construct of the institutions of family and school that parents and teachers find themselves interacting and thus a sociological perspective is suited to an analysis of the layers of the home/school relationship. A lens of role theory and interactionism allowed me to understand how parent and teacher are roles that are constructed and function in relation to the larger institutions of family and school. It placed them in the context of the expected and predictable behaviours relied on for the smooth functioning of institutions like schools and families. Narrative design allowed for the examination of how these roles are also constructed, derive meaning and negotiated subjectively, on a day-to-day, individual-to-individual basis.

Sociology: Role Theory and Interactionism

A society is a group of people that shares the same political authority, geographical location and cultural expectations. A social structure is created to provide its members the support necessary to interact with each other and with the society at large. The social structure of a society is essential for its survival; for it is the parts of a society's social structure that essentially make up a society (Kendall, Murray & Linden, 2004). "If there is any generalization

that applies to men and other animals, it is that all creatures capable of learning are compelled to organize. To be organized means to follow patterned, redundant ways of behaving and to exist in a hierarchy" (Haley, 1976, p. 101).

Social institutions, groups, statuses, roles and norms are the elements of a social structure at the macro level. The social positions of its members and the relationships between and within these social positions are an essential part of a society's social structure, as are the resources attributed to these positions. The groups in a society and the relationships of these groups are equally part of its social structure.

Social positions are characterized by status and role. A status is a socially defined position that is not defined by the particular individual holding it. A status carries expectations, rights and duties and is distinguishable by the manner in which it is acquired. Ascribed status is conferred upon one's birth or acquired involuntarily, achieved status is achieved through ability or competition. In modern societies occupational positions are considered to be achieved statuses (Kendall et al. 2004). Within the parent/teacher relationship parents hold an ascribed status and teachers an achieved status.

Sociologists identify interactional groups as primary and secondary. Primary social groups are made up of our closest friends and family. Secondary social groups are larger, goal-oriented and less personal, where members are engaged for a limited period of time. Schools are considered secondary social groups, individuals are engaged in schools for specific and practical reasons and for a predetermined and finite period of time. In secondary groups,

individuals relate to each other in terms of specific, structured, role expectations (Kendall et al. 2004).

A formal organization, such as school, is a large secondary group, made up of social relationships that are formed for the express purpose and function of achieving or completing specific goals or tasks. "These organizations are a very important component of social structure in all industrialized societies as they are expected to educate us, solve our social problems and provide work opportunities" (Kendall et al. 2004, p.142).

Formal organizations and social institutions are organized to meet society's needs. These social institutions serve to socialize. By definition, an institution has organized and well-defined role expectations, it is a society's way to standardize behaviour. Formal secondary social institutions, like schools, rely on predictable role behaviours to function well and achieve their goals.

As both parent and teacher are socially constructed statuses it is imperative to examine their relationship within the sociological frame used to define these identities. It is through the very construction of a society's social structure that these roles have come to exist, and it is through the maintenance of the social institution of school that the relationship is supported.

Role theory is a sociological model that explains how behaviour is guided by expectations held by individuals and groups, parents and teachers. These expectations are constructed socially. This theory argues that behaviour follows role expectations. If you know what the expectations of a particular role

are, you can predict the individual's behaviour. Roles consist of the norms we use to guide behaviour. That our meanings are socially constructed allows for the understanding that our perception and experience of roles are not static, but, again, involved in a constant and multidimensional act of negotiation (Biddle, 1986; Kendall et al. 2004).

Role theory is a means of understanding individual behaviour and social structure together. Information on the construction of roles and predictability in the performance of these roles enables individuals to function effectively and for generalizations about society to be made by sociologists (Biddle, 1986). Role theory as applied to parents' choices regarding their child's education holds that the groups to which parents belong – family, school, workplace – have expectations about appropriate behaviors, including those concerning parental involvement and teaching.

While role theory helps explain and predict people's perceptions, expectations and actions in their roles, it is limited in that it assumes that people are conformists, they try to live up to the characteristics or behaviours that define their roles. Role theory also assumes that people spend time interacting in groups. Role theory expects people will adapt to role expectations and continue to develop deeper understanding and commitment to the role (Shepherd & Turner, 1999).

Role theory has several approaches. In the functionalist approach, roles are viewed as being relatively inflexible. Although functionalism recognizes the interaction of different roles it fails to explain how roles are constructed or how

differently individuals may construct the roles of parent and teacher. Functionalism is criticized for viewing roles as static and non-negotiable (Biddle, 1986).

Interactionism, sometimes referred to as symbolic interactionism, is associated with the interpretive theoretical work of George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman and other early sociologists (Burns, 1992; Morris, 1934). Interactionism adds to the interpretive and subjective element regarding the significance of peoples' interactions and the construction of roles. Since parents and teachers have no choice but to interact to some degree in the functioning of their roles, interactionism provides a frame with which to understand the nature of their relationship. In interactionism, roles are not static and clearly defined.

Interactionism views the whole of society as made up of people's interactions. In this view, people's behaviours and the expectations and perceptions of these behaviours are under constant re-evaluation. Values and norms are not independent realities, but are constantly being reinterpreted through social interaction and evolving in response to society's needs. Behaviour is thus adapted through personal interactions. Our actions or expectations are constantly adjusted in response to someone else's actions or expectations (Kendall et al. 2004). In interactionism human behaviours all but exist because of our social nature, we construct our identities largely through the interaction we have with others.

Specifically, in situations where the expectations of a role are not clearly defined, interactionism explains how people continue to adopt roles and adapt them through interpersonal interactions. Individuals may experience role conflict when the expectations held for one role is at odds with those of another. Role ambiguity is felt when the responsibilities and parameters of a role are unspecified or when one person does not fulfill the expectations of a role and therefore the other individual is incapable of meeting the expectations of their role. In this we see that parents and teachers may feel unable to fulfill the functions of their role because the responsibilities and expectations of the roles were unspecified or unclear (Shepherd & Turner, 1999).

As applied to organizations, interactionism, assumes that roles are identified with hierarchical positions and as such may explain the power relations that exist between parents and teachers (Kendall et al. 2004). The participants reflected on how their roles as parent and teacher were constructed through the feedback and interactions they had with each other and the school and how this was constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated.

Research Question

Little research is directed at the relationship between parents and teachers at the secondary level, even though it has been long been understood that adolescence is a crucial time in a person's life for needing support and teachers and parents have long been understood as important socializing

agents in children's lives. This study explored this gap in research by focusing

on the nature of parents' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of their

roles and responsibilities, towards each other, the school system and the

students. More specifically, this study asked the following questions. How do

parents and teachers relate and communicate with each other? How do parents

and teachers perceive each other's roles? How do parents and teachers explain

difficulties in establishing a partnership that is to the benefit of students,

parents and teachers alike?

Recruiting the Participants

The participants included four parents and four teachers from within

the English secondary school system in and around Montreal. The teachers and

parents were purposefully selected. To ensure perspectives from a range of

school communities in terms of social class, ethnicity and gender, I used a

snowball recruiting method, I asked my friends, colleagues, relatives and

children to recommend potential participants.

I asked them to find people who were associated with English public

high schools as a teacher or parent. I actively sought participants from

different schools. In this way, I ensured a variety of perceptions and

experiences to examine, however, at the same time, my role as a researcher in

seeking participants from different schools must be acknowledged as

potentially contributing to researcher and/or sample bias.

I telephoned the people who were recommended and explained the nature and purpose of the study. I asked them if they were interested in participating. I explained that it would require an in-person interview lasting about an hour. If the person was interested, we discussed the place of the interview and scheduled an appointment.

Interviews were conducted in-person at either the participant's home or mine, according to their choice. These interviews were audio-recorded. I spoke with the participants in the weeks following the interviews to add to and discuss their stories. Some of the participants were extremely diligent in wanting to ensure their voices were properly heard and reviewed my interview notes and proofread my retelling of their narratives. This was extremely helpful in ensuring my research data was not unduly skewed by my personal emphases or biases.

Creswell explained the need for the researcher to establish boundaries "because participants give a great deal when they choose to participate in qualitative research" and that "deep personal relationships can form through the qualitative process" (Creswell, 2008, p. 239). As a researcher it was most important and yet difficult for me to "keep my opinions to myself...and say little" (Creswell, 2008, p. 238). Following the interviews I elaborated more fully on the aspects of the parent/teacher relationship that interested me.

I found it noteworthy how incredulous and self-consciousness the parents were at their thoughts and experiences being considered worthy and relevant in educational research. The teachers expressed both hope and

pessimism that this study, or educational research for that matter, was effective in bringing about change.

Gathering and Understanding the Stories

The methodological approach I used was primarily in-person interviews. Interviews provided me with rich data, the parents and teachers I interviewed related meaningful information to better understand the nature of the relationship between family and schools. I also kept a journal throughout the research project in which I noted any personal insights I had, particularly observations I made during the interviews of the participants' body language. In this way I was able to observe if the participants displayed any signs of nervousness, unease or suffering. Throughout the study I noted my reflections about emerging themes, commonalities in participants' experiences, perceptions and use of descriptive words.

Prior to the interview, I broadly explained the nature of the study, the consent form, and the use of the audio recorder, the participant then signed the consent form as seen in Appendix A. I asked participants to describe themselves and noted their background information, their age, marital status, the ages and grades of their children, the schools they have been involved with, their education, and for teachers, their years of experience teaching.

I began interviews with an icebreaker to relax the interviewee and encourage them to feel comfortable being audio-taped and recounting their

narrative. The icebreaker varied with participants, but more often than not, involved small chat about the weather or the area in which they were living.

After collecting demographic information from the participants, I asked one brief, open-ended question, "Can you describe an encounter you had with a parent (or teacher, as applicable) in the last academic year?" This allowed participants the greatest flexibility in their response. To maintain the richness of the data, the original content of the interviews were largely preserved, although summarized, in the retelling of their stories. This enabled the discourse and context of the parent/teacher relationship to be explained firsthand. As an interviewee said, "I want people to recognize themselves in my story, identify with it."

I chose a mixed genre format for this reason. This style of writing is comprised of short stories and connecting text (Ceglowski, 1977). In the retelling of the stories, I provided an introduction of the participant along with my interpretations and observations. As outlined by Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993), data summaries should be one or two pages long to provide the maximum amount of information in the quickest and most efficient manner.

Some of the value of the stories came from exploring the commonalities and contradictions in the roles that were identified by parents and teachers. Parents and teachers may also have derived meaning by recounting and reflecting on their own perceptions and experiences. Meaning behind the participants' experiences was also constructed through our collaborative

communication, and in some cases, through the relationship developed between the researcher and the participants throughout the study.

The relationships I developed with the participants allowed me to be immersed in the experience of the other and try to re-tell the story in an empathetic and powerful way. By reviewing what was included in the narratives, what was left out and in what order the story was told, I was able to consider my own previously held thoughts and perspectives.

Narrative design provided a context for understanding the intimate lived experiences of my participants and the depth of the parent/teacher relationship. A small sample was best suited to safeguard this intimacy. It enabled me to negotiate between the roles of researcher, parent, student and teacher. This type of process of discovery values the collaborators' perspectives as well as the researcher's own understandings and emotions. It also created challenges that will be discussed in the section on limitations (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

As discussed above, narratives are an effective way of "capturing the complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of the phenomenon with which we deal" (Carter, 1993, p. 6). In some cases, they emerge from experiences of anxiety or conflict and the telling of these stories are themselves a particularly important means of conflict resolution (Polkinghorne, 1991). For these reasons the use of narratives was appropriate in the study of the parent/teacher relationship.

To ensure confidentiality all names were replaced with fictitious ones and in some of the narratives the gender of the characters were changed. This was due to the size of the communities in which the participants lived and worked. It was thought necessary to preserve the identity of the participants and in one case, requested by the participant who felt they might be recognized otherwise.

The consent form provided the objectives of this study, informed participants of their right to confidentiality, and provided a clause informing them of their right to discontinue participation at any time.

Participants reflected on their own experiences with very little prompting and offered useful advice on improving relations between parent and teacher. In many cases the narratives included past experiences in addition to those occurring in the last year. Participants inevitably related their own childhood experiences. I inquired of parents and teachers if they had resources or support to facilitate the relationship, and of teachers, if their formal training had prepared them for communicating with parents.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. I loosely followed Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space narrative model for analysis, organizing the participants' stories into themes of continuity (past, present and future), social or institutional interaction, and the context of the situation.

I summarized the main ideas, coded them and organized them into themes. Where, for instance a participant lapsed into recalling a past experience that pertained to their role construction, I coded it. A past or

present perception or experience on the family was coded either as present family or past family. In this way I was able to identify what participants experienced as changes that have occurred over time in the family. When participants mentioned elements of the relationship that involved the functions of the school or training they had received I coded them s-school, p-principal, p/t-interviews and e-education. These were combined under the theme of institutional factors.

I then retold the stories in a condensed and sequenced fashion. I selected passages that, in my opinion, further substantiated, or contradicted current perspectives surrounding the home/school relationship. My retelling of the stories were verified by the participants, in this way the participants were very much a part of ensuring that the retold stories were representative of their larger story. This did, however, raise the question of why participants chose to tell the stories they did, and why to me? Was it possible participants had underlying motives or prejudices that were unacknowledged but surfaced in their stories? These are questions that require a more psychological examination of the nature of the home/school relationship.

The research data obtained from the interviews was cross-referenced with my reflective journal, which included my observation notes, to further increase validity and ensure rigor (Creswell, 2008). From the participants' descriptions I identified the functions and characteristics parents and teachers expected of their own and the other's role. The commonly identified characteristics and functions of the roles appear in the figures on pages 53 and

56. Some of the participants, as well as friends of mine who are parents and teachers acted as expert reviewers (Creswell, 2008). They were asked to comment and make suggestions on my analysis and contributed to the iterative nature of the study.

Limitations

The study was limited in that it was restricted to a small geographic region and a small number of participants who chose what stories to tell. The participants represented only two rural and two urban high schools in the Montreal area. While it gathered descriptive narratives of both parents and teachers, it did not verify these stories with the other parties involved. Since narrative research design relies heavily on the self-reported stories of individuals, the authenticity of the data presents a particular challenge. Distortion in the data may have occurred by participants not correctly recalling past events, or intentionally distorting their story by inventing past actions, as discussed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, T. (1998). This may be done intentionally to avoid embarrassment or discomfort.

By restricting my attention to a small number of rich, in-depth interviews, a purposeful sample allowed for the best use of time to gauge current role expectations and perceptions. In purposefully attempting to choose participants from a range of backgrounds I was able to look for patterns within the variety of perceptions and experiences I collected. A pitfall of this

approach is in the likeliness of over-representation. It is possible that the participants of this study represented a particular perspective that may not be widely shared.

I experienced the dual positions of observer and narrator, parent and teacher that posed challenges and may have produced distortions in the research data. Although I made every effort to protect against researcher bias by having the data member-checked, my being a mother and teacher inevitably informed my perceptions of the participants and their stories. The different roles I held may also have contributed to an insider/outsider dilemma.

As a researcher I needed to convince the participants that I could be trusted as an insider. As several of the participants were also divorced and/or single parents it is possible that this had some effect on what they told me. Although not identified, it is also possible that personality issues and issues relating to ethnicity, class or gender may also have presented challenges for the participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Elliott (2005, p. 22) suggested narrative researchers question "whether the accounts produced from interviews were accurate representations of reality", in other words, to what extent the narratives are distorted, as well as "are we measuring what we think we are measuring?" She questioned how widely the descriptions derived from a qualitative sample (a small sample from a specific geographic region) may be applied to a larger population (Elliott, 2005).

Elliott (2005) described two views on narrative research design, on the one hand it presents an accurate account of personal experiences and the meaning individuals make of them, on the other hand, that in the making of meaning of their experiences, participants inevitably distort reality. This study is limited in the generalizability of its findings, and again, by how the information gathered and analyzed may have been distorted by participants, the researcher, or both

CHAPTER THREE

Teachers and Parents Share Their Stories

Teachers Share Their Stories

Dennis

Dennis is a seasoned veteran with over thirty years teaching experience. He has been a teacher and administrator in three different public high schools in Quebec and is presently teaching grade ten and eleven at a rural high school north of Montreal. He has never married and has no children. He is a university graduate.

When asked if he felt his tall stature influenced his role as a teacher he replied, "I used to think it was my strategies that worked, but I guess when a student is staring at my chest it makes a difference, I'm 6'3"." But then he described the most authoritative teacher he could remember, a short little man who, he said "would clear the halls". Dennis explained that the teacher was an angry man who invoked fear in his students and was not particularly friendly with staff. Dennis said that "his size had a lot to do with the sec ones" which presented the possibility of physical characteristics, in this case, stature, as a factor in teachers' relationships with parents.

Dennis described himself as a "meat and potatoes guy" who likes meat and potatoes parents, people who are direct, who say it as it is. He described himself as flexible with a sense of humour. Dennis divided parents into two groups: involved parents, or 'power parents', those "you can count on to get

things done without too much trouble" and 'helicopter parents' as those that "are busybodies, always defending their kid even when they shouldn't". He believed this behaviour was unintentional, parents have energy and direct it towards their child. ' What he said he found sad in today's world is, "the way everything has gone electronic. Kids today figure that no matter what they do they can hit the restart button and it'll be okay." He suggested parents "be there for your kid, but don't hover." He described parents who "come in and attack, to defend the kid... it becomes a blame game."

Dennis said he felt there was never enough help for the parents. Parents are frustrated when their child is having difficulty and this is often where conflict comes from. Teachers make referrals and good parents "grab the ball and run with it". Some parents "sort of accept the weakness the kid has." But, "it's really about avoiding blame. Parents who are told their child is having difficulty feel they have dropped the ball, they feel they are not good enough and thought they were until that moment."

He described how 'knowing the kid' is crucial to the parent/teacher relationship. He described how one of his student's parents had just finished meeting with another teacher and had been "through the mill". When the parents spoke with Dennis, he broke the ice by saying, "your daughter must be quite a handful at home." The parents appreciated his candor, honesty, empathy and humour. This was what he described as the beginning of a great relationship. Dennis said that he became the one teacher these parents continued to speak with throughout the student's high school years, a

relationship from which he said he derived great professional satisfaction. Dennis explained that one of the best parts of teaching is that you get to see how your students turn out, you get to see them and their families through the years. He felt this is easier to accomplish in a small community.

Dennis used the word terrifying to describe parent/teacher interviews for both a rooky teacher and parents. He said he sees the nervousness in parents. He wondered, "how do the parents get their information?" He feels newsletters from the school are not effective as a means of communication. "Half of them don't get home, and the remaining half don't get read. If I was a parent and I got a newsletter, I would only skim over it looking for what relates to my kid." He recognized that much of the information parents receive on school issues is filtered through the student.

Dennis described parent/teacher interviews in the gym like being at Walmart and said he preferred speaking with parents in the privacy of his classroom. He mentioned that perhaps some teachers preferred the 'safety' in numbers the gym environment provided. Later in the interview Dennis expanded on this preference in communicating with parents saying that while he did not particularly enjoy formal parent/teacher interviews he rarely telephoned parents. He said this was due to the large number of students he teaches and lack of time.

When speaking about the skill of communicating with parents he said, "Thirty years has taught me to be careful with what I say. You can say two thousand words to a parent and months later, one thing comes back, it can be

an adjective that may have been too strong." He acknowledged that parents make mistakes with him too.

Dennis went on to discuss two institutional factors he felt were problematic. He said the reform puts incredible pressure on the teachers. Teachers are required to produce more grades. "I had to give 900 marks this semester with the reform. With comments and love notes, what is the accuracy after the first dozen?" He said parents, however, are exact. The grades in the reform are vague and this presents difficulty in validating the student's grade to the parents. He said one parent told him their child was so nervous and confused about how the teacher arrived at their grade, the student threw up in the parking lot.

The second problem he described was in the probation period for new teachers. He explained that it was the principal's responsibility to train new teachers and "to pick out the bad teachers". However, as Dennis explained, when you keep changing principals there is no one to support and train new teachers. If a rooky gets in with a new principal he stays in. The principal has one year to determine which of the new teachers are incompetent, after all "(teachers) don't turn bad, they were bad and not picked out." "Once the bad teachers start their third year, they stay. Unless they fondle the director general's daughter you can't get rid of them." Dennis described a situation where the teachers' union was so strong that when a principal tried to address an issue with one of its members, the teacher filed a grievance against the principal for harassment.

"If I came across a new bad teacher I would say your career in truck driving is still available," because, according to Dennis, when people think about a school they think about the bad teachers and that negatively affects the reputation of the school and its good teachers. To him, "teachers' training does not produce teachers, it produces people who can become teachers. You come out with a piece of paper that says you have taken a teaching course, they expect the skills have been covered."

Dennis's story confirmed that teachers' training programs cannot possibly meet the demands of the various resources and policies particular to individual schools and boards. His caustic tone demonstrated the frustration he felt. It was apparent that he abhorred his lack of power in determining the curriculum and the quality of teachers. His joking about parent/teacher interviews betrayed his anger at incompetent teachers and the lack of effective means for communicating with parents.

In pointing to the role of the principal as quality control agent, Dennis's story highlighted the effects of lack of self-regulation and short-term postings for principals on teacher quality. His discussion on the reform showed how teachers feel they have to implement policymaker's decisions without participation in the decision-making process. Dennis's experience exemplified the double-bind Nakagawa (2000) talked about from the teacher's perspective. Dennis on one hand enjoys the interaction with parents and wished to enlist their participation and interest in his class but feared busybodies and hovering parents. His expressed anxiety over validating his students' grades to parents,

showed the extent to which teachers feel their professionalism is questioned by parents.

Robyn

Robyn is in her early sixties. She is a university graduate. She has been teaching in a rural high school for thirty years. Robyn was quick to relate her story and tell me that it involved a parent who was also a teacher in the school where she taught.

She said she felt the student had a lot of pressure from the parents to perform well. Robyn immediately felt it necessary to explain that the student's parents were separated and in the midst of a divorce. Robyn felt the student was manipulative and easily distracted in class. The family situation made communicating with both parents difficult for Robyn.

Robyn related how one of her students presented her with work saying it 'was good enough' and when called to task, would return to her father and tell him she was being 'picked on' by her teacher. The father showed up and aggressively accused Robyn of not liking her child. The father refused to accept Robyn's view of her daughter's behaviour in class. As Robyn said, "what recourse do I have? All I can do is tell the parents the truth. One of the problems was that we had a new principal. One that was not familiar with the dynamics of the school, not with parents that are also teachers in the school, not with the parents as parents and not with the students."

Robyn said she was thrilled to report that by the end of the school year "the curtain had gone up." The father had seen how manipulative the daughter could be and "how what was happening in the classroom could be seen from a different perspective." The father told Robyn that other teachers had remarked on his daughter's behaviour and that he had witnessed it himself at home. The father sought Robyn's support. To Robyn "this was seldom the case. Parents see their kids as perfect little images of themselves." She felt "sometimes parents think the kids work harder than they do." Robyn said that parents turned up as 'helicopter parents' when the student was about to fail, she explained that "they (parents) expect the teacher to make it all better in the last two weeks of school." Robyn was the second teacher to use the term 'helicopter' to describe parents.

She recalled teaching thirty years ago. She spoke of the newly immigrated Greek community where she felt the families valued the importance and privilege of education more than today. She said that she felt revered by the parents and grandparents of her students. "It was most important that the teacher be respected." Robyn said she was told by parents, "if my child doesn't listen to you, you can smack them or put them in the closet." Now, she said, "society doesn't respect teachers, parents don't respect teachers, and I've also seen teachers that don't deserve respect." She explained, "the unions are so strong that there is nothing to do if a teacher is not getting the results they should."

How an individual's past experiences contributed to the construction of their role is evident in Robyn's recounting of her experience as a young teacher. While Robyn identified the ethnicity of the community in which she taught thirty years ago, her discussion focused on the changes that have occurred in the family and the authority of the teacher. The unquestioned authority she said she felt in her past teaching led her to reflect on how parents and families have changed, on how she no longer felt she had the same authority she once had.

She said that she had received no training in working with parents. She felt working with the public is a skill. "Just as you can be taught classroom strategies but some people cannot deliver them, some people are going to be better able than others at communicating with parents. I certainly had no training in how to deal with parents."

Robyn said that her skills at communicating had improved with experience. She suggested a mentoring program for new teachers would be beneficial. She said, "you can be taught how to not have a knee jerk reaction to what parents say to you; to say, I have to think about that and get back to you." She said she felt new teachers were "set up to fail. They end up with the more difficult groups because teachers with seniority choose their assignments. You have to be a great natural teacher to be able to graduate and deal with any group." Robyn was adamant, "unless the school community cares about the school and supports new teachers, they can't help but fail. I think this support happens less and less. The school has to function as a community."

Robyn's story demonstrated the importance of communication between parents and teachers. It seemed to show that parents and teachers not experiencing the same perception of the student, may contribute to conflict in their relationship, an idea that may deserve further exploration. According to Robyn, it was only when her student's father experienced the daughter's behaviour firsthand and other teachers had spoken with him concerning her behaviour, did he seek Robyn's help.

Robyn expected that her approach to her student's parents would be well received. She explained that they shared a common religion and socio/economic background that was a minority in the community. She described how she fully expected that these commonalities, in addition to the fact that they were both teachers at the same school would facilitate their communication. This was not the case, contrary to what Storey (1990) suggested, being a teacher did not necessarily facilitate communication between parent and teacher. It seemed that the emphasis Robyn had initially placed on her functions as a teacher overstepped the expectations of the parent. In other words, she may have been perceived by the father as too focused on his daughter, perhaps even too nurturing.

Her story showed the impact changes in the family, in particular divorce, had on parent/teacher interactions. In this case it presented difficulties in communicating with the parents. Robyn's experiences shed light on the changes over time in the role of teacher as an authority figure and of the assertiveness of adolescents over their rights. It also demonstrated that the onus is on

teachers to validate not only the grades they give students but their every comment and suggestion.

A lack of institutional support for the relationship between parents and teachers was remarked upon. Robyn directed responsibility for teacher quality at the principal and at teachers' training programs. Her story also pointed to the inability for principals to control the quality of teachers or education in a school due to time constraints they face. Her story showed the frustration teachers felt at their powerlessness in terms of self-regulation. Unlike other professions, like nursing, medicine and accounting, teachers are not organized within an order that enables them to self-regulate the quality of professionalism within their field. Robyn's frustration also extended to the lack of preparation she felt teachers received in skills to communicate with families.

Joanne

Joanne is the single mother of three teenage sons. She is a university graduate. She has thirty years experience as a teacher and principal at two public high schools in outlying regions of Montreal. Her narrative, therefore, included a discussion of the role of teacher as well as principal.

She explained that every school had a different protocol for how parents and teachers communicate. The administration in the two rural schools she has worked in expected certain steps to be followed. The teacher was responsible for contacting parents with any problem or concern they may have about a student. If the problem was not solved the matter was then brought to the

attention of the administration by the teacher. The goal of teachers and the administration was to help students succeed. Joanne tells students "if you're in the office, you're not succeeding."

Joanne explained that teachers could no longer dole out punishments as they did in the past, they had to talk to their students. In her experience, students are now very comfortable challenging teachers and the principal. "In my day, students would be sweating if they came to the office, not anymore." Joanne added that at home she wanted her children to challenge what she said, feeling it helped them make better decisions. She said she wanted her children to know there is injustice in life and they should stand up to it. Joanne went on to say that parents challenged more as well. She said she felt society in general challenged authority more today, that the field of education was no different than that of medicine, where we regularly challenge our doctors for a second, or third opinion.

One of the difficulties Joanne described in the parent/teacher relationship was how "parents will come to the office and have an opinion of their child as the 'good kid'. But this may not be so, at least not with every teacher, every time." She acknowledged that most teachers were good at their job and knew how to reach students. There were also "lousy teachers" and students who were "manipulative". When it came to teachers and parents, "some teachers just have it, that thing that comes out, respect." She explained that with these teachers parents did not feel defensive about what the teacher

was saying. She added that other teachers felt their professionalism was being questioned.

She shared that there was a school in Switzerland that offered courses in conflict resolution and communication strategies for its teachers and staff. They had someone who came in once or twice a week to offer ways to deal with problems and help reach solutions. She said there was no such program in her school board nor had she ever been offered any such training. Teachers weren't helped with how to communicate with parents, "there are strategies, but they are not being taught". Joanne felt many teachers could use help delivering the message, "we're on the same side of the fence, you're not the bad and I'm not the bad. I can't come up with a solution to every problem, I don't know what it's like in your house. So, how are WE going to fix this." Joanne emphasized the importance of the "we" in the equation of finding solutions or "paths we can try".

She reiterated that in her opinion and from her experience "personality and character are key to being a good teacher, for some it's easy and for others it's not." She recalled an experience as principal with a teacher having difficulties with classroom management. A social worker observed the class and made suggestions to the teacher. The teacher sat in on other classes but nothing helped, "she didn't pick it up". Joanne's point was that to a certain degree teaching is a knack that cannot be taught, good teachers possess natural ability and characteristics suited for the profession.

Joanne admitted that young teachers often quit. She explained that if they have had a difficult year they leave. Joanne said teachers had a difficult job. She described the characteristics of a good teacher. They must have good self-esteem and feel comfortable with criticism. They have to feel secure and sure of themselves, "to know they are doing the right thing" in order to feel comfortable communicating with parents. Joanne said that some teachers feel threatened by parents while others feel empowered in their position, they feel they can judge parents. Joanne explained that when parents are criticized by a teacher they lose respect for the teacher and tell their child not to take any abuse. She said parents tell their children, "you are your own king", you can challenge authority to advocate for yourself.

When describing the role of parents, she said, parents, in turn, must promote education, tell children that "to get anywhere in life you need a good education." Parents must remind students that they are ultimately responsible for their own education. "Just like you cannot choose your boss at work, you cannot choose your teachers." Joanne said she explained to students experiencing difficulty with a teacher, "this is part of your challenge for this year." To Joanne, parents shouldn't feel after elementary school that they've done their bit. While she insisted parents should be part of the school, she said it was difficult to involve parents. "Fifteen or twenty years ago mothers were more often at home and able to offer their time at the school. Now", she said, "they are happy being busy" and career-oriented.

When asked how she communicated with parents, Joanne spoke of meeting parents in an informal setting. Joanne said she would not be interested in "getting into an intimate conversation about something specific" outside of school. "When a parent sees me outside of school and asks, how's it going?" she hoped and expected they were asking after her health and not asking her about a student's progress.

Joanne was particularly concerned that teachers often did not realize that out of conflict came solutions. Her experience working with parents has taught her that "after the Kleenex, or the glass of water" you find out what the real concerns are. She explained that identifying these concerns was the starting block of any partnership, that most parents wanted the best for their children.

Over her thirty years as a teacher and principal Joanne experienced the shift in the nature of parents and teachers. She explained the change in how assertive and challenging students and parents are. She said that she thought this was a result of parents teaching their children to be critical of injustice. Her story demonstrated a diminishment in the role of principal, let alone teacher, as authority figure.

Through her acknowledgement that not all students behaved the same way with every teacher and that parents often did not recognize this, Joanne's story demonstrated the importance of parents and teachers sharing the same experiences, or opinions, of students, or at least recognizing that they may not. Joanne suggested that it might be a good idea for school boards to make

available conflict management and communications strategies for parents and teachers.

As a researcher, I found Joanne's story interesting in that it seemed too good to be true. It was as though she had never had a conflict with a parent, in any of her roles, as parent, teacher or principal, which I found curious. During the interview she spoke of teachers feeling empowered by their position, ready to criticize and judge parents, and of her personal commitment to involve parents in the school community.

At the end of the interview session Joanne mentioned, however, that she preferred not to allow parents to visit the school. She explained that parents who visited unannounced later complained to her of the students' unruliness in the halls and the administration's lack of control. Her story provided a different perspective from which to view the relationship between parents and teachers and further explained some of the contradictions in the nature of the roles themselves. It may also, however, have highlighted one of the pitfalls in narrative research, the possibility of contradictions in what the participant reported that may have been guided by the interview process itself.

Joanne said that it is the protocol of the school boards she has worked for that teachers communicate to the parents of their students any concerns they may have relating to the student's behaviour or education. This may place parents and teachers in an adversarial position where the necessity for competent communication skills to manage the challenge seems clear.

Melanie

Melanie is in her early thirties. She is a university graduate. She has been teaching grade seven and eight at a high school in Montreal for seven years. Melanie is newly married with a young child of her own. When I first met Melanie she told me she had just returned from getting a new tattoo. This to me conveyed her desire to demonstrate her youth and her capacity to relate well to and understand her students. Melanie was eager to relate her story, it was apparent by her body language that the experience she was about to recount caused her anguish. She seemed agitated, nervous and, while at the same time, eager to relate her story.

Melanie said she has always had great relationship with her students and their families. She recalled nostalgically how she had taught four siblings from a family that had immigrated to Canada from India. She described how she had taught the eldest child in her first year of teaching and the others subsequently. She said over the years she had developed a close relationship with the parents over the years and her last parent/teacher interview for the youngest child was a sorrowful affair. Melanie explained that a long-term relationship with a family is rewarding to her professionally. "She gets to see the kids grow up and knows that she helped." She told me that she was proud, and even joked with the parents, that even as a new teacher, when she had taught the family's eldest child, she "didn't really screw up, the student turned out fine". It may not only be a teacher's experience that contributes positively to the parent/teacher relationship.

Melanie told me that a good sense of humour is crucial in dealing with adolescents, who "by nature, can love you one day and hate you the very next". She expressed concern that her humour did not offend and told me the story of one of her students who discovered through a class project that he was not particularly skilled at hockey. She received a letter from this student's mother saying that Melanie had damaged her student's self-esteem. Melanie explained that it was from that incident that she learned to watch carefully what she did and said.

Melanie recounted that at the beginning of the school year she was given a promotional pamphlet from her student's mother detailing her son's achievements and interests, and his preferred authors and novels. The student's mother, explained Melanie, taught Cegep, was divorced and not on good terms with the boy's father with whom Melanie had never spoken or met. Melanie expressed her view that the lack of participation from the father in the student's life was possibly a contributing factor in her conflict with the student's mother.

Melanie went on to say that, although bright, the student was a huge behavioural problem in the class. Melanie had many descriptive images of bad behaviour to share. For example, she described how the student would inhale spaghetti through his nose and pull it out of his mouth in class. The boy was in Melanie's class for two years, during which she suspended all class outings for the entire class. She explained that although this was a drastic measure, suspending all class outings for the entire class because of one student, but she

said she felt unsupported and incapable of assuming responsibility for the student's unruly behaviour in her classroom let alone outside of the school.

Melanie said that despite many accommodations she made for the student, the mother was unappreciative and blamed Melanie for not being able to inspire her son. Melanie described how she had followed the mother's suggestion and chosen from this student's favorite authors list the book the entire class would read. The mother complained that her son had already read that novel and Melanie should choose another. To Melanie, it seemed whatever she did she could not please the mother. She said that the mother accused her of not controlling her class, and went as far as to say that she was able to control her class of Cegep students and expected Melanie to be capable of doing the same. Melanie visibly shook when she related the story, it was apparent that this experience had scarred her. Melanie told me that this same mother defended her son's use of marijuana when he was caught smoking on school premises, as she claimed it helped his concentration.

Melanie told me she was surprised and perplexed by the difficulties she had experienced with this particular parent. She explained that she had thought that since the mother was a teacher and lived in the same neighbourhood as her, their commonalities would help establish a reciprocal understanding and a good working relationship.

Melanie's story illustrated the depth of emotion that may be the result of conflict in the parent/teacher relationship. Melanie expected the student's mother to understand and empathize with her and was shocked by her

accusations of professional incompetence. This story showed the painful insult it is to teachers to have their professionalism questioned.

Once again the suggestion that parents that are also teachers would be sensitive to the issues surrounding the relationship between parents and teachers and would therefore make better partners, is proven false. However, the extent to which parents and teachers experienced the same behaviours of the student is seen as imperative to any collaborative efforts. Melanie's pain at what she considered a failure at partnering with the parents of her students is indicative of the need to help teachers with strategies to better communicate with parents. Melanie's story confirmed that teachers derive professional satisfaction from being a part of the school community and from ongoing relationships with their students and their families.

Parents Share Their Stories

Rob

Rob moved to Quebec from Ontario three years ago. He is a divorced father with three children living with him, two of which are in high school. He attended university. The children's mother had been estranged from the children for two years.

Rob had to think about whether he had had an interaction with a teacher in the last year. This was interesting because it showed that even parents who

did not think about the relationship they had with their children's teachers had something to say, when they thought about it.

The story he related involved his son in secondary four. Rob told me that his son had been given the option of enrolling in high or low math for grade eleven. He was concerned that his son had decided to opt for the lower math class and asked his son to have his math teacher contact him to discuss the matter. Rob described the telephone conversation he had with the teacher. He said that the teacher had reiterated what his son had told him, that his son, Mike, would do better in the low math but was capable of doing just as well in the high math with some effort.

Rob said that he trusted the teacher because she had a son in the same grade and "knew the challenges". He explained that she was an experienced math teacher in her fifties with three children of her own. The words he used to describe the teacher were, genuine, concerned, upbeat, and understanding. He told me, "I trusted her because when I spoke to her she was just showing concern, it wasn't like she was just trying to make him work harder or make his life more difficult with these challenging assignments, she felt they would be beneficial to him, and she was clear about that." Rob said that he appreciated the teacher's honesty, clarity and concern for her student.

Rob went on to explain that, at the time, he and the children's mother were in the middle of a messy custody battle. He said that he appreciated the teacher "understanding we were having some issues at home that were maybe outstanding, that maybe were getting in the way of what Mike was trying to

accomplish at school." Rob told me that he realized the teacher cared for his son and his family when she said, "I know things aren't the way you would like them to be at home now, but Mike is an outstanding student and…"

Rob trusted the teacher's opinion on what course Mike should take perhaps because they shared the same experiences with the student. "I trusted that she knew Mike well enough to know." According to Rob both parent and teacher shared the opinion that Mike was a good kid and an excellent student, albeit a student who may have been experiencing difficulty in school because of the changes in his home life.

Rob told me that he had a follow-up discussion with the same teacher when he met her at the bank a few weeks later. He said that he had discussed his custody issues with her and that she had offered to provide him with a report that said that Mike's efforts had improved. The father explained that he felt more relaxed speaking with the teacher in a social setting than at the official parent/teacher conferences where he said he felt, "treated like a number." He said he felt that meeting her in a 'random' way was a good way to get to know her better, "where she could speak more candidly." He said he saw how genuinely the teacher cared by her eyes.

I asked Rob if he had ever had a problem with one of his children's teachers, but he said no. He explained, "my children are way better behaved than I used to be, and I'm grateful for that!", indicating that good behaviour is a positive characteristic that facilitates good student/teacher relationships. Rob reflected that he purposely tried not to replicate his own strict upbringing.

Instead, he said he appreciated what he saw and heard from his friends' parents and that was what he tried to replicate in his own parenting. He said he stressed the importance of education to his children. He told them never be intimidated by teachers, and said he didn't like it when teachers felt they were always right.

Rob said that as a parent he recognized that teachers experienced difficulty with large classes with a wide range of academic capabilities. He felt teachers should acknowledge that families with several children are often in the same boat. He explained that parents with several children may appear less interested but really may just be concerned and concentrating their time and efforts on one of their other children at any given time.

Rob's story supported the notion that some teachers 'just have it', the ability to communicate and relate well with others. The importance of characteristics that complement the roles of parent and teacher included empathy and compassion. The teacher and parent experienced the same behaviours of the adolescent and that proved key to their successful communication. Rob emphasized the value of in-person communication and the need for parental support particularly at times of transition in a family's structure. Rob said he was in support of less formal parent/teacher interviews.

Julie

Julie is a divorced mother of two children attending a rural school, one in grade six and the other in secondary one. She is a CEGEP graduate. Although

from a francophone family, she opted for her children to attend school in English. When asked about her experience with a teacher, Julie was quick to relate the following story.

Julie and her ex-husband attended a Christmas concert in which their youngest son was participating. Their older son, Kris, decided to leave class to join his parents and watch his brother sing. While the parents were sitting with Kris in the gym, his teacher entered and demanded Kris leave the gym and wait for him in the hall. The teacher, according to Julie, did not address the parents at all.

The teacher then proceeded out to the hall to berate Kris. Julie was furious, "the parents are right there, you can talk to the parents before kicking the kid out and giving him shit. It was insulting!" Julie said she felt the teacher was "power tripping".

Julie went on to say that her son had complained in the past that this teacher disliked him, saying he felt picked on by him. Following the incident in the gym, Julie said she then also felt the teacher disliked her son. She was disappointed the teacher did not try to help his students more. She expressed anger at his lack of empathy for Kris's "being an adolescent and having trouble with his parents' separation at home."

Julie said she wrote a letter to the principal in complaint of the teacher's "unacceptable" behaviour with her son. She took no further action at the time. She attended parent/teacher conference and tried to speak with the teacher but he was "abrupt and very negative". According to Julie the meeting did not last

long or accomplish anything. She told me the teacher avoided her the rest of the year. It was obvious from her description of the incident that she was greatly upset. Interestingly, in relating the story she remembered a similar situation she had experienced as a youngster.

While attending high school outside of Quebec, Julie had a French teacher who she felt picked on her. She said he repeatedly called on her to answer questions and, when finally exasperated, she ridiculed him and was sent to the office. She complained to her mother, who then met the teacher and appreciated her daughter's point of view. Julie's mother told her to forget it. She told me that she and her mother laughed about the teacher all year. Julie was clear in her belief that "teachers are power-trippers and their position goes to their heads." She explained how her experience in high school validated her belief in supporting her son's perspective.

Julie was specific when she said that as a parent she felt the teachers in high school "don't want to be bothered with parents". She went further to say that she felt that if the student is doing well teachers don't even want to see you at parent/teacher conferences. She said she communicated with teachers by leaving a telephone message for them at the school, and then either speaking with them or making an appointment to meet with them.

Julie's story showed the conflict of authority between the role of parent and teacher. Parents feel entitled to challenge the authority of the teacher even while in the school. While not prepared to blindly accept her son's allegations that this teacher was picking on him, Julie's experience at the concert validated

her son's view. It was also apparent from Julie's story that her own high school experience heavily influenced her construction of the role of parent.

Julie's experience confirmed the belief that parents do not find parent/teacher interviews an effective means of communicating with teachers. Her story also confirmed parents' belief that teachers at the secondary level are less likely than elementary teachers to involve parents, and that parents of high school students are less likely to seek communication with teachers.

Lynn

Lynn is about fifty years old, previously divorced and now living with someone. She is a high school graduate. She has an adult daughter living outside the house and two children attending the local English public high school, a daughter in grade eleven and a son in grade nine.

She described a situation that occurred this past year. Her son was constantly being pushed into his locker. While he didn't tell his mom, he later told her that he had told the lunch monitor and his teacher of the situation. Lynn told me that when she saw bruises on her son, she called the principal. She expressed that she was angry and disappointed in the way the school handled the security of her son. "Someone should have called me when it was happening and he didn't tell me." Lynn was very angry that neither the teacher nor lunch monitor had acted to protect her son.

Lynn described the "blow out" that ensued with the principal. She insisted that she "told her how to take care of the situation". Lynn felt entitled,

in fact, responsible for telling the principal how to do her job and felt "things improved after that". She said that the principal "took off after, anyway. She left." She expressed anger at the lack of accountability of the teachers, the lunch monitors and even the principal.

Lynn went on to say that she felt the school did not communicate adequately with parents. "With school grades, they don't say nothing, you go to parent/teacher and they say nothing. Then at the end of school they say they're going to fail, by then it's too late." Lynn attended parent/teacher if requested. She preferred to be telephoned by teachers.

Lynn easily divided her role expectations of parents and teachers. "The teacher's job is to teach, not to teach manners, that's the parents job. Teach the kids, that's your job, that's what you're paid for." She told me she found "a lot of teachers don't inform the parents, they don't want the hassle of it." She suspected this was why the bullying continued.

She also described what she said was a case of mistaken identity, where her son was accused of something he said he did not do. She explained that while she does not blindly accept her children's version of events, she does feel "I know my kids aren't angels, but I know what they are capable of." She felt that in a small school, "they should know what's going on with the kids."

Although seemingly disgruntled by her experience, Lynn described how "it only takes one teacher to influence a kid. Teachers should inspire, encourage and give students hope", something she says she hasn't seen in a long time. She

felt there are too many teachers that are tired, "they're burnt, they don't care if they inspire a student. For some, it's just a power trip."

Lynn's story reiterated the frustration felt by some parents with schools. Parents felt teachers at the secondary level had little interest in communicating with parents. Parents felt not only entitled to challenge the teacher and the principal, they felt it was at times their duty. Her story very clearly defined the expectations parents had of teachers as agents of socialization and experts in their fields, and not as instructors of any moral code.

Nadia

Nadia arrived in Canada as a refugee from Lebanon twelve years ago. She is fifty years old and attended college. She explained that she left Lebanon because she wanted her baby daughter to carry her last name and not the name of her biological father (with whom she had ceased all contact following Ara's birth). She further explained that it was the custom of her culture for her daughter to take the name of a male relative if the father was unknown and being unwilling to do this, she fled.

Throughout the interview Nadia repeatedly emphasized to what extent she felt she had sacrificed to provide Ara the opportunity to study and live in Canada, to what extent Ara should feel privileged. Nadia explained that as a youngster she was sent to a boarding school to learn 'principles' and studied there fourteen years. She insisted that things are not at all as they were when she was in high school. She told me how the nuns who ran the boarding school

used a strap to discipline the students and, as she explained, "there was no question as to who was in charge".

She told me that she impressed the importance of education on Ara constantly. She repeated what her father had told her, "my father always said, if you don't learn to love to study you'll have no future, you'll sell fruit from a basket." Nadia expressed that Ara was going to have all the opportunities Nadia's sacrifices had provided her.

Nadia did not regularly communicate with Ara's teachers nor did she attend parent/teacher interviews. " I don't go. I used to go when she was younger but I don't see why I should go now. I see how she is behaving and I see her grades. What more are they going to tell me? I'm her mother, I know her behaviour, as her teacher does. If they see anything they will call me." According to Nadia, Ara is a good student and relates well with other students and her teachers. Nadia felt it was the teacher's responsibility to call her if they found Ara's interest in her studies diminished or if Ara experienced a social problem in school. To Nadia the divide between the role of parent and teacher is clear. "My part here is as her mother, which is a very important part, giving her a secure place, the atmosphere of studying. I'm here to give her help, to contact the school if she needs help with her studies."

Her interactions with teachers or principals were centered on two instances in which Ara was bullied and Nadia took action. Ara was being called an Arab and a terrorist by a boy in the school. She had yoghurt, and later paint thrown in her face and on her jeans. Nadia was not notified by the teacher or

the school that Ara was having a problem. She related that it is her duty as a "momma bear to defend and protect Ara's rights as a Canadian and as a woman".

Nadia felt justified in standing up to or confronting anyone impeding her and her daughter's rights to equal treatment and respect. Nadia was not satisfied with the way the school handled the situation, where both students were suspended. She was angry that no one told her what was happening at school and that Ara was being punished. She met with Ara's teacher and then the principal to communicate her dissatisfaction. She also went to the police to lodge a complaint.

Nadia explained that according to her experience, "in every school the whole world is there, and everyone comes with their own culture, their own mind. Children learn from their parents. It all comes from the house." Nadia told me that she felt it is the job of the immigrant to learn the laws and the culture and 'fit in', to bring their children up as Canadians first.

Nadia's story showed, once again, that challenging the authority of teachers and principals is perceived to be within the bounds of the role of parent. Parents are less inclined to communicate with teachers at the secondary level unless they perceive, or are informed of, a problem with their child. Her story showed that parents believe it is the role of the teacher to inform them of any such problems.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis and Reflections

As the reader will recall, role construction is regarded as the most significant factor in predicting family involvement according to Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler (2005). There is, however, scarce literature on the construction of the role of parent and teacher of high school students. This study provided a small sample of the expectations and perceptions of parents and teachers, two of the stakeholders identified as crucial to the family/school/community partnership in contemporary Quebec.

I conducted eight in-depth interviews in the summer of 2009 (four teachers and four parents of high school students attending public English high school). I transcribed and coded the interviews as described in the methodological section. I then analyzed the texts to identify elements that, I felt may contribute to the ongoing discussion on the home/school relationship. An iterative approach was used, that is, I consulted the transcripts and collaborated with participants on a regular basis throughout the three-month study. My findings were divided into five themes: 1 The student in the home/school relationship, 2 Changes in the family, 3 Personal characteristics, 4 Functions of the roles, and 5 Institutional factors.

The Student in the Home/School Relationship

Teachers in this study recognized that the information the parents received about them, in most cases, came through the student, and was therefore highly subjective. Some parents recognized the same and said that they did not always take their child's word at face-value. The student's pivotal role in the relationship between parents and teachers is self-evident, because without the student there is no parent/teacher relationship at all.

What the parents learn about the teacher often originates from their child and what the teacher learns about the parent is often from their student. It became apparent to me from the participants' comments that both parents and teachers agree their relationship is often mediated by an erratic third party, namely by the emotions and behaviours of an adolescent.

My data suggested that to what extent parents and teachers shared perceptions and experiences of the behaviour and academic competencies of the student seemed to be a factor in the relationship. This is the impression I received from Dennis explaining how he had developed a relationship with a student's parents based on them sharing the same perceptions of the student. In Robyn's story she described how her student's father did not consider her observations credible until they were confirmed by his own and other teachers' experiences. This is not to say that the student's behaviour is expected to be the same at home and school, or from class to class, or that parents and teachers cannot agree to disagree on the perceptions they have of the student.

A generation of liberal philosophy and critical thinking has produced parents and students that will not follow authority blindly. This is seen as confrontational behaviour by teachers but as an entitlement by parents. The structure of the family has changed as well. Participants in this study remembered their high school days, where two parents were in the house, in some cases mom worked and the teacher was THE authority. Nowadays, teachers are expected to manage a variety of family situations, their own included.

Teachers are expected to find time to communicate with parents and a variety of others who act in the role of parents: grandparents, stepparents, older siblings or others. Parents expect teachers to make allowances and be sensitive to family break-ups and single parenting and even to get involved in custody cases. Teachers said this put added pressure on them and made for an organizational mess of scheduling separate parent/teacher interviews, sometimes to the extent of ensuring the parents did not meet. As Melanie explained, "I had these two parents who wouldn't even come to the school at the same time."

An increased dependence on technology was thought to further complicate the relationship. As one teacher said, "students think there's a restart button in life, just like in the video games". He described how parents and students expected 'a do-over', that there was a lack of accountability. The

term 'helicopter parent' was mentioned by two teachers, but other teachers interviewed described the tendency in today's parents to be ready to get in the way, busybodies, who cover for their kids when they shouldn't. One teacher, for example, described how a parent went as far as to defend her son's use of marijuana on school premises. The teacher was surprised that the mother actually said, "it helps him concentrate".

In both rural and urban settings, teachers reported deriving professional satisfaction from ongoing relationships with the families of their students and that some of these relationships became quite personal. Teachers derived pleasure from seeing how their students turn out and keeping in touch with their students' siblings, parents and relatives. This finding diverged from Lawrence-Lightfoot who found that for teachers, professional satisfaction is mostly derived from the performance of their students and the management of the classroom (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

Parents reported that they enjoyed informal relations with teachers. Parents have particular interests, they are focused on their particular child, teachers, however, having many students have group interests, their focus is on the group; this has not changed throughout history. Both parents and teachers recognized and acknowledged the potential conflict this presented in the function of their role and in the relationship between them. A parent, being focused on their particular child's success, may request extra attention from a teacher without considering the teacher's focus on the group and inability to accommodate students' individual requirements.

Parents and teachers have long been termed "natural enemies" (Waller, 1932). Even parents and teachers who had only good experiences to relate used the following words to describe each other and their relationship: scared to death, uncooperative, aggressive, blaming, distrust, mean, offensive, vulnerable, nervous, terrifying, non-appreciative, challenging, uncaring, inflexible, and accusing. Figure one, on page 69 shows the characteristics parents and teachers described as important to the parent's and the teacher's role.

Teachers described preferring parents who had a sense of humour, were direct, appreciative, and empathetic. Parents described preferring teachers who were liked by the student, showed that they knew the student, had a sense of humour, were flexible, direct, honest, tolerant, understanding, compassionate, empathetic, inspiring, sincere, not too sensitive and the list goes on.

My data suggested that parents expected more of teachers than teachers of parents, much in line with the Deslandes study that found that parents think more of teachers than teachers do of parents (Deslandes, 2007). Where parents felt teachers were 'power-trippers', as Julie angrily put it, "teachers are power trippers and their position goes to their head", believed to be putting on airs of superiority, by contrast teachers seemed to feel they experienced a lack of authority and appreciation. As Melanie said when speaking of her experience with a parent who she felt had treated her disrespectfully and unappreciatively,

"Can't you see that I'm trying? Give me a break, can't you even say thank-you for the special efforts I've made for your son!"

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) coined the term 'ghosts in the classroom' to explain how parents' and teachers' past experiences influence the construction, expectations and perceptions of their present role. Neither parents or teachers said they had ever reflected on the 'ghosts' they had in the classroom or the home, that is, how their construction of their roles were modeled from their past experiences, both negatively and positively.

My data suggested that the past experiences of the parents and teachers interviewed influenced their perceptions of their roles. While telling her story Julie lapsed into an experience she had as a youngster. She immediately recognized that she had reacted to her son's teacher in the same way her mother had with her high school teacher many years back. Julie was extremely surprised to see that her mother's behaviour with her teachers had influenced her behaviour with her son's.

Criticism from either parent or teacher is taken as a sign of having "dropped the ball". Regardless of the focus through on individual or group interests, both parents and teachers consider their function as one of "getting the student through", thus recognizing this shared purpose of their roles. Teachers seemed surprised to learn how much parents took their comments 'to heart'. The positive characteristics that were mentioned by parents and teachers as valued, would do well to be included in any relationship, let alone a parent/teacher partnership.

Characteristics of the roles

TEACHER

'Professional adult'

Devotion to the group

Respect

Humour

Empathy

Tolerance

Flexibility

Directness

Appreciate

PARENT

A range of possibilities

Devotion to the individual

Differences   Similarities   Differences
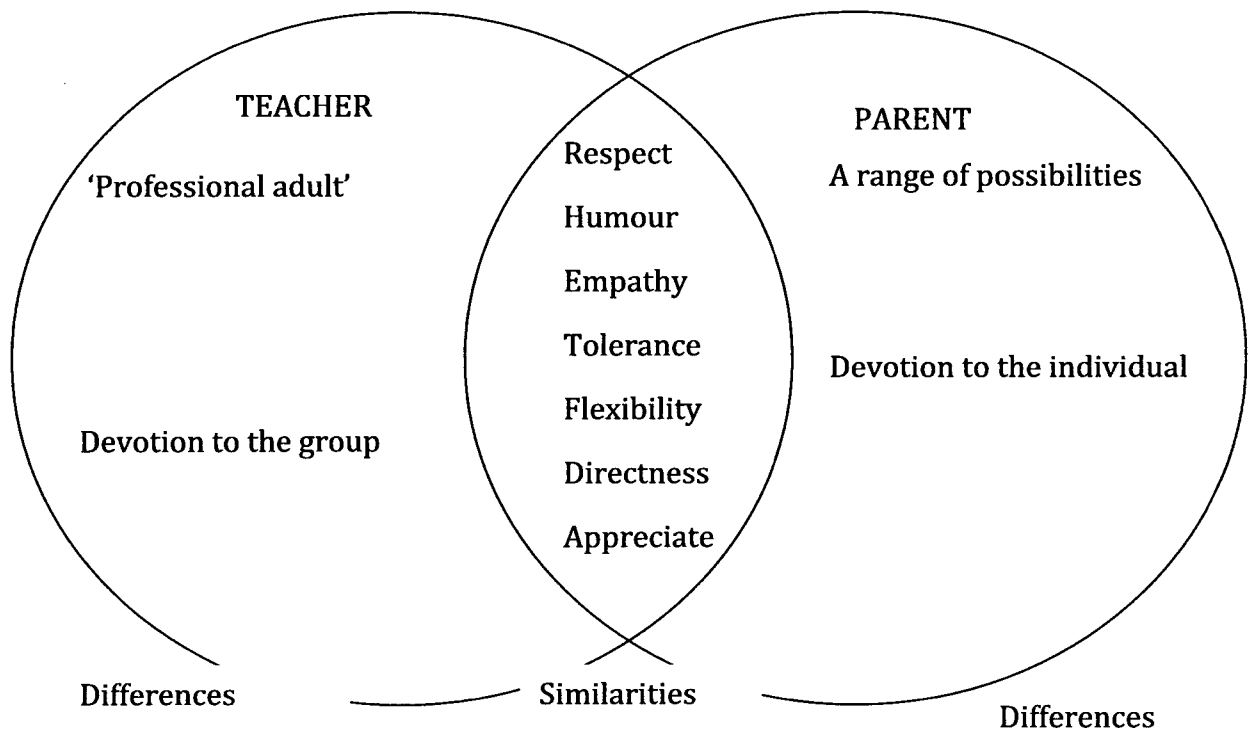
FIGURE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROLE OF PARENT & TEACHER

The key to an effective comparison is the identification of important characteristics. These
characteristics are then used as the basis for which similarities and differences are identified,
or comparing and contrasting. The similarities between elements are listed in the
intersection between the two circles. The differences are listed in the parts of each circle that
do not intersect.

Both the parents and teachers in this study demonstrated that they had a definite concept of their different roles. As functions of their role, parents described: giving the student a secure home, a nurturing and supportive environment, food, a place to study, promoting learning, listening, advising, inspiring, disciplining and teaching values. For their part, teachers described: providing security in the classroom, supporting the student, teaching the academic curriculum, listening, advising, inspiring, disciplining and teaching values as functions of the role of teacher. Teachers also described how they preferred parents who teach values, disciplined the student and supported the teacher. Figure two, on page 72 shows the functions of the roles of parent and teacher as described by the participants. It shows that, on the whole, parents and teachers expected similar responsibilities of each other.

Other than the teacher being expected to teach the academic curriculum and the parent for providing food, the perceived functions of the two roles appeared to be quite similar. Both parents and teachers expected to be appreciated and respected by each other in their respective roles. What seemed to differ was the perceived and expected level of engagement for each function. Consensus between parent and teacher of the emphasis given to these characteristics and role functions may contribute to the parent/teacher relationship in much the same way as described in the Epstein overlapping spheres model (Epstein, 2007).

The functions of parent and teacher appeared to have so much in common that conflict seemed to arise when parents and teachers had differing emphases. For example, a parent expecting a teacher to be more or less nurturing, or a teacher expecting a parent to provide more discipline, almost invariably led to ambiguity and confusion in the expectations of the roles.

Storey (2001) in his study on conflict between parents and teachers proposed that perhaps if parents were also teachers they would be more empathetic to the position of the teacher and this would result in better relations. Epstein's model of inter-connecting spheres showed that the more the teachers and parents shared philosophies, activities and socio/economic/cultural values, the better their relations.

This study demonstrated, however, that similarities in values between parents and teachers were not a guarantee of good relations. The response given by one teacher was " if you want to scare the hell out of a teacher today, let them know that the parents are also teachers." A sentiment largely expressed by the teachers interviewed was that parents who are also teachers were a nuisance. In fact, two of the teachers' stories centered almost completely on how parents who were also teachers had caused them not only tension and anxiety but anguish, frustration and a sense of professional failure.

Functions of the Roles

TEACHER

Teach academic
material

Group interest

Historically-
Figure of authority

PARENT

Promote learning

Individual interest

Provide food,
shelter, nurturing

Discipline
Security
Support
Accountable
Inspire
Promote
critical
thinking

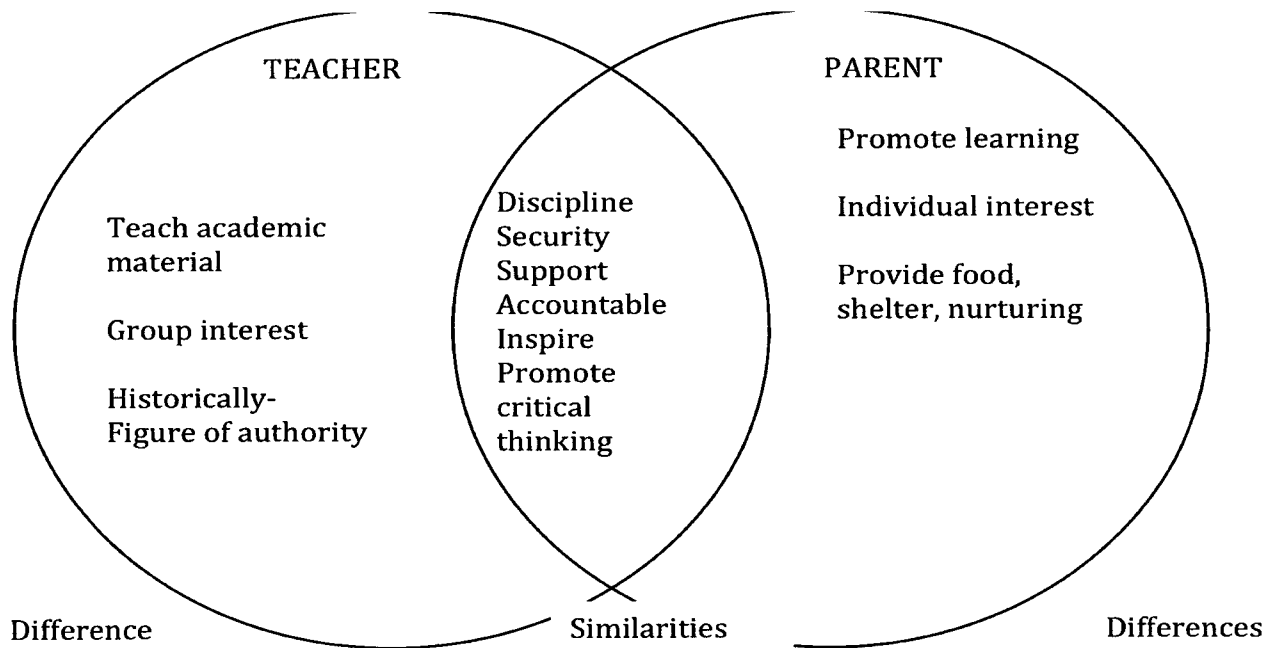Difference   Similarities   Differences

FIGURE 1: FUNCTIONS OF THE ROLE OF PARENT & TEACHER

The key to an effective comparison is the identification of important functions. Ttions are
then used as the basis for which similarities and differences are identified, or comparing and
contrasting. The similarities between elements are listed in the intersection between the two
circles. The differences are listed in the parts of each circle that do not intersect.

The stories suggested a systemic failure to provide teachers and parents the support needed for a viable relationship, let alone a productive partnership. Robyn, Dennis and Joanne said that their teacher training did not include teaching communication skills or conflict resolution strategies for dealing with parents. Parents also said they had received no training or education in communicating with teachers, and had only their own parents and their friends' parents as references in the construction of their role.

Parents expressed seeing themselves in a double-bind, similar to what Nakagawa (2000) described. Parents described feeling that, although their involvement and presence in the school was not encouraged by teachers, possibly even avoided, they were still expected to support the teacher's authority, be involved in their child's education and school activities. Teachers confirmed the feeling parents had. Joanne and Dennis described how they viewed parent involvement as beneficial, but they didn't want parents at the school. As figure 3, on page 76 shows, parents feel they are represented as both the solution and the problem. Parents are represented in family/school discourse as both the low cost, practically free, solution to education's woes and the problem (Nakagawa, 2000). This study suggested that parents today may feel the same.

Parents confirmed a decline in their communication with teachers at the secondary level. This was attributed, on an institutional level, to the increase in

the number of teachers the student had between elementary and secondary school and the lack of a suitable means of communicating with teachers.

Teachers identified the school principal as the bridge between the school and the family as well as the person responsible for encouraging and mentoring novice teachers. The principal's responsibilities were said to include identifying and dealing with weak teachers and weak parents, ensuring that academic standards are met, parents, teachers and students are satisfied, students are well behaved and the school functions smoothly.

The teachers and parents interviewed suggested that the principal had little time to fulfill all these functions. Robyn explained that where in the past principals remained at the same school for a number of years, today they were not in the school long enough to "get to know the dynamics of the teachers, the students or the families." There was, reportedly, a lack of administrative support from the principal for the relationship between parents and teachers in the schools.

Parents and teachers expressed feeling that formal interviews at the high school level were a waste of time. To teachers, parent/teacher conferences were a place where they needed protection, a time when teachers feared being 'let loose on' by parents. To parents it was a place to feel treated as a number and criticized, a frightening ordeal for all, certainly not a stellar environment for partnership building. But when else did parents and teachers communicate? Parents expected teachers to telephone them or send a note home with the student, teachers expected parents to leave a message with the school secretary

to telephone them. There was no organized manner in which to relay information between parents and teachers in any of the schools that were part of this study.

Teachers said that the recent educational reform in Quebec added to already difficult time constraints making it almost impossible to have time to communicate with parents, or as Dennis said,

> Conflict between individual and group interest arises. I had to give in 900 marks this semester with the reform...The reform puts incredible pressure on teachers, Much more than pre reform...The parents are exact...(and) I don't even know the friggin' kids' names yet!

When are teachers to find the time to develop and maintain contact with parents? What are we, as a society, doing to facilitate the relationship between parents and teachers?
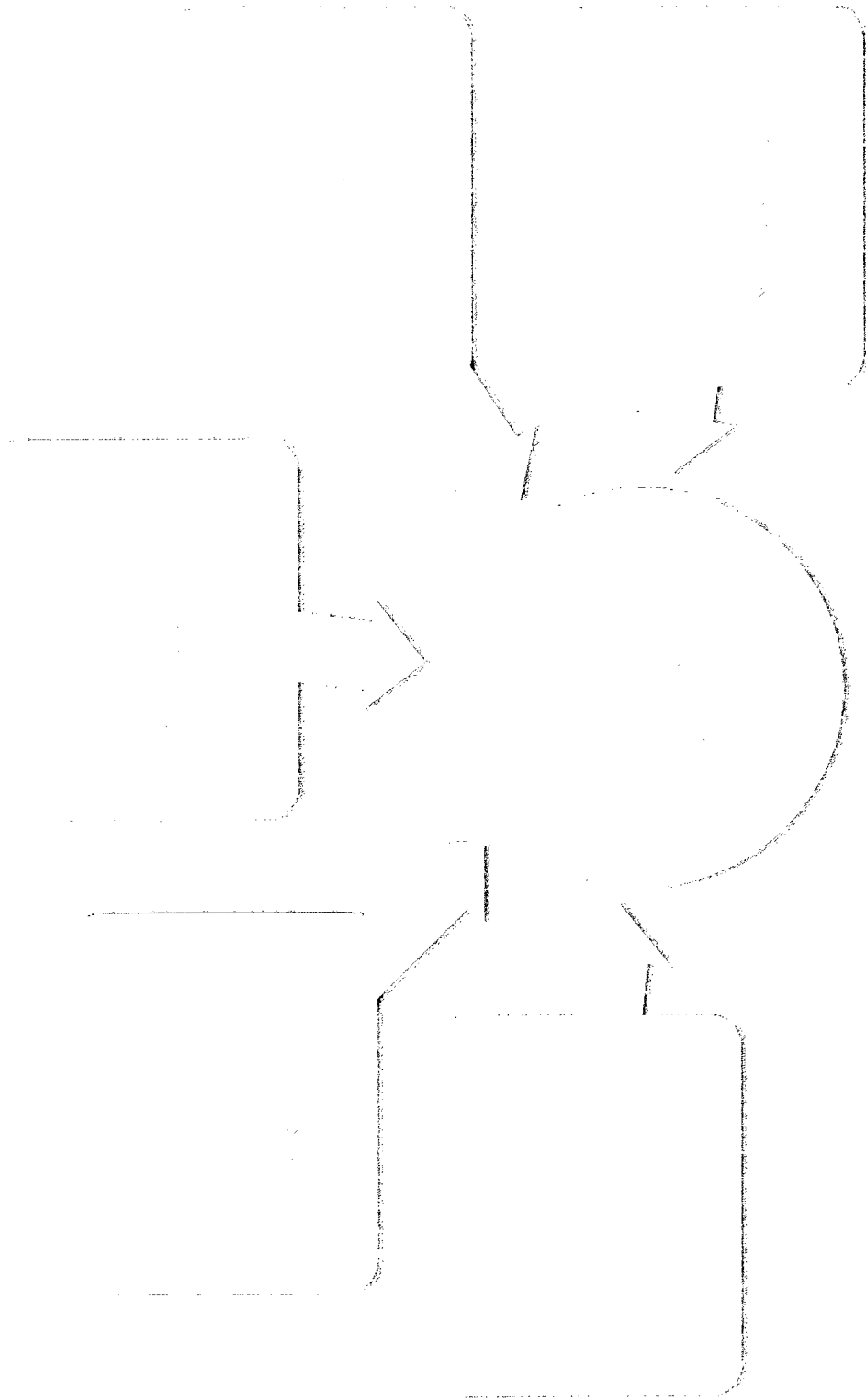
FIGURE 3: THE DOUBLE-BIND OF THE ROLE OF PARENT
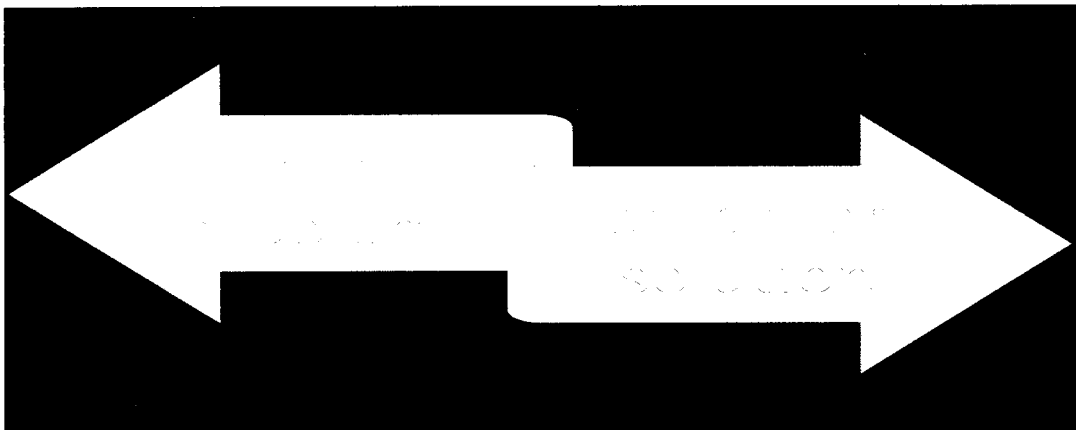
FIGURE: 4– PARENT/TEACHER PARTNERSHIP

CHAPTER FIVE

Where Do We Go From Here?

If parents and teachers both feel insecure and both have at their disposal the potential to validate and support each other in one of the most important roles they have chosen, then why are there not more systematic mechanisms in place to facilitate this crucial and sought after relationship? Society relies on adolescents' choices for their future and all of our futures. They are, after all, society's only prospects.

The dynamic structure of today's family means schools have to deal with a myriad of situations. Teachers are dragged into many of these situations, expected to act as social worker, psychologist, friend and advisor. Sometimes unraveling who is responsible for the student and to whom the teacher should address their concerns is unclear. Nonetheless, it is understood and expected that teachers assume the responsibility for communicating with the 'parent'. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that we empower teachers with the skills and support to do so.

In considering the sensitive nature of this prescribed relationship, the potential for anxiety and emotional stress it may evoke, this study recommends that conflict management skills programs be established in teacher training, 'parenting', and school programs. For, as one teacher put it, "you can be taught

how to not have knee jerk reaction to what parents say. To say, I have to think about this and get back to you."

When it is often said that there is no handbook for being a parent, I ask why not? A simple handbook illustrating the different perceptions and expectations of parents and teachers may be made available to high school parents. Parents should be made aware of what is expected of them, how to communicate effectively with school personnel and especially teachers. Parents may be made to appreciate the importance of their involvement with the student in the high school years, that parents and teachers do not always experience the same behaviours or see the same academic capacities in the student, and most importantly, the challenges and limitations facing today's teachers. Parents and teachers may be helped to recognize to what extent their personal 'ghosts' affect their perceptions and expectations of the roles of parent and teacher and be provided suggestions on how better to navigate the relationship.

Figure four on page 77 presents a model that recognizes the multidimensionality of the nature of a parent/teacher partnership. It suggests five areas of focus to aid in the construction and sustainability of parent/teacher partnerships. These are: recognizing "ghosts in the classroom" and the home, understanding to what extent our past experiences affect our behaviours today; "knowing the same kid", recognizing that students may not be the same at home and at school and that parents and teachers sharing perceptions of the student contributes to their relationship; communication

and conflict management skills, making available and implementing effective communication and conflict resolution strategies; respect and appreciation, recognizing the value of, and empathizing with others; and lastly, clearly defined benefits and responsibilities, without both of which a partnership is unlikely to be sustainable for any length of time.

Parents need to know what powerful allies teachers can be. As one teacher pleaded, "parents, please pay attention to what I have to say! I spend five hours a day with your child and others his age." Parents did not all recognize the valuable ally, source of information and advice the teacher may be, especially at times when the student's family structure may have been fragile or particularly stressed.

Parents and teachers accept the interdependence of the roles of parent and teacher. They recognize the commonalities in their expectations of the functions and characteristics of these roles. They seek to engage in both informal and formal long-term relationships. Conflict in the relationship causes long-term pain, anxiety, frustration and anger. It also causes new 'ghosts' that will affect future generations. Institutional support is lacking but necessary for this relationship to be fostered, nourished and sustained. Teachers reported no system in place with which they operate to communicate with parents. Other than the perfunctory official parent/teacher interview, there was no organized institutional support to facilitate communications.

An environment where reflective practices in teaching and parenting are encouraged and nurtured must be forged. For the participants as well as the

researcher, this study provided an opportunity for reflecting on the construction of these roles. The process of telling the stories and the discussions that followed were enriching, as an educational experience unto themselves, and in demonstrating the potential benefits of less formal parent/teacher interviews. An environment where parents and teachers may reflect on the assumptions, perceptions and experiences of their roles is crucial for a partnership to be developed and sustained.

As in all business partnerships, common interests, benefits and skills must be identified and organized in a mutually agreed upon system. This system must be informed by the agendas of parents and teachers, two of the primary stakeholders in the family/school relationship. The very technological advances that were reported to complicate the lives of teachers and parents may find use in facilitating communication. Perhaps schools may create a network, where the school community can exchange services, skills and ideas, where parents and teachers can come together in mutual support, in cyberspace, if not in a physical capacity. We must strive to create opportunities for all stakeholders to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, and seek to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities.

As Max van Manen (1992) explained,

Parenting and teaching derive from the same fundamental experience of pedagogy: the human charge of protecting and teaching the young to live in this world and take responsibility for themselves, for others, and for the continuance and the welfare of the world (p. 6-7).

We the parents and teachers are the principle stakeholders in a home/school partnership, we, our children and our children's children reap the greatest reward from mutual support in this grandest of goals.

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NATURE OF HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Rhonda Kantor of the department of Education of Concordia University.

PURPOSE:
I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to explore the nature of the home-school relationship at the secondary school level.

PROCEDURES:
The research will be conducted through interview and the interview conversation will be recorded. The interview should last about one hour and will be conducted in person. I understand that fictitious initials will be used for myself, anyone I name, and that the names of schools will also be confidential.

RISKS:
I understand that there are no hidden motives or risks in this study.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:
I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
I understand that my participation in this study is confidential.
I understand that the data from this study may be published.
I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.
Name: (Please print)
....
Signature:
....
If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x 7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca.

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview

Please describe yourself and your teaching experience- I've been teaching for

32 years, most of it here and some of it up north. I graduated from McGill, now I

teach history and social studies, I used to teach shop. I have no kids of my own,

I've never been married, but I have nieces and nephews.

Can you describe an experience you've had with a parent in the past year?

An experience I've had with a parent in the last year? Where should I start?

Should I talk about the parent/teacher interview? The role has changed over

the last years. Some say it has gotten harder some easier. Teaching today is

very demanding so is parenting, especially with technology. The parent I

appreciate is the one who is aware of what their child is doing, if something is

up they don't mind getting involved. Tuning in somehow, I have parents whose

kids are doing exceptionally well who come by, who want to put a face to the

teacher and be seen by the teacher. Often I joke, what are you doing here? The

kid is happy with their self-esteem.

The kind of parents I most enjoy, regardless of their background, are the ones

who are straightforward, meat and potatoes. If something stinks, they say

something stinks, it can have a lot to do with the background, like financial or

ethnic, but not a hell of a lot. Parents across the board, like in the Cree,

education isn't as important as cultural background, they don't have a specific

agenda. They are comfortable being straight up, if I screw up I want to hear it, if they screw up they don't mind hearing it. Most parents are like that. You have your extremes in parents, busybodies, or what's that term going around? Helicopter parents.

I like that one, we have some of those. They're there, they're ready to be in the way, to cover for their kids and they shouldn't. I've seen kids that have been helicoptered now they have all sorts of trouble, they're twenty years old and unemployed. They have no one to blame, they try to blame the school, he wasn't given a chance in high school.

Is this a change in parenting- it's unintentional, they have energy and want to use it on their kid, by doing that they become this kind of parent.

Does the parent's educational background have anything to do with it? Sometimes, if you want to scare the hell of a teacher today, let them know that the parents are teachers. When that happens, I take note of it, it's not that important to me. Parents who have PhDs try to show off, they are not helping the kid when they show that they know more than the teacher. It doesn't help anyone, especially the kid.

Is this perception or reality? Teachers say the same thing, different teachers have the same experience, the parent is walking around saying look at me while Johnny is sitting in the corner. But there aren't many parents like that.

Is this new? I don't think so. I see consistent patterns throughout the years. The pressures on everyone have changed. Twenty years ago, how do you handle pressure? It used to be aids now It's different.

When I go back to the meat and potato parents, the ones I get along with, probably because I think I am that sort of person, how do they handle the pressures. If you were to compare twenty years ago to now, how do you start the conversation?

Hi, it's Dennis, Johnny's ok, we've had a problem. I don't make many of those calls because of my teaching style. If there's a problem, it's between you and I, and I decide if I take it higher to the parents or the office. You never threaten a kid with the psychologist or a therapist, there's no need for that.

Institutional help for parents and teachers who are not meat and potato. They handle things as soon as possible.

Great parents with an ADHD kid of some sort. First meeting with parents I told them they need help and don't let the help stop. The kind of kid who wants to help, trouble sitting down at 75 minute periods, they used to be 50 minutes. Kids can't sit that long.

Parents, there is never enough help for the parents. They were very frustrated. I caused problems for the principal by saying, get help for this kid. The parents went to the office right after the interview.

Is it part of the teacher's job to help parents get help for the kid? There's only so much we can do, basically we can refer. I haven't referred anyone but this one, and they grabbed the ball and ran with it. Great parents and I knew they would go for help. I told them great kid but needs help. Other parents who are not getting anywhere with the kid and they sort of accept the weakness the kid has. If you prod the parents, you're not going to get too much. It's not a case where

we have to force the help on the kid, like, get help or we'll have to call youth protection. It's not that serious so you just have to let things lie. We have a format where you fill out a referral, if you want you can talk to other teachers and have them fill it out, that leads to gang warfare. I don't do that, if four teachers are having trouble with a kid and I'm not, I'm not involved, similarly, I don't need four teachers for my case. Some teachers believe we all sent it him in and the administration should deal with, they dump it on the admin. There's a process, it'll get referred and it takes forever.

Who do you talk to?

I'll talk to anyone, I've had trouble and I've talked to the principal. I get directed if I need it. I have admin, so I know where to go.

Did teaching training provide you what you needed to talk to parents? I was probably made aware of it at McGill. They have to deal with 7 school boards with different and every school and every school board has different resources. They can make suggestions that you should get contact with the guidance counselor or whoever, but there may be another way in that board.

How about parent/teacher communication? Were you trained for this? Um, no. Maybe parent and teacher interviews but if we even discussed that it was short. For a rooky teacher in any school it is terrifying. It's been terrifying everywhere I've worked, Lachute, the Innuit.

Scared of what? Uncertainty, who's walking in the door and are they going to take a run at me? Last year in James Bay, I had 5 classes, about 150 kids, I didn't even know their names. That is a weakness I have. I spent the last month of the

semester getting ready for parent teacher interviews, because I knew, and I'm a veteran teacher. I identified students by their projects, they had their name on it and I could talk about the project.

Generally I find parents are not out to take a run at you unless there has been conflict with the kid. Conflict that got big and conflict that probably wasn't resolved in the kid's favor. Unfair things, or something like that. I saw with the rooky teachers, the nervousness. But the parents too, how are they getting their information? They're getting it through the students. Newsletters from the school don't cover very much. Can that help? No, no. Half of them don't get home and the remaining half don't get read. If I was a parent and I got a newsletter, I would only skim over it looking for what relates to my kid. Parents are individually minded and looking out for their kid, you see this in things like meetings for grad. That's natural, what parent is looking out for all 200 kids in the high school, outside of the school itself as directed. When it comes down to nuts and bolts, they are interested in, like, if their kid is weak in French, let's add more French.

Conflict between individual and group interest arises. I had to give in 900 marks this semester with the reform. With comments and love notes, what's the accuracy after the first dozen, and the parents are looking. How exact are they, the parents are exact. The reform puts incredible pressure on the teachers. Much more than pre reform. More marks with the reform. I don't even know their friggin' names yet. Parents are pretty good, they say hi I'm Johnny's

parents. Most parents come in and there is no conflict, not with me. It's pretty chatty.

What do parents expect of you? What do you expect of parents?

I will give you a quote, the teacher's job is to take an empty mind and open it. Not fill it. I think I do that.

How about if I have a Jehovah's witness child, do you have the right to open his mind? I will say this is what we are doing, if the parents say no there may be conflict. I had a religious kid who had problems with some of the movies we watched, so she wouldn't watch them, then if the subject came up I would cut her some slack. That's one of my tactics, I cut kids some slack. What I'm doing can be moved, but you don't have to know that. I don't like parents who make special requests because then you call me once a week. I can't do that. With 150 students and marks to put together. I will shy away from that unless there are special circumstances.

I'm not a teacher that will telephone.

This one kid, we had a serious flare up. I left class and took the student to the office.it was bad. I called the parents and I wasn't even mad at the kid. I said, we had a flare up and we really have to keep working on this kid.

It's really about avoiding the blame.

Blame is so cheap. Really it is, the last person to blame usually is the kid. I'll often blame myself because it could have worked if I had gone another way. But I'm a veteran teacher, right? Not a rookie.

You would say your best practices are...

being clear with my intentions and what I expect, not blaming and being

flexible.

Yup, when I say being clear that means being flexible. Where I am going to

move my line. I told my sec 5s I know teachers who have two pages of rules, I

told the teacher these are kids who don't even read the newspaper. I told my

sec fives, I have one rule, if you act like sec fives I'll treat you like sec fives. And

they were fine with it. Kids would come up with late projects and I would just

look at them.

How about your size? Sometimes it makes a difference but I remember my high

school years the meanest teacher was this short little man who would clear the

halls when he went by. I used to think it was my strategies that worked but I

guess when a student is staring at my chest it makes a difference, it helps. I'm

6'3". When kids graduate they tell me that they were scared of me, more at the

elementary level. My size had a lot to do with the sec ones.

It's character. We used to argue over teachers wearing jeans. I used to say it's

who's wearing the jeans, it's the same with size.

How about the responsibility of the parents?

What I find very sad today is the way everything has gone electronic. Kids today

figure that no matter what they do they can hit the restart button and it'll be

okay. Now parents have to deal with that and parents are the ones who let their

kids sit in front of the screen all day. I understand it.

But parents who take the kids out to ski don't have kids who have to reset the

start button. My suggestion to parents is, not to helicopter. Be there for your

kids but don't hover. Let the kid fall down and cry, then pick him up. If you bail him out all the time, parents come in and attack to defend the kid. They ended up with big problems. The parents would blame, it was a blame game. We don't have time.

The ideal parent? Find out what your kid is doing, what he likes and dislikes in school and find out how serious it is. If he likes it too much that's not good, too little that's not good either. Sometimes I want to take a run at the parents. I had a girl who talked too much, other teachers were complaining to the parents. They'd been through the mill. But I didn't. I said, she must be a handful at home. You saw the tension leaving their bodies. It was such a positive thing. You could see that they would not get what they got from the others. I became the teacher they could talk to for years. I didn't solve any problems, you can't solve all the problems, but I knew their kid, they saw that. I turned it into a little stab of humour.

I heard one parent tell me that I had once told her in response to her telling me that her kid was in high school now and I can take off the apron and I told her to keep the apron on. This kid was high maintenance, great kid but easily strayed the kind of kid that you have to go over once in a while and verbally or physically you had to punch him. Once in a while, are you doing your homework?

Do you hate me?

The mother thought she could let him go.

Are you taught how to deal with parents?

Taught? No, it's something you just pick up.

How about rookie teachers?

We had a lot of rookie teachers. I had one who came to see me saying that I didn't have the problems he had. He was tight, anal.

I took him on a trip with the kids and the kids saw him differently and it was great.

I went to Lachute – as a twenty-year veteran, and I was scared. The principal there told us to find a mentor. I already had someone, a senior in social studies. The danger with that is, there are some teachers I would not like to mentor. Their interest for going into the field is not the same as mine. They are paycheck seekers.

One of them I did, I talked to him. One of the things that helped him was that he was having trouble with the kid I took down to the office. I don't believe in ganging up on a student. I hate those. We know he has problems so let's sit around the table and dump on him. This is not professional, I don't wear my professional t shirt often. I just do my job the best I can. I don't use the word professional, what is that? A bunch of the professionals sitting around saying Johnny is a piece of crap. Where are we going with that?

What does this have to do with professionalism?

How much time do we have?

A union is in some ways a good thing but in the end it defends the incompetent teachers. A lot of energy, union energy spent getting the incompetent teachers back in the classroom.

In Alberta, they will try to get rid of the teacher. In Quebec, they don't. they'll try to hide the teacher, get them easier workloads, they'll transfer.

When parents see a teacher who is lousy they take it out on other teachers. Not personally though, my approach helps me avoid this.

When people think about a school they think about the bad teachers and that affects the reputation of the school and all the good teachers. And there aren't that many bad ones. If I came across a new bad teacher I would say your career in truck driving is still available. The principals don't do that, they don't have the time.

McGill does not produce teachers, they produce people who can become teachers. You come out of McGill you are not a teacher, you have a piece of paper that says you have taken a teaching course. They get into the saddle, they get over the nervousness and then you see if they have what it takes to be a teacher. The best administrators can see.

I don't think McGill thinks they turn out teachers. They hope all the skills are covered.

Do you have additional support or training?

Imagine out of fifteen teachers there is one rookie. There is nothing for the rookie. The admin would say have the principal do this... they have no time. Ideally, principal takes young teacher out for lunch... there is a probation period for new teachers. I've seen teachers who are lucky to get the signature. Teachers don't turn bad, they were bad and not picked up.

The other thing with a school like ours is that we keep changing principals. If a

rooky gets in with a new principal he stays in. the principal is new and busy.

This principal has one year to pick out the incompetent teachers.

I can name the incompetent teachers who get through while we have a one-year

wonder. If a parent comes in to speak to the principal it takes up a tenth of their

day.

When I played staff assistant I tried to end things as quickly as possible.

What can the school do to improve things? They've tried all different things.

I'd like to see more professionalism because the bad teachers, once they start

their third year they're in, until they fondle the director general's daughter.

They have rights. There were some bad teachers this year and the principal

tried to address some things with them and the teachers filed a grievance

against the principal for harassment. First year teachers, straight out of McGill.

It's a labour thing. Unprofessional.

When I went away and came back I had to be evaluated.

The only way things would get straightened out is if there's a public outcry.

Nothing has changed.

Sometimes at parent-teacher interviews I'm vulnerable. I get parents come in to

see me, generally it's good, it's friendly it's not only the 90 percenters. They

come and see me after they've seen other teachers, and they're pretty rough on

the other teachers. I agree with them but as a pro I don't side with them. The

parents are pretty frustrated. A kid after one term doesn't know how the

teacher got the term mark and you ask the teacher and they blame the kid for

not working hard and it's wait, wait, wait. There's something missing there. What's the parent to do? So the level of frustration in the parent, and the kid is high. I've had parents show up at my room saying that their kid just threw up in the parking lot because the kid is so nervous that they're going to go in and see these weak teachers and the kid is so confused because he or she doesn't know how the mark was obtained, and the parents are leaning on the kid, it's unclear, it's vague, everybody's confused.

How do you feel about the student being present?

Feeling on this is unclear. Some teachers don't like the kid there. Some do. I do if the kid is weak. I can say, hey are you working? He may get away with it with his parents but with me there he can't. Sometimes the chemistry between me and a kid is not there and then it can be uncomfortable. We accept each other, we are at a level of politeness but that's it.

The parent can't be offended if the teacher doesn't want it, or read too much into it. It's up to the teacher.

Do you have the right not to talk to a parent?

It can't get rude. I've had tough parents as a principal, but not as a teacher. Maybe it has to do with my size, but I think it has more to do with character. It depends how you run it. Tone it down or leave.

I get parents who come in. you can tell it's confrontation time. I don't give you a confrontation until you earn it.

Are parents and teachers equals?

In the classroom no, in the home it's them. We have the same target. To get this kid through, or succeed, depends on words. I don't compare because it's apples and oranges, they're different. I compare myself with teachers.

You see it in their DNA, their eyes, you see where the kid comes from. Can I change anything in a ten minute interview. No. If they swear a lot, you see where it comes from. At the dinner table the words come out. I had a cute little girl just start swearing.

...I crapped over the reform, but that's good.

The parents are complaining. The marks are too vague, I can't understand...anyway, I don't go for the gym thing, it's like Walmart. I like it in the classrooms, if it isn't a total waste of time. Maybe there the teachers feel protected, like if a parent freaks out.

We're supposed to be vague in the marks and that's frustrating for the parents. I'm doing citizenship, studying Egypt, how do I get a mark. They don't fit. We're being forced to fit into bureaucracy. The kids too, they don't have many rights that they care about. We check lockers because it's in school.

When you tell parents their kid needs help, it's tough because it's like telling them they've dropped the ball. They now feel they are not good enough and thought they were up to now. The kid is now fourteen or fifteen years old and they've just been told they can't do it all.

What kind of feedback do you get from parents? I get lots of feedback from parents. I respect it from a good solid parent, it's one of the ultimate compliments, that my kid likes my course. It's better still if it comes from the

kid, but ultimately where did it come from anywhere? The kid. With me it's mostly compliments, but don't helicopter, it's only as good as the parent it's coming from.

You talk to a parent and say two thousand words in ten minutes but a few months later one thing comes back. You can be decorating your statement and the decoration comes back, usually at the next interview. And it's not the whole concept or thought it could be an adjective that was may have been too strong. I've learnt that. I like to talk so it's easy for me to clear the air. Thirty years has taught be to be careful. If a parent repeats a word I'll change it. Parents make mistakes with me too. Remember, teachers don't like p/t interviews after a long day.

I can see parents and teachers are against each other. I don't feel that, I say hi to parents in the parking lot. It' s better in a small community, I see the parents years after the kid has graduated. How's Johnny doing now? The long term relationship with the family is great.

How do you get parents to help without driving you insane? You don't want parents who will make you nuts. When it's time to discipline I don't care who is around. I was out on a field trip and I was giving the kids shit when one parents said they weren't all that bad. I said, my lightning doesn't strike them all. She left. She didn't have to say anything. It didn't bother me, I was in charge. It was an active parent but nothing came of it. She's a bit of a helicopter parent. I asked Mary for a list of the power parents, she knew, the parents that would just get things done, no problems.

Sometimes people think it's a good idea for parents and teachers to evaluate each other, but no. It would just be a tool to take shots at each other, the negative is uncontrollable.

Parents and teachers want to do the same thing, in spite of each other. There are weak parents, the worst are the weak parents who think they are good. Do stupid people know it?

It's easier for a bad teacher to stand out than a bad parent. We're in the limelight, in front of your kid for hours. It's easy for the bad teacher to stand out.

What do parents do with a bad teacher, especially in a small school? The principal is at the core of it.

I had a student who was making noises in class. When I approached him, he said the noises were whale farts. I told the parents the story at parent/teacher interviews. These parents came in with serious faces because I wrote needs work as a comment on the report card, but when they saw that I was not overly concerned, liked the kid, I appreciated his sense of humour they were okay.

Sample Journal Notes

Dennis seemed at ease. He showed up a bit early and we're meeting in my

kitchen over coffee. It's Saturday morning. My sons took off as soon as they saw

him, perhaps because they were shy, most likely because of his imposing

stature.

Comfortable being recorded, worried about swearing or naming people I might

know confident, sarcastic

Never married, no kids/nieces and nephews, admin, thirty-two years

experience (twenty-seven off and on at one school), rural/north, teacher

training McGill

"It's the teacher's job to take a closed mind and open it"

electronic-restart button

flexibility, humour, discipline, proving marks

Mentorship-principal

Parents are touchy, respect, individualistic

Parents as teachers, showing off what they know

Students: Jr vs me

Dennis elaborated on how having parents in the classroom was a problem. He

said was often approached by parents to volunteer in the classroom and

introduce their interests. "but how do you tell one parent their interests have

value and another, they don't". He discussed the problems of involving parents at school.

The reform-teachers weren't included in planning, forced to comply, given huge books at a meeting with all the rules...

APPENDIX D

Sample Interview Protocol

Please describe an experience you've had with a parent/teacher in the last year.

Have you ever had a good/bad experience with a parent/teacher?

How do you communicate with parents/teachers? What part does the school play?

What kind of feedback do you get from parents/teachers?

Are you taught to deal with parents/teachers?

Are parents and teachers equals?

What do parents/teachers expect of you? What do you expect of

parents/teachers? What specific responsibilities?

Where a participant mentioned a specific characteristic of either the parent or

teacher, I added:

How does the parent's/teacher's (education, professionalism, ethnicity,

profession, sense of humour...) have to do with your relationship?