PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION.

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Abbreviations

CRE   Commission for Racial Equality

DES   Department of Education and Science (recently renamed DFE)

DFE   Department for Education

EDP   Education Development Plan

ERA   Education Reform Act 1988

HCRE   Hackney Council for Racial Equality

HEP   Hackney Education Partnership

HMI   Her Majesty's Inspectorate

HSA   Home School Association

HTA   Hackney Teachers' Association (local branch of NUT)

ILEA   Inner London Education Authority

ILTA   Inner London Teacher's Association (local branch of NUT)

LBH   London Borough of Hackney

LEA   Local Education Authority

LMS   Local Management of Schools

NALGO   National Association of Local Government Officers

NATFE   National Association of Teachers in Further Education

NUPE   National Union of Public Employees

NUT   National Union of Teachers

PA   Parents' Association

PLR   Primary Language Record, later changed to Primary Learning Record

RSA   Royal Society of Arts

SATs   Standard Assessment Tasks

SHES   Save Hackney's Education Services

SMT   Senior Management Team

SUMMARY

This thesis is a qualitative study of the power relations structuring interactions between parents and teachers in one inner London borough. The first three chapters consider the theories and practice of participation and the extent of its realisation in education. Individual parental involvement is seen as the accepted way for parents to intervene in their child's education; this tendency is heightened by the current New Right emphasis on the 'parent-as-consumer'. Such individual parental incursions can only have a limited effect upon the imbalance of power that defines relationships between teachers and working class parents. However opportunities for collective parental participation are found to be restricted.

Chapters five to nine contain case studies of two primary schools, a home-school co-ordinators' project and a parents' centre. The ethnographic chapters use fieldwork data, gathered mainly through semi-structured interviews to illustrate the effects of social class, ethnicity and gender; firstly, on individual teacher-parent-officer relations, and secondly, on allowing access to school and LEA decision-making fora. These chapters illustrate the arguments of the earlier theoretical chapters, by showing how teachers as individuals and schools as institutions allow particular types of individual parental involvement whilst limiting opportunities for collective parental participation.

The concluding chapter applies these findings to the theoretical arguments outlined in chapters one to three. It argues that allowing parents a role as participant would profoundly alter their relationship with the education system. Such a role - resulting in increased lay participation in a welfare state institution - is seen as an integral part of citizenship in a fully participative democracy.

CHAPTER ONE

PARENTS, POWER & PARTICIPATION:
SOME THEMES

Introduction

This thesis examines the relationships between two distinct social groups, parents and teachers, and their location in two distinct settings, home and school. The fieldwork was conducted in the London Borough of Hackney, and comprises case studies of two primary schools, and two local authority initiatives; namely, the employment of three home-school co-ordinators, and the establishment of a Parents' Centre.

In studying these parent-teacher relationships, this thesis draws on a range of theories to analyse the power relations structuring parent-teacher interaction. Following Wright-Mills, this study explores "private troubles", and their articulation with "public issues", (ie broader social forces), thereby aiming to "open for inquiry the causal connections between (specific) milieux and social structures," (Wright-Mills 1959, p.144, 145). This study argues that parent-teacher relationships are conducted within a rigid framework, shaped by the imbalance in power between the two parties [1]. Obviously the exact nature of the relationship is influenced by the social positioning of the individuals concerned. For example, research suggests that some middle class parents can take the initiative concerning their child's schooling more frequently and effectively than working class parents (CACE 1967; Cyster & Clift 1980; Lareau 1989). Chapters 5 to 9 use fieldwork data to illustrate some effects of the dimensions of social class, ethnicity and gender in shaping individual relationships, and allowing access to school and LEA decision-making fora.

This introductory chapter, however, addresses the dominance of individual relationships as the mode for parental. access to the state education system, and seeks to explain why collective incursions by parents are so uncommon. Firstly, it examines several theories of the state to establish whether power-shifts between dominant and

subordinate groups are considered theoretically possible. Secondly, theories of participation are employed to illuminate the processes by which such a power-shift could be realised. The concluding section looks at developments within community education, (including definitions of the term 'community') as many advocates of this approach have argued for re-distribution of power within the education system, away from the professionals and towards other lay actors.

The nature of the state education system

This section initially adopts a Gramscian perspective on the state, as Gramsci's writings suggest that incursions by subordinate groups into sites of power are theoretically possible. His work emphasises the way in which different social groups endeavour to retain and enhance their power in particular spheres; a process inevitably leading to struggle and conflict (Hall 1989 p.168).

Gramsci divided mature capitalist societies into various, interactive sources of power: the economic structure, and political and civil society (Simon 1977 p.84). By contrast, a classical Marxist formulation sees the economic base as exerting an ultimately binding influence over the political and cultural arenas of society. Gramsci defined civil society as a range of institutions and organisations, such as the churches, schools, political parties, trade unions, the family, and voluntary groups. Participation in all these arenas is by consent. In contrast, the institutions of political society, such as the forces of law and order, are marked by coercion. It is through the agencies of civil society that the hegemony of the dominant social group is exercised. Hegemony is the process by which one group exercises control over other groups by gaining their active consent. In this too, Gramsci's work contrasts with that of determinist Marxists, such as those of the economic or cultural reproductive schools (Giroux 1983) [2]. Althusser, for instance, sees subordinate social groups as passively receptive to the preachings of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) [3] which demand acceptance of the existing social order (Althusser 1972). Gramsci however eschews this apparently smooth process by which the ruling class's ideology is inculcated.

Instead he views civil society as composed of many sites of struggle at different levels. He allows, therefore, for the possibility of collective resistance from the subordinate group which might lead to negotiation and concession by the ruling faction (Buci-Glucksmann 1980). This is a broad view of politics, surpassing a narrow party political definition, and instead seeing multiple sites for the operation of power and subsequent challenges to that operation (Hall 1989 p.168). Gramsci argues that the outcome of such struggles is open-ended, which allows him to forsee the possibility of the working class developing its own hegemony, with which to supplant that of the ruling group. This might occur in a limited fashion, perhaps temporarily in one locality. It is this possibility of resistance by individuals and groups which renders partial the reproductive outcomes seen as inevitable by such theorists as Althusser, Bowles & Gintis and Bourdieu (Althusser 1972; Bowles & Gintis 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Dale 1989; Giroux 1983).

Thus the state is not presented as a monolith, but as composed of political and civil society. Each institution within these two spheres has some autonomy which also allows for the possiblity of oppositional action within institutions. Political theorists have used the concept of *relative autonomy* to describe this 'space' (Castells 1977). Green (1990) argues that national factors affect its extent and nature. He suggests that the emphasis on individualism, decentralization and the autonomy of different parts of our education system derive from the legacy of the liberal market and the doctrine of minimal government that has been so fundamental to the formation of the British state. He contrasts this with the more centralized, collective nature of the French education system. 'Relative autonomy' has also been used to study micro-level developments. Troyna & Williams say of their research into the formulation of local authority anti-racist policies,

> "[The] complex relationship between broad state forces and concerns and the specifity of local responses to these issues is what we mean when we use the terms, relative autonomy and sites of struggle. While we recognise the primacy of the state, it is in the arena (or 'space') opened up by this relative independence of the local education system that the competing ideologies of different groups arise and are resolved, either partially or wholly," (1986 p.7).

Giroux (1983) contends that theorists do not closely examine how this 'space'. Nor do they explain how dominant groups apply to the subordinate groups for their active consent to the status quo, and how such consent can be won or withdrawn.

> "Theories of the state focus primarily on macro and structural issues, resulting in a mode of analysis that points to contradictions and struggle, but says little about how human agency works through such conflicts at the level of everyday life and concrete school relations....The driving force of culture is contained not only in how it functions to dominate subordinate groups, but also in the way in which oppressed groups draw from their own cultural capital and set of experiences to develop an oppositional logic," (1983 p.281-2).

Some recent theorists take these arguments further. Watson (1990), whilst agreeing that theories of the state have tended to ignore the workforce, the 'human agency', of various state institutions, takes issue with the theme of the state acting in a contradictory fashion. This, she claims, suggests the continued existence of a perception of the state as an essentially unified body, "that is, the discourse of contradiction implies a unity of state form which then surprises us when it appears to act in unexpected ways," (Watson 1990b p.237). Furthermore, it is this very notion of a "more or less coherent network of institutions or apparatuses" which lends theories of 'the state' their depersonalized character (1990a p.8). Instead, she portrays 'the state' as "erratic and disconnected" (1990b p.237).

> "There are many different varieties of the state, spatially and historically. Each of them has its own combination of institutions, apparatuses and arenas which have their own histories, contradictions, relations and connections, internally and externally," (Watson 1990a p.7; see also Allen 1990; Ben-Tovim & Gabriel 1982; Ben-Tovim et al 1986 [4]).

Incursions by interest groups will not, therefore, automatically fall victim to monolithic state power. Watson, writing about the effect of feminism on public sector institutions comments,

> "The ability of feminists to influence the political agenda and to achieve reforms is inevitably a result of specific political and economic relations, of the composition of bureaucratic and political players, of localized powers and resistance, and of the

strengths of 'feminisims' within and outside the political structure,"
(1990a p.19).

'Feminists', in this quotation, could be replaced by other
'oppositional' or relatively powerless groups, such as 'anti-racists',
'progressive educators' or local parental pressure groups. In addition
to the forces Watson identifies, there are two other dimensions
affecting the successful incursion of currently subordinate groups
into the domains of powerful groups. Firstly, just as 'the state' is
diverse, subordinate groups rarely form a totally unified, homogeneous
body (Yeatman 1990). Parents are an obvious example; all have school-
age children, but differences may stem from variations in age, gender,
social class, ethnicity, religion, and so on. This diversity can be
heightened once the group gets some foothold into state institutions,
as Watson (1990) and Yeatman (1990) show in their studies of feminist
bureaucrats in Australia. Such divisions are also evident in the
different positions held by reformist and radical community educators
(see below). Secondly, powerful groups can reformulate the demands of
others, thereby limiting, rationing, and restraining apparently
radical aims (Watson 1990a).

Therefore, these macro-level theories do suggest the possibility
of concessions being granted by 'the state' to those who previously
had little power or influence. However, elements that might be harmful
to powerful established interests are vulnerable to reformulation or
marginalization. Community education illustrates this tendency, and is
explored in more detail below [5]. Next, however, this chapter
examines theories of citizen participation, and the processes by which
re-distribution of power can theoretically occur.

Power and participation

This section examines several theories concerning power relations
between institutions and government and a wider constituency.
Commentators differ on the opportunities available for those who are
not formally power-holders to participate in the political process.
Pluralist theories assert that the political system consists of
diverse interest groupings competing openly for access to power.

Pluralists would therefore see many opportunities for citizen participation. Dahl, studying American local politics concluded that,

> "The independence, penetrability and heterogeneity of the various segments of the political stratum all but guarantee that any dissatisfied group will find spokesmen in the political stratum," (1961 p.93).

However Bennington (1977), writing about the 1970's Community Development Projects described 'flaws in the pluralist heaven' (Schattschneider 1960), noting that community participation in decision-making is often restricted by power holders who allow it to operate only in directions deemed acceptable (also McAuslan 1980; Ward 1976; Lukes 1974). McAuslan, writing about planning law, identifies the *ideology of public interest*. This allows administrators the apparent right to define that interest as well as the necessary powers to act to fulfill it (McAuslan 1980 p.2-5). Lukes, in a critique of pluralism, comments that,

> "The diversity and openess that Dahl sees may be highly misleading if power is being exercised within the system to limit decision-making to acceptable issues," (1974 p.36-7).

Bacharach & Baratz develop this point by highlighting the processes by which an agenda is formed. They quote Schattschneider (1960);

> "All forms of political organisation have a bias in favour of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others, because organisation is a mobilisation of bias. Some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out," (Bacharach & Baratz 1970 p.8).

Newton's (1976) study of decision-making in Birmingham provides an example of this point. He idenitified a 'limited or partial' pluralism; that is, that for some pressure groups the system does operate in a broadly pluralist manner. These groups have effective links with decision-makers, their opinions are heard and influence policy. The character of 'successful' groups varied depending on the issue involved, but were often professional and business associations (also Eade 1989). Newton comments,

> "Some interests are difficult to aggregate while others are represented by organisations which, because of the social and

economic position of their membership, have a weaker set of political weapons than opposing groups - consumers as against producers, tenants as against landlords, pedestrians as against motorists," (1976 p.227).

Lukes, however, believes that the picture is still incomplete. He argues that the most subtle and insidious form of power is non-decision making. This extends beyond the form that Bacharach & Baratz describe, which is the exclusion by power holders of various issues from the agenda against the wishes of others. Instead Lukes argues that issues may be excluded by the powerful, without provoking dissent from other groups, even though raising those issues on a public agenda might prove to be in the latter's interests. He continues by noting,

"The many ways in which potential issues are kept out of politics, whether through the operation of social forces and institutional practices or through individuals' decisions," (1974 p.24).

The commentators mentioned above studied instances of participation before the emergence of the New Right as a dominant force. Woods (1988) argues that "participation is not necessarily associated with the achievement of any particular social or moral purpose" (Woods 1988 p.325; Richardson 1983). In contrast, this section argues that different models of participation can make particular kinds of outcomes more likely. This can be illustrated by examining the particular form of participation encouraged by social democracy, and contrasting it with two other variations from the right and the left respectively.

Social democracy and participation

The ideology of citizen participation in a social democratic society assumes the desirability of a fully participative democracy. Advocates argue that the classic vehicle for achieving such a society - the electoral process - is too blunt a tool as it renders citizens passive between elections, concentrating power exclusively within the governing elite (Carr 1991). Only through the process of participation itself can the 'informed consent' of those governed be achieved (Pateman 1970; Miliband 1984; Ward 1976). Such involvement in the

management of state institutions would allow citizens to develop a sense of 'ownership' over organisations previously perceived as alienating and/or patronising (Dale 1989; Seddon et al 1990).

However there exists a well-developed critique of the initiatives in participation offered by the social democratic state. This commentary addresses two main issues. Firstly, that attempts to increase participation may prove illusory in substance. Secondly, that participatory initiatives are designed to legitimate the more general action of the institution concerned. Therefore their effect is to increase opportunities for individual rather than collective participation.

The first assertion is well-supported by empirical research. Several typologies exist which show differing amounts of citizen power in various circumstances, all subsumed under the label of participation. For instance, Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation has eight 'rungs'. At the bottom are *manipulation* and *therapy*, which masquerade as opportunities for citizen participation but would be more accurately described as opportunities for the powerholders to 'educate' or even 'cure' those involved. The ladder progresses through stages of involvement which allow participants to voice their opinions but retain the power holders' decision-making autonomy. Transference of power occurs at the top two rungs only, *delegated power* and *citizen control* (Harlow & Rawlings 1984 p.440). Similarly, Gibson's study of black community groups and their relationships with local authority officers defines the majority of their interactions as fitting his *advisory* or even *illusionary* models of participation (Gibson 1987). Even when exercises in increasing community participation are underway, not all citizens can respond to the initiative (Harlow & Rawlings 1984). Newton's study of voluntary groups in Birmingham (1976) showed that groups with the least radical aims were most able to establish fruitful relationships with officers. Class, ethnicity and gender may all be important factors in determining willingness to participate. Although data in this area is sketchy there is some evidence that white middle class people remain most likely to take up voluntary positions in local groups (Thomas 1986 p.46).

Thus we begin to get a sense of the gap between the reality and

the rhetoric of citizen participation. This obfuscation can result in the same language being used for initiatives with widely differing aims. Beattie quotes Pennock's (1979) four reasons for introducing participatory democracy: it could serve to *legitimise* institutional or governmental activity, to make it more *responsive* to its clients or electorate, to aid the *personal development* of individuals who become more closely involved in matters affecting their lives, or to *overcome the alienation* of groups supposedly served by that institution (Beattie 1985 p.5). The first two of Pennock's reasons - responsiveness and legitimacy - can be fulfilled without transferring power. Beattie observes that they are conservative in character, their main aim being to ensure the smooth running of the institution. Aims three and four - 'personal development' and 'overcoming alienation' - are concerned with minimising the powerlessness felt by those formerly excluded from the system (Beattie 1985). Both these aims, but especially the last, require more fundamental changes in structures and attitudes, which, as the typologies show, are attained less frequently.

Participation and the New Right.

The effect of change in the dominant political ideology since the 1970s cannot be underestimated. The rise of the New Right has severely disrupted social democratic principles, and radically re-defined the concept of participation. The New Right adheres to economic neo-liberalism, advocating an enterprise culture in which the market operates free from state constrictions. There has been a calculated move away from collective state provision towards an individual client orientation throughout state welfare policy since 1979 (Adler et al 1989). Citizens are assigned the role of individual consumer and have access to power through the operation of consumer choice (Ranson 1986). The pre-eminence of the individual affects the possible forms of citizen participation. The marginalisation of collective activity pre-empts potential alliances between individuals with similar interests (John 1990). Additionally, the consumer's power comes from her ability to withdraw her 'custom' from an organisation, rather than to participate in its running. Any changes in the institution

resulting from an aggregate of individual choices are viewed as the supposedly neutral effect of market forces (Ranson 1988; Johnathan 1990). With relation to education, many commentators assert that the apparent increases in power open to individual parents appear tokenistic, or of use only to a minority (Simon 1988; Whitty & Menter 1989; Jonathan 1989, 1990). Yet as Harland notes, the significance of introducing apparently participative processes, such as increased parental choice, lies not just in their outcome, but in the very act of introducing them.

> "The state has apparently made an honest attempt to accommodate the views of those concerned... having done so its policies and its right to enforce them are rescued from legitimation deficit," (Harland 1988 p.98, original emphasis).

Despite the many flaws in implementation, social democratic forms of collective participation offer the *possibility* of enhanced control of state institutions. New Right concepts of participation offer individuals the possibility of 'exiting' from, but not participating in the management of public sector institutions (Bash & Coulby 1989). To use Hirschmann's terms, parents-as-consumers are offered 'exit' but not 'voice' (Hirschmann 1970; Ball 1987; also Flew 1987; Locke 1974). Yet whilst 'exit' may be a more straightforward option than 'voice', (the results of exercising the latter being difficult to predict), Hirschmann also argued that 'voice' is more effective in promoting changes in organisational performance (Westoby 1989 p.71) [6].

Participation through empowerment?

The 1980s also witnessed the growth in popularity of a competing ideology of participation. Spurred on by the rise of Labour Left authorities, the term *empowerment* became common currency amongst left-wing educationists and local authorities. Education is seen as a potentially empowering force for children and adults as children become autonomous critical learners (Freire 1985), and parents take firmer control of elements that affect their lives. However, definitions of the term 'empowerment' vary. The following are two recent examples.

"The basis for decision-making [in educational institutions]
should not of course, be merely the will of elites or of a
majority. Decisions should be made on the basis of a demonstrated
and demonstrable relationship to empowerment directed towards
survival within the status quo as well as alternative economic
and social relationships," (Catterall & John 1990 p.74).

"Empowerment means people taking greater control over their own
lives collectively and individually, which often entails them
gaining a greater understanding of issues that shape their lives.
For example a person may, through an educational activity be more
skilled and confident in gaining employment or improving their
job prospects; as a result of their educational experiences,
people may become more active and effective citizens through
their involvement in local pressure groups and organisations
which represent community interests; by becoming more effective
and efficient in one area of their lives (eg home repairs or car
maintenance), people may be more able to devote their energies to
other chosen activities and interests. Such activities should
empower people in order that the quality of their lives improves
collectively and individually," (Coventry LEA 1990 para 4.4.3).

What can be deduced from these quotations linking education and
empowerment? Can a concept covering inclusion in school decision-
making *and* expertise in car maintenance have any solid theoretical
basis? Certainly, it does not appear as well-developed theoretically
as New Right concepts of participation and is often used loosely
(Leicester 1989; Croft & Beresford 1992). Indeed Conservative
politicians now also refer to 'empowerment' (Major 1992). Without a
precise definition of the aims and methods involved in the process of
empowerment in a particular context, it seems that, as the quotation
from Coventry LEA suggests, radical rhetoric may easily collapse into
liberal implementation.

To explore the concept further it may be useful to identify
levels of empowerment. The Coventry quotation seemingly focuses on
enabling individuals. Despite its references to collectives, it
emphasises giving individuals skills to create areas of greater
freedom and control in their lives. However, because these effects
are limited to individuals, a process of enabling does not affect the
structural constraints controlling people's lives, a point noted by
John.

"If there is one criticism I have of the concept of adult
education it is that...it has to do with enabling people to do

things on an individual basis, that is creative and productive and minimises stress...as distinct from being a project that is about empowering people as groups and collectivities within the communities in the context in which they operate, and by context I mean as black people, or women or residents of an estate," (John 1990 p.139).

Empowerment (as opposed to enabling) would therefore be a precursor of collective citizen participation; a process of setting in motion actions and attitudes that lead to groups of people, generally considered to have little access to state decision-making processes, acting collectively to change the conditions shaping their lives, and *in addition* improving their quality of life within those boundaries.

In theory, therefore, parental participation in their children's education could be empowering for parents. Having a 'voice' would allow them control over a welfare state institution, perceived as crucially important to future life chances, that has traditionally been largely closed to lay intervention (CCCS 1981; Ranson 1990). A policy aimed at empowerment would concentrate on developing a participatory ethos within schools so that parents and members of the community shared decision-making powers with educational professionals.

A note on language - The concept of 'condensation symbols'
As this section has implied, participation rhetoric is characterised by vagueness and generalities as the term is applied to proposals with varying aims. 'Participation', 'partnership', and 'empowerment' all have positive connotations. Like 'participation', 'partnership' is a diffuse concept. It implies a broad spectrum of ideas embracing equality, consensus, harmony and joint endeavour. 'Empowerment' implies redistributing control and influence in favour of the disadvantaged and deprived; that this may negatively affect other groups is less frequently considered. Edelman (1964) defines such terms as *'condensation symbols'*. They 'condense' specific emotions into a particular word or phrase, so that its usage provokes those emotions. However the exact meaning of these condensation symbols is not clearly defined. Indeed they are often kept vague to attract maximum support. Over time, the words gain assumed meanings which are

rarely critically scrutinised. Thus their usage can obscure more than it illuminates. The next section focuses on concepts of 'community' and 'community education', terms which offer further examples of the phenomenon of 'condensation symbols'.

Theorising 'the community'.

Practitioners and theorists involved in community approaches to education have long argued that benefits accrue from closer home-school relations (Watts 1977; Carspecken 1990; Shipton & Bailey 1989). Some influential factors shaping developments in parental participation in community schools are discussed below. However, first it is necessary to consider what is meant by the concept of 'community'.

Used as a condensation symbol, the connotations of 'community' are always positive. Consequently it is often employed to add a warm and humane gloss to other concepts. 'Community care' is a prime example, giving an impression of a level of care unobtainable from impersonal bureaucracies and institutions. The term's positive associations derive from Tonnies' influential work. He distingushed two ways of ordering society — *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Geschellschaft* (association). The former refers to typical (or stereotypical) rural lifestyles, centred around agriculture and the home. Shared beliefs, continuity and collaboration pervade all areas of life. In contrast, association is linked with city life, underpinned by trade and characterised by heterogeneity and a corresponding alienation (Tonnies 1955; Bash et al 1985; Knox 1982). Tonnies' theories must be seen in their historical context, written when the fast-moving pace of urbanisation alarmed many commentators (Williams 1977). Similar ideas are discernible in the writings of Wirth. His empirical work described how in an urban setting, peoples' primary relationships with their family and close friends were weakened by the demands of city life. The fragmentation and lack of connection inherent in the specialized environments of the city (school, home, work etc) could leave people unsupported and unrestrained. Rational institutions, such as the social services or

the police, attempt to substitute for the loss of close-knit social groupings. However, Wirth doubts the ability of such institutions to replace a communal order formerly founded on consensus, believing instead that anomie would result (Wirth 1964; Knox 1982).

Wirth's conclusions were questioned by some commentators, including Gans (1977) who highlighted several moderating factors. He claimed firstly that Wirth described a relatively small inner city area and not the larger reaches of surburbia. Secondly, he suggested that many inner city residents were relatively permanent members of 'urban villages', which contained cohesive social networks based on shared ethnicity and social class (Gans 1977; Young & Wilmott 1957).

However, during the post-war period many traditional working class communities in Britain have fragmented. An area with a long-established, white working-class population like London's Bethnal Green (the setting for Young & Wilmott's work and bordering Hackney) has been altered by various developments. Firstly, centrally-determined policies have encouraged many former East End residents to move out to the surrounding 'new towns' (Frankenberg 1988). Secondly, the area, although with a long history of attracting migrant groups, has become more visibly heterogeneous as a result of immigration, notably from Bangladesh and Somalia. A section of the white population has an equally long tradition of racial prejudice and exclusionism (Husbands 1983). Thirdly, general population drift out of the city centres encouraged the development of a 'suburban' lifestyle, which affected both rural and urban residents to some degree. Knox calls this 'community transformed', and quotes Mumford (1940) who describes suburban living as 'a collective attempt to lead a private life' (Knox 1982 p.71). The focus here is on individual households, and the immediate family. This trend has not led to the complete disappearance of localized social networks (Knox 1982). However, it is arguable that the concept of the locality-as-community is diminishing in relevance for many urban residents.

Other sociological studies have developed the idea of a continuum on which particular communities can be located, thus replacing the rural/urban dichotomy (Frankenberg 1966). One particular characteristic of communities towards the urban end of Frankenberg's

spectrum, is the tendency for conflict to lead to segregation of the conflicting groups. This does not suggest that conflict is omnipresent in urban communities, but that when it does occur, its management takes a different form. In itself, conflict is not automatically disruptive of a community's cohesion. However as the ties linking individuals in urban areas are fewer than those binding villagers, conflict can often break those bonds, causing segregation and alienation.

Thomas further develops this point. Describing life on inner city housing estates, he concludes that relationships are managed by withdrawal not engagement (1986 p.96). He too constructs a continuum, calling the two extremes *nominal* and *interacting* communities. In nominal communities, people have few interactions with neighbours. Partly this is due to the urban dwellers' tendency to maintain social relationships over a wider geographical area than the immediate locality. However, Thomas also identifies a sense that shared values and beliefs cannot be assumed within a heterogeneous population. This can produce feelings of fear and distrust, which lead to a retreat into the individual household. "Differences [between people] are exaggerated and not negotiable...agreements and understanding about how to live together are unable to emerge," (Thomas 1986 p.126-7). Racial prejudice plays a powerful part in the development and maintenance of these boundaries. Participation rates in voluntary organisations are low, because of the difficulties of overcoming the divisions besetting the population. People doubt that community groups can effect improvements. Also, as Thomas points out, people who work long hours, live in poor housing or who are under financial pressure, may have little energy, time, or inclination to participate in voluntary groups. By contrast, the interacting community is primarily known by residents' willingness to leave their households and interact with people around them, both formally through participation in voluntary groups, and informally thorough personal relationships. Active neighbourhood organisations can strengthen relationships with outside bodies, such as the local authority, and this in turn lessens residents' feelings of powerlessness.

However, it is arguable that social networks are now less likely

to be shaped and determined by locality than in the pre and early post-war period. For many people living in cities, the notion of an area-based community is increasingly redundant. In addition, the heterogeneity of most urban areas means it is impossible to talk of one local 'community'. Any area may contain several 'communities' based on class and ethnic groupings. Even one housing estate may consist of distinctive groups, who have little contact with others. Tenants' associations often face great problems in finding common ground amongst residents, across potential barriers resulting from differences in ethnicity, age, and employment status etc (Thomas 1986).

Yet a community school presumes this set of neighbourhood relations, and consequently sets out to exploit or develop them. Brar notes that teachers often have recourse to idealised, reified visions of community, referring to what was or what might be, rather than what is (Brar 1991 p.33). He adds that the 'black community' is particularly likely to be seen as homogeneous, despite differences in ethnicity, religion, class, gender, and political allegiances (also Eade 1989). Carspecken comments that some schools draw pupils from a 'strong' community (with a homogeneous socio-economic and/or ethnic grouping, 1990 p.8), while others draw students from more varied backgrounds. In the latter case, "community becomes a weak term, applied to the aggregate of families sending their children to the school or living within its proximity," (1990 p.9). Thus, he continues, community schools aim to work in one of two ways. In areas with 'strong' communities, the school draws on its resources to blur the boundary between school and community. Schools with apparently 'weak' communities try to 'create' a 'community spirit' focused on the promotion of the school as a shared interest for all parents and children regardless of other differences. For this to succeed, schools have to overcome the trend away from area-based perceptions of 'community'.

At this point it is important to differentiate between school-as-community and locality-as-community. Using Thomas' (1986) terms, it is theoretically possible to have an interacting local community and a nominal school community and vice versa. The first possibility would

suggest a scenario where designated community schools, concentrating on access, would encourage local people to use the school's educational and recreational facilities. However, the institution would serve a primarily utilitarian purpose. Local people receive resources but are not involved in their provision, in the management and organisation of the children's education, nor in wider school issues. Alternatively, one particular 'community' may be quite heavily involved in the school, but to the exclusion of other ethnic and social class groups. This suggests that the view of 'community' as a spatially-defined group sharing the same goals and values is somewhat simplistic. Nevertheless it remains highly influential, encouraging schools to assume that such a 'community' should exist 'out there'. If it does not appear to do so, then the school's task is single-handedly to resolve the deficiency. The next section continues by developing these themes through an examination of the ideology underpinning community approaches to education, and the origins of and influences upon various practices. It also reveals a gap between the ideals of community education and the reality manifest in many community schools.

Social Democratic Ideals — Community Education.

Community education is an umbrella term for a bewildering range of projects and initiatives world-wide (Poster & Kruger 1990). In response to this miscellany, there have been recent attempts to supply community education with a common theoretical framework (see especially Martin 1986; 1987). This chapter draws an admittedly somewhat crude distinction between just two categories, a *statist reform* model and a *radical* model. The former emphasises open community access to school facilities, and closer links between the institution and the local community through the involvement and participation of local people [7]. The radical approach is equated with adult education and community development programmes, such as those associated with Tom Lovett (Lovett 1982; Lovett et al 1983) and Paolo Freire (Freire 1972). It sees education as a process through which people can

identify and address social and economic issues affecting their locality. This chapter contends that, despite a tendency in some quarters to describe reformist strategies in radical terms (see p. 11 above), most community education initiatives currently base themselves on statist reform principles.

Developments in community education were influenced by social democratic ideals; accordingly, statist strategies were employed. The CCCS (1981), although warning against a simplistic dichotomous interpretation, contrasts statism with substitutional strategies. The latter advocates independent popular forms of provision [8], whilst the former stresses the state's ability to reform through 'top-down' innovations. Statism, derived from Fabian socialist ideas, was increasingly propounded during the 1920s (for example Tawney 1922).

The statist reform model has several features; namely a tendency to abstract educational developments from the characteristics of the surrounding community; an emphasis on creating a 'community spirit' amongst the people served by the institution; a consensus over aims between those people and the professionals staffing the school, which serves to legitimate the school's actions; a 'top-down' method of implementing change; and in community-designated schools, a tendency for staff to view themselves as exclusively responsible for one area within the organisation which can lead to fragmentation and a lack of coherent identity.

On the first point, the abstraction of educational developments from the affairs of the surrounding community, Baron distingushes between two influential proponents of social democratic community education, Henry Morris and Eric Midwinter [9]. Morris' interventions he suggests were "rooted...in a carefully weighed analysis of the economic and political context of rural Cambridgeshire," (Baron 1989 p. 96-7). In contrast, Baron argues that Midwinter's work in the Educational Priority Areas attempted to change the behaviour of the local working class populations, and thus make the school function more efficiently, whilst ignoring the uneven power relationships shaping parent-teacher interactions (Baron 1989). Both Halsey and Midwinter appreciated the limited role of education in engaging with structural inequalities (Halsey, Heath & Ridge 1980; Midwinter 1972).

However, like Morris they saw great potential benefit in improving people's attitudes to education.

Both Morris and Midwinter identified a lack of 'community' as a deficiency in their localities, and saw the remedy as being its creation or regeneration by the school. The aim was to create a sense of 'ownership', 'community spirit', and shared values amongst the people using the community provision. However, as suggested above, this emphasis on homogeneity and consensus overlooks the inevitability of conflict between groups with differing experiences stemming from their structural location in society (O'Hagan 1987; Baron 1988, 1989). Such conflict is often seen as abnormal and negative, and it may take the form of destructive, highly personal disputes where the fundamental causes lie submerged and unarticulated. This process is detailed in Phil Carspecken's (1990) account of the community occupation of Croxteth School in Liverpool, and the disagreements about the future and direction of the campaign between teachers and the co-ordinating Action Committee. The root of the dispute was the conflict between two very different ideologies. Most teachers supported increased grass-roots control, while local activists wanted to court Labour Party and trade union support to re-instate a state-funded and managed school (Carspecken 1990 ch.6). The adoption of both these viewpoints by the two opposing camps reflected their present and past experiences, and was linked to the interaction of social class and gender. However personality differences rather than variations in social positioning were seen as the problem. The focus on altering individual attitudes and behaviour is another recurring feature of the statist reform model (Midwinter 1972; Baron 1988).

The emphasis on the importance of maintaining consensus is closely connected to the legitimising of the schooling process - a vital function of the statist reform model of community education. By bringing the school and its community together, it aims to strengthen consensus around the school's aims. It seeks to make education - 'school knowledge' (Carspecken 1990) - more accessible to adults, through part-time classes and courses, (for example, Morris' Village Colleges, Ree 1973) and to children, by introducing a curriculum 'relevant' to their experiences outside school (Midwinter 1972).

Inter-personal relationships between local adults and staff will improve through increased contact and communication. This process will, in theory, break down parents' presumed apathy and children's resistance to the education system, as well as raising levels of achievement (Midwinter 1972; Rennie 1985).

Acting as agents for the legitimisation of the education system leaves community schools vulnerable to the accusation that their hidden agenda is social control. Baron dubs as "surveillance" the attempts by Midwinter's Liverpool Project to collect information on the local area and residents, and in particular to influence the modes of adult-child interaction (1989 p.95). Cowburn calls much reformist community education practice a "palliative for inner-city decay" (Cowburn 1986 p.132). Developments in the community education field are often inspired by professionals within the school or the LEA, or by outside researchers. Thus they are 'top-down', and sometimes find it hard to gain lay confidence and enthusiasm. Power relations between those who are part of the educational hierarchy and those who are not remain unchanged. The camouflage of presumed social unity conceals the retention of power by the dominant social group, and professional autonomy remains intact (Cowburn 1986). It is on this ground especially that radical community education projects challenge the statist reform model (Lovett 1982). In his analysis of the 'bottom-up' takeover of Croxteth Comprehensive, Carspecken contrasts its strong effect on the activists from Croxteth's housing estates with more ineffectual 'top-down' policies.

> "There was a rise in the confidence of the participants...the feeling that by being involved they could do something about the circumstances of their lives. This translated into a trust of their own perceptions of educational processes so that some could challenge the experts. This growth in the desire for political and community activity alongside the growth in a critical awareness of schooling is precisely what advocates of community schooling have called for but have found so difficult to create through the policies of education authorities and educationalists," (1990, p.181).

The statist reform model has also produced particular forms of organisation in community designated schools. Workers in large institutions often observe internal demarcations as a result of

professional specialisation, and this has resulted in a tendency towards the separation of the 'school' and 'community' parts of the institution (Ball 1987; Carspecken 1990). The community staff may include local volunteers; the teaching staff are salaried professionals. Community workers engage in educational and leisure activities, and their clients are adults and children; teachers deal in the 'high-status' knowledge of the statutory curriculum, their client group is largely children.

This traditional model of a community school has been criticised as a 'school-plus' model; extra community activities and resources are 'bolted on', leaving the school's fundamental organisation unchanged (Cowburn 1986; Watts 1989). Adults entering the institution as parents, come into contact with its compulsory schooling arm which remains largely impervious to any more radical influence that might be emanating from the 'community' arm, (Martin 1987 p.22). Within the school, professionals retain control, whilst parents may be invited in to be 'educated' into a school-approved method of interacting with their children. This leaves parents with only the choice of whether to conform or not.

> "Parents were once kept out of schools so as to `allow the professionals uninterrupted control; parents are now being encouraged to get involved and come into school so that they can understand why the professional exercises control in the manner he/she does. The base-line remains intact but its preservation is achieved by methods opposite to those which had been used," (Cowburn 1986 p.18).

The statist reform model does not closely examine the issue of institutional control. The possibility of conflict arising from struggles with groups who have traditionally little access to power is not considered. Communication and contact between those running the institution and those using it, or whose children use it may improve. However, with the exception of a few individuals (such as parent governors, see Golby & Brigley 1989) who may become included into the dominant group, the status-quo remains unchanged. Thus the traditional community school legitimates the education system by making it more palatable to a wider section of the community, but leaves fundamental structures and aims untouched.

"The ideologies of liberalism......seek to resolve the dilemmas of Victorian legacy of popular education. At their most ambitious the ideologies of liberalism are attempting to transform an urban educational system which was historically concerned with social control and 'socialization to type' into an agency for social democracy and self-realization. But this, from the viewpoint of various radical and marxists critiques is nothing more than rhetoric or liberal gloss upon the realities of power and control," (Grace 1978 p. 86).

Thus the post-war ascendancy of social democratic principles has fashioned a specific model of community education – the statist reform model. It is based on a model of 'community' that is too one-dimensional for many urban localities. This particular model of community education illustrates the way that 'the state' appropriates and reformulates potentially radical movements. In order to make the education system seem more *responsive* and *legitimate* (Pennock 1979) in the eyes of its clients, it introduces certain reforms – for example to make the school seem more welcoming, accessible, and relevant to its pupils and parents. More radical initiatives remain at the level of theory, or emerge as small-scale projects, often in non-statutory areas of education, and with a limited impact on mainstream policies (see Cowburn 1986 for examples). Even when radical rhetoric, such as that of empowerment is used, innovations often reveal themselves as reformist once implemented.

Instead, developments at grass-roots level are needed, to allow people the opportunity to define what interests and concerns they do share about local educational provision. This would require developments in the geographic area surrounding the school (Thomas 1986). As Carspecken comments, community schools have not really focused on issues outside school,

"Efforts at creating community schools have tended to involve changes in curriculum and school social relationships with only slight involvement of adults from the neighbourhood. Power has not been devolved. Community education programmes designed from above have..a limited view of power, conceiving it primarily in terms of formal access to decision-making procedures within the school..[It is] futile to try and empower residents with respect to their school lives alone, when they have so little power over the other conditions of their lives..The radical version of community education [on the other hand] implies the devolution of more than just educational power; it must involve the devolution

of command over a score of resources which are in the hands of local government and landowners living outside the community," (Carspecken 1990 p.14-15).

Conclusion

This chapter's main argument is that the dominant model of home-school relations allows and encourages parental involvement on an individual basis, thus maintaining an imbalance of power between professionals protecting their collective interests, and individual parents. Closer examination however, reveals a more complex picture. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is alluded to, in demonstrating the possiblity of collective resistance from relatively powerless groups. However, the realisation of this is subject to many checks and balances by the dominant social group. Watson and Yeatman's work on feminist bureaucrats illustrate the partial success won by previously excluded groups as they infiltrate the power structure (Watson 1990; Yeatman 1990). Theories of social democratic citizen participation reveal further examples of the ability of powerful groups to legitimate their own actions, through an apparently increased openess and willingness to allow subordinate groups to participate. Even in cases where supposedly radical rhetoric is employed, the outcomes in terms of shifting existing power relations may be more modest than rhetoric suggests. However, whereas social democratic models of participation theoretically encourage collective involvement, New Right models focus entirely on individual consumer participation.

The concept of collective parental involvement in the state education system has been most fully developed by supporters of a community approach to education. Yet, this chapter has argued that the social democratic state appropriated potentially progressive elements of the community education agenda, and reformulated them, resulting in the statist reform model. Moreover, this model is based on somewhat simplistic notions of area-based 'communities' which have diminishing relevance in many areas today. During the 1980s and 1990s, Conservative education legislation has made community education, even in its statist reform model, appear increasingly redundant. The New Right emphasis on individual choice, and a fragmented pattern of

school-based management within a climate of declining resources, has offered parents a role as consumers, and banished from the policy spotlight collective participation as enshrined in much community education rhetoric.

The next chapter analyses the parental role established and popularised by Conservative ideology. It sets this development in historical context, through briefly examining the changing economic and social context which preceded the domination of the New Right.

Chapter 1: Footnotes

[1] As a group, teachers share broadly the same professional concerns and have the same relationship to the state - that of employees. By contrast, the title 'parent' covers such a wide range of people that combining them in one category may appear overly simplistic. However, the ideological impact of the concept of 'the parent' has been considerable (CCCS 1981 p.202). Commenting on the overlap between the two groups, Atkin, Bastiani & Goode (1988) suggest that teachers who are themselves parents often find contact with their own children's schools problematic, and may not assert themselves in deference to other professionals.

[2] Giroux defines the economic-reproductive model as stressing the compatibility between the pattern of social relations found in the school and in the workplace, with the former acting as training for the latter (see Bowles & Gintis 1976; Althusser 1972). The cultural-reproductive model argues that 'school culture' is that of one particular social class, thus giving middle class children access to the same 'cultural capital' at school as at home (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977).

[3] ISAs are social and cultural institutions, such as schools, churches, the legal system, which inculcate the appropriate ideology to produce a conformist population. Repressive state apparatuses (the police and army) cope with any dissenters (Athusser 1972).

[4] Ben-Tovim et al (1982, 1986) developed the concept of the 'extended state'. As well as central and local government, it includes private organisations, broadly defined to cover trade unions, voluntary organisations etc. Thus, struggles for resources or access to decision-making powers are not characterised as between 'the state' and outside interests, but rather as taking place in the arena of the extended state.

[5] Other examples include the backlash against progressive forms of education which has marginalized initiatives, such as anti-racist education (Troyna & Carrington 1990; Ball 1990)

[6] Witte (1990) notes that plans for decentralisation can stress both collective community participation in school management and individual choice of school. However the contrasting rationales can cause tension (Caldwell 1990; Morre 1990)

[7] The statist reform model proposed here combines Martin's (1987) universal and reformist models. Martin describes the former as the secondary school/college emphasising open access to facilities and integrated provision of resources to serve a wide age-range. Its key influence is Henry Morris. The reformist model targets particular groups and areas perceived as disadvantaged. It concentrates on fostering closer links between the institution and the local population through the latter's participation in the school. Its key influence is the work carried out in the Educational Priority Areas (Midwinter 1972). Conflating Martin's models into a hybrid emphasises their similarities.

[8] An example of substitutional strategies from earlier this century would be the development of community-based forms of adult education. More recently, supplementary schools, established by black parents dissatisfied with state provision, would fall under this heading.

[9] Morris established a series of 'village colleges' in Cambridgeshire in the 1920s. They provided educational and recreational facilities for rural communities (Ree 1973). Eric Midwinter worked in the Liverpool EPA in the late 1960s/early 1970s, planning programmes designed to take the school out into the surounding locality.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROLE OF 'THE PARENT' IN STATE EDUCATION

Introduction

This chapter provides a historical context to this study of parent-teacher relationships, by tracing developing concepts of 'the parent' in the state education system. Covering the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, it briefly explores the changing social, political and economic discourses in order to illustrate how the role of 'the parent' has altered. The chapter has two main sections, one dealing with the social democratic influences on the education system, and the second examining the increasing dominance of new right ideology, and its transmission into policy.

Social democracy and the state education system

The immediate post-war period was one of optimism regarding education. Expansion of the state system was expected to lead to economic growth, *and* greater social equality. The possibility of tension arising from the disparity between these aims was not widely recognised (CCCS 1981). Indeed, there was a consensus over the aims and means of education policy, that affected even party politics, (exemplified by the ministries of Boyle and Crosland in the 1960s). This was largely due to the homogeneous nature of the elite that controlled the education service. Local chief education officers, DES officials, and some leaders of the teachers' associations assumed the existence of shared values and beliefs pertaining to education (Ranson 1980; Dale 1989; Ozga & Gewirtz 1990). The dominant ideology located officials as public servants taking decisions in the general interest (Dale 1989; McAuslan 1980); thus all groups could accommodate each other. This in part stemmed from the social democratic view of education which assumed its separation from politics [1]. However, the climate of

benevolent paternalism (CCCS 1981) left most of the population without voice or immediate means with which to influence education provision (Ranson 1990). Thus in Middlemass' words, the system was underpinned by a "technocratic rather than a party-political, Fabian rather than populist" conception of the state (education system)" (cited in Dale 1989 p.98).

Disillusionment - the 1960s

By the 1960s, the teaching profession had gained a certain amount of autonomy, made possible by a decentralised education system. While Grace suggests that the notion of autonomy is somewhat illusionary, he agrees that it is "celebrated in the rhetoric of the occupational group; is strong in the consciousness of many teachers; and is seen to be the glorious culmination of the long struggles waged by teacher groups against 'obnoxious interference'," (Grace 1978 p.98).

Teachers may be controlled from above, as Grace suggests, by exam boards and universities; they may be controlled from within by a conservative occupational culture and by professional training, but they are not controlled from below, and below was where parents were in the educational hierarchy. Many teachers viewed parents as inconvenient distractions from their real task of teaching the children behind closed classroom doors. This was symbolised by the legendary white lines in the playground, signalling 'no parents beyond this point' (Tizard et al 1981).

However, during the 1960s, disquiet with the 'top-down' statist ethos of the welfare state grew (CCCS 1981). Post war prosperity had raised expectations of the education system, and dissatisfaction with the unfairness and ineffectiveness of the tripartite system spread (Dale 1989). This was reflected by the appearance of independent campaigning parents' groups. (Earlier groups had concentrated on promoting supportive parental involvement in individual schools). The first new group to appear was the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) which sprang from the infant consumer movement, and concentrated on informing the public about education. Its aims and approach were resolutely non-political (Beattie 1985 p.174). The Campaign for the Advancement of State Education (CASE) was a consortium of locally

active groups. However, both organisations had few resources compared to other interest groups (Woods 1988). Neither did they appear to threaten the status quo in schools as both stressed their general support for teachers, and LEAs (Beattie 1985 p.175).

Public disillusionment was not confined to the education service, but affected all welfare services (Adler et al 1989 p.2). A growing lack of trust in bureaucracy was accompanied by demands for more public participation in decision-making. Politicians responded in several ways. Initiatives were introduced to create administrative systems responsive to public demands which would generate renewed confidence. Attempts were made to enhance opportunities for greater public participation in some state activities. The Skeffington Report (MoH 1969), for example advocated more community involvement in planning [2]. In education, comprehensivisation seemed to promise a fairer system, giving all children equal chances of success, at school and subsequently in the labour market. However educational professionals and politicians controlled much of the debate. Newton's Birmingham study showed that parents were involved, if at all, through pressure groups organised by the teaching unions (1976 p.206).

The Plowden Report.

The 1967 Plowden Report continued the trend of advocating more public involvement in state institutions. It argued that schools had a duty to encourage parental interest in their child's education. Children's levels of achievement would improve, as they benefited from positive parental attitudes (CACE 1967, para.92). Despite the Report's emphasis on the school's duty to include parents, it saw parental willingness to conform to the school's values as the determining factor.

> "If the least co-operative parent rose to the level of the most co-operative, the effect would be much larger than if the worst school rose to the level of the best, or the least prosperous parent rose to the level of the most prosperous," (cited in Bastiani 1987a p.92; also CACE 1967 para.129).

The Report's research reflects a social class bias, judging parental interest from how frequently teachers saw the child's parents, and the out-of-school activities parents conducted with the children.

"Plowden exhorted teachers to enter into 'partnerships' with parents while simultaneously conveying that the task of the teacher in disadvantaged areas was to compensate children for all the things their parents...did not give them, or even to counteract parental influence altogether," (Hewison 1985 p.45-6).

The aim was to convert as many *individual* parents as possible to supporting the goals of the school. The rights of parents as a collective, or the economic factors involved in the home-school relationship are seen as subordinate. Plowden might represent the "biggest single influence upon the study and practice of home-school relationships in Britain," (Bastiani 1987a p.91), but if it "marks the time when power begins to flow back to the parents" (Partington & Wragg 1989 p.124) that definition of power must remain limited. Plowden embodied a consensus view of home-school relationships, stretching the school's walls to include parents who were co-operative and supportive, (Bastiani 1987a p.93).

The breakdown of consensus - the 1970s.
Expectations of the new comprehensive system were high. It was expected to usher in a new age of education based on increased educational opportunities for all (CCCS 1981 p.176) [3]. Yet research during the 1970s began to highlight the limitations of school as an instrument for achieving greater social equality (Bernstein 1975; Bowles & Gintis 1976; Halsey, Heath & Ridge 1980). This appeared to confirm the experience of many parents - that progress through the education system was far from a guarantee of enhanced life chances. Additionally, many parents perceived their inferiority in professional eyes (Sharp & Green 1975). These concerns were taken up by a group of right-wing educationists opposed to the social democratic experiment with egalitarianism.

The first Black Paper, appearing only a year after the Plowden Report, called for a return to traditional educational methods, moral values, and a curriculum representing the best of British culture (CCCS 1981). Although the writers may have originally appeared to be "the dying chant of defeated elitism" (Bash & Coulby 1989 p.5), they soon gained ground. By 1975, the Black Papers had adopted a proactive

tone, proposing more parental choice through a system of educational vouchers [4]. Their ideas were increasingly disseminated to a wider public through the media, which fostered a 'moral panic' (Cohen 1980) over educational standards (Chitty 1989; CCCS 1981). The reception given to the Bullock Report (DES 1975) on language teaching (described in the Daily Mail as full of 'trendy pieties', Chitty 1989 p.64) and the media's reception of Bennett's 'Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress', (1976) [5] demonstrate that less than ten years after Plowden's publication 'progressive' education had become a folk-devil (Cohen 1980).

This was the beginning of a reconstruction of 'parent power' to serve a conservative discourse. Whereas social democracy separated 'politics' and education, the right merged left-wing politics and progressive beliefs about education, and juxtaposed them with 'good' education and parental concerns (Ball 1990).

> "The Black Paper authors..'care passionately about education' (Daily Mail, 2/4/75)..Their opponents are 'political fanatics' who had 'brought education into politics and condemned thousands of children to live below the best,' (Daily Mail 10/11/76)...The lay actors in the drama were those imbued with common sense who were worried about falling standards – industrialists and parents fearful of reprisals about their children," (CCCS 1981 p.211).

In the early 1970s, greater parental involvement in education had been the concern of progressive educators, including community educators (see ch.1 above). However, the 'moral panics' of the 1970s, and in particular the William Tyndale scandal altered all this. In this London Junior School, apparently 'subversive' teachers maintained a policy of 'total children's rights'. As the children seemingly became more difficult to manage the number of complaints grew. The teachers strongly defended their professional right to determine curriculum and pedagogy, unencumbered by parental views (Gretton & Jackson 1976; Ellis et al 1976).

> "The William Tyndale case..made a major contribution to the articulation of 'parent power', to a conservative rather than a progressive or radical educational programme.... There is little in the phenomenon of parent power itself..that would necessarily lead to it being in opposition to, rather than in association with 'teacher power' (though on this latter point the approach of

the teaching profession is clearly crucial): the example of what happened at Tyndale might seem to have pushed it powerfully in the other direction," (Dale 1989 p. 146).

Tyndale's lasting effects were various. Firstly the impressions of 'progressive education' that parents nationwide received were filtered through the sensationalist lens of the tabloid press (Dale 1989). Secondly, as the education authority involved, the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) was criticised for its inaction, the affair strengthened the legitimacy of Prime Minister's James Callaghan's calls for increased central control of education. Callaghan's stance was in part an attempt to take the initiative in education, as a response to the incorporation of Black Paper-inspired criticisms into the mainstream of the Conservative party (Knight 1990). Callaghan's words - "What a wise parent would wish for their children, so the state must wish for all its children," (CCCS 1981 p.220) - illustrate his attempt to divert parental support away from the right, without seriously altering the parameters they had set for debate. Thus the Taylor Committee was established to review the functioning of governing bodies, and a national 'debate' initiated on the future direction of state education.

The Taylor Committee's main recommendation was that there should be equal representation on governing bodies of parents, staff, LEA and the 'local community'. Employing a pluralist model, the Committee felt that equal participation would lead to equal influence on the decision-making process (David 1978). However, the potential flaws in this assumption did not become immediately apparent as both main political parties accepted that LEAs should retain their dominance on governing bodies. This acknowledged that the professional and administrative interests which had controlled the education system under the social democratic consensus still exerted influence. As Taylor's recommendations journeyed through the DES and Parliament, they were further diluted, so that the final result was no real change in the power-structure of governing bodies (Whitehead & Aggleton 1986).

The Great Debate also resulted in few concrete alterations, but the ideological change was marked. Throughout the 1970s, the economy

had been buffeted by a series of crises (Hall 1989; Gamble 1985; Gough 1979). The continued economic downturn proved a powerful incentive for Callaghan's appropriation of a conservative approach to education. Indeed, Apple (1986) has identified calls for the reinstatement of formal styles of education as resulting from the search for a scapegoat on which to blame economic problems.

The failure of social democratic education

By the late 1970s the rationale of social democracy had been exposed as bankrupt. Its attempts to establish a more equitable and economically efficient and prosperous society were hindered by the contradictions inherent in trying to fulfill that equation. Policies were tentative and piecemeal, reacting to individual social problems, abstracted from their political and economic context (George & Wilding 1976). Consequently, policies often displayed signs of attempting to accommodate conflicting interests. One illustration is the cautious adoption of the principles of comprehensivisation and community education (see ch.1 concerning the latter). The Winter of Discontent was final and fatal proof that social democracy no longer attracted mass support. The working class was clearly fragmented; a diversity exploited by Thatcherism in its appeals to specific social groupings (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group 1980 p.135).

The Labour Party had become increasingly associated with remote bureaucracy and corporatism (Jacques 1983 p.56). Attempts in the late 1960s to change this perception of distant, but powerful, officialdom, had been half-hearted (David 1978 p.93). Such moves had in fact stemmed from a concern with increasing the efficiency of state institutions, rather than increasing citizen involvement. As chapter 1 noted, it was this lost opportunity to increase collective public participation in the running of state institutions, including schools, that allowed the New Right to re-articulate public concerns with the remoteness of central and local services, towards a solution emphasising individual participation and increased consumer control. This forms the subject of the next section.

The rise of the New Right.

New Right ideology has a long history, pre-dating Thatcherism (Green 1990). However, the 1980s were particularly notable as New Right principles were enshrined in far-reaching legislation, that is not easily amenable to change, even if the political will to do so existed (Hall 1989 p.155). This section examines briefly how one wing of the modern Conservative Party rose to such ideological supremacy.

Advocates of New Right values were marginalised during the social democratic consensus of the immediate post-war years. However, their ideas came to prominence as part of the conservative backlash against the 1960s progressive social movements (Isaac 1990). Writers such as the Black Paper group and Enoch Powell contributed to the creation of 'moral panics' "around such apparently non-political issues as race, law-and-order, permissiveness and social anarchy" (Hall 1989 p.151). Education provided another fertile site for New Right ideas.

There have been various influences upon New Right ideology. Hayek's 'Road to Serfdom' (1944) was adopted by Thatcherites as an ideal-type statement of neo-liberal economic policy. By exposing industries and public sector organisations to the acid test of consumer choice, those who operate efficiently and fulfill the demands of the customer will flourish. Inefficient, ineffective organisations would either improve or expire. State intervention will be minimised on the grounds that it fosters a 'dependency culture'. Citizens are allocated the role of individual consumer, and left to make whatever gains they can in terms of acquiring social and economic status, with everyone apparently having an equal chance to utilise their new powers of choice and control. Those who do not have only themselves to blame (Brown 1990). Thus individualism and naturalism are two of the main tenents of the New Right's education policy (Brown 1990). Individualism negates the possibility of collective action, focusing on individual effort as the key to success. Naturalism reinforces this idea by viewing social and economic progress as a result of an individual's 'natural' talent and hard work. Both ignore the fact that the inevitable competition between individuals is biased by structural inequalities.

However, unconstrained market liberalism contains the potential

for social fragmentation leading to unrest and disorder. The urban uprisings in 1981 and 1985 were seen as proof of this. In order to maintain and increase social cohesion, the Thatcher Governments supported highly conservative social policies. Isaac (1990) identifies three such Conservative strategies. The first is the concept of an 'active citizen'. This stressed individual social responsibility such as picking up litter and forming neighbourhood watch schemes. A government which has firmly set itself against the encouragement of collective action can only allow a limited and individual notion of citizenship (Isaac 1990, see also ch.10). The second is the emphasis on Christianity. It acts both as a moral guide for government policy, (as employed by Mrs Thatcher, and more recently the Education Secretary John Patten), and as an agent to homogenise values and beliefs. The third element is the concept of the traditional heterosexual, two parent family. Isaac comments that the family is needed to provide caring and control as welfare state expenditure is reduced. However, conformity is paramount; therefore families outside the norm (eg single parent families) are presented as less likely to raise their children within the approved moral framework (ibid p.217).

The New Right's neo-liberalism with its principles of consumer sovereignity and individualism, does not remain undiluted, but is blended with these neo-conservative themes. Together neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism created Thatcher's radical conservatism. It is this very mix that makes the New Right so powerful, despite the inherent contradictions between these two main ideologies. Neo-liberalism disapproves of state intervention, whilst neo-conservatism sanctions it. By separating the spheres in which the two value-systems operate, the resulting government is "economically libertarian...but socially and morally authoritarian" (Whitty & Menter 1989 p.52).

A key New Right success has been to translate these theoretical ideologies into populist discourse,

> "Thatcherite populism is a particularly rich mix. It combines the resonant themes of organic Toryism - nation, family, duty, authority, standards and traditionalism - with aggressive themes of revived neo-liberalism - self interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism," (Hall 1983 p.29).

Hall describes how New Right values offer an interpretation of people's lived experiences. This 'popular morality' is inclusive, covering moral, philosophical and social issues, and straddling class boundaries, (Hall 1989 ch 8). It has wide appeal, viewing Britain as an "imagined community" (Hall 1989 p.167), and "construct[ing] a 'unity' out of difference" (p.166), that overlooks both the fundamental contradictions of New Right philosophy, and differences of class, ethnicity and gender within the populace. In contrast, social democracy lacked so complete a vision.

The multi-faceted and inclusive nature of New Right ideology [6] is evident in education policy, and again contributes to its wide appeal. Jones contends that several apparently disparate, social groups including disenfranchised sections of the urban white working class, many of the skilled white working class, and some middle class groups together formed a constituency which accepted the link made by right-wingers and the media between progressive education and politically motivated teachers, low attainment, and indiscipline. They were also receptive to the assertion that the supposed 'levelling-up' of achievement resulting from the comprehensive system was, in fact, a 'levelling-down' (Dale 1989) which adversely affected their own children's chances [7]. Hall describes the total process thus,

> "When in a crisis the traditional alignments are disrupted [as
> happened with the breakdown of the social democratic consensus],
> it is possible on the very ground of this break, to construct the
> people into a populist political subject: with, not against, the
> power block," (1983 p.30).

This has happened in education with the Thatcher Governments' claiming to speak for parents, and juxtaposing their interests with those of education professionals. Yeatman notes another two factors; firstly "the conversion of core values like equity or choice into ritual litanies to be invoked on all symbolic occasions, where the values themselves lose discursive and reflective meaning," (1990 p.173-4; also Troyna & Williams 1986). Secondly, "the commodification of claims by turning them over to the market, and thereby rendering them subject to market-orientated discourse rather than to political discourse," (1990 p.174). This process is also apparent in the re-defining of

'parental power' away from parent-as-participant towards parent-as-consumer (Dale 1989 ch.8).

It is clear that New Right ideology has a strong and powerful voice. It has displaced social democratic value systems to such an extent that many commentators on the left talk of finding alternative solutions rather than returning to social democracy (CCCS 1981; Jacques 1983; Hall 1983, 1989; Jones 1989). However its neo-liberal economic policies have so far been no more successful than Keynesianism. The effect of its neo-conservative ideas is harder to trace at this stage, although Hall quotes Gramsci in support of his argument that, "hegemony is impossible to conceptualize or achieve without 'the decisive nucleus of economic activity'" (Hall 1989 p.156). The next section considers education policy, and suggests that the change has been fundamental, if not total.

The New Right's education project — the parent as consumer.

Despite radical initiatives in housing and finance, the first Conservative Education Act (1980) lacked a strong, pervasive ideological frame-work. However, the Act did introduce the Assisted Places Scheme, sending out a powerful message about the deficiencies of the state system compared to the private sector, (Whitty & Menter 1989). It also acknowledged the ideals of consumerism by strengthening parents' rights of appeal against LEAs.

The 1986 Act however, embodied many familiar New Right themes, a concern with 'standards' (which implies moral, not simply educational concerns, such as discipline and order), 'excellence' and 'choice' (Brown 1990). Professional control of the curriculum was decreased in favour of governing body influence (Deem 1989; Jones 1989). Furthermore, parent and teacher representation on governing bodies was strengthened and LEA representation reduced. By removing power from political appointees the Act ostensibly contributes to the 'neutralizing' of education, separating it from 'politics'. As the Thatcher Governments were engaged in a project to shift values and attitudes to the right, politicians expected the 'depoliticised' views

of parents and other lay people to be highly conservative; a restraining influence upon progressive teachers and local authorities (Jones 1989; Golby & Brigley 1988). This supposition has not been borne out by research which currently shows that parent governors in particular are anxious not to upset the power balance in individual schools, but rather to support the teaching professionals (Golby & Brigley 1988, 1989; Golby et al 1990). However, teachers have their own interests and spheres of influence to protect, and parent governors' apparent willingness to absorb themselves into school norms may not be in the best interests of all parents, as the majority remain without an independent channel for collective representation [8]. Another sign that the apparent redistribution of power to parent governors has had little effect on parents in general, is the reaction to the Annual Parents Meetings. These events have a notoriously low attendance rate and have been criticised for dull unimaginative presentation that does not inspire discussion (Earley 1988; TES 29/1/93). Overall the 1986 Act gave governors responsibility with limited power. The relationship of the parent body to centres of decision-making at any level remained largely unchanged.

The Education Reform Act 1988.

By 1987/8, conditions were such that radical reforms of the school system could be executed. The left, at both local and national level, was in disarray, and a Thatcherite government firmly esconsed in Parliament for a third term. Teachers were subdued by their long period of industrial action in the mid-1980s. Thus adverse reaction to the Act was muted, fragmented, and in any case, largely ignored (Haviland 1988).

The key rationale for the Act's extensive changes was parental choice. Open enrolment for instance provides parents with the right to send their children to any school, which must accept them unless it is physically full. This prevents local authorities from introducing artificial 'ceilings' in some schools to ensure that the school-age population is distributed around all the LEA's schools. Open enrolment is apparently designed to improve standards within the state system, by encouraging 'good' (ie popular) schools to expand, and forcing

'bad' (less popular) schools to improve in line with consumer demand or risk closure. The 1988 Act also claims to offer parents a variety (or a hierarchy) of provision through regulations to allow Grant-maintained status for state schools, and also to encourage the establishment of City Technology Colleges (CTCs).

The National Curriculum provides a framework for a national system of testing and assessment thereby producing a guide for parents to enable them to choose a school. Test results will eventually be compiled into 'league tables' and published. However, those that have appeared so far have simply illustrated the close correlation between social class and achievement (TES 20/11/92). Early concerns about the culture and gender bias in the tests, as well as the achievement of bilingual children have not been fully answered. Moreover, the existence of league tables makes schools cautious, both in terms of developing any curricular innovations, and in seeking to shape the profile of their intake [9]. However research suggests that parents do not choose a school solely on the basis of its national test results, but are heavily influenced by other factors, such as the child's preferences, and the school's proximity to their home (West & Verlaam 1991; Coldron & Boulton 1991) [10].

There are several reasons why the Conservative Party has highlighted parental choice of school as the most appropriate mode for the enhancement of parental influence over the education system. The strengthening of individual rights in the face of an apparently unresponsive state bureaucracy is a key principle in New Right ideology, in respect of all areas of social welfare provision (Butcher et al 1990).

The introduction of market forces also serves the additional purpose of stripping local authorities of many of their powers (Ball & Troyna 1989; Adler et al 1989). Some commentators have suggested that this motivation is at least as powerful as central government concern with remedying individual grievances (McAuslan 1983; Adler et al 1989). During the acrimonious central/local struggle of the 1980s, the New Right conceived of a model for local government that would considerably limit its powers. Councils would be concerned solely with the provision of basic services and not place their operation within

an ideological framework; the local state was there to administer, not to govern (Loveland 1991). This model was expected to combat the collectivist policies and high-profile equal opportunities campaigns of left-wing councils (Lansley et al 1989; Gyford et al 1989; Gyford 1985; Gilroy 1987). However, while the New Right neo-liberal ideology sanctioned this process of 'rolling back the frontiers of the state', the neo-conservative influence led to increased centralization of power (Chitty 1989). The resulting combination, (which is, as noted above, an ideological hybrid), has forcefully marginalized the local authorities (Whitty & Menter 1989; Ball & Troyna 1989). The introduction of open enrolment, grant-maintained status, CTCs, Local Management of Schools, and new plans for school inspection and Funding Agencies have all further constrained local government powers.

Education policy in the 1990s

The change in the leadership of the Conservative Party may have brought a less ideological and more pragmatic approach to Government policy-making in some areas (witness the abandonment of the poll tax, and rapid changes of economic policy), but the general direction of education policy remains constant. Thus the Parents' Charter (DES 1991) claims to give parents the information and rights they need to act as effective consumers of the education system, and this is explored further in the next chapter.

The recent Education Bill further develops the idea of the parent as responsible consumer. The preceding White Paper claims that "parents know best the needs of their children, certainly better than education theorists or administrators, better even than our mostly excellent teachers" (DFE 1992, para. 1.6). That this "reality" (para. 1.7) does not apply to all parents is apparent later. Teachers are described as struggling to imbue children with moral codes and values, and being hampered by "the indifference of parents or the surrounding community" (para.1.26). These 'irresponsible' parents are apparently working class and poor, as they live in "our inner cities or large housing estates" (para. 1.26).

Despite the rhetoric however, the ERA and subsequent policies have been criticised for offering parents limited choices, and

moreover, ones which are not open to all (Simon 1988; Johnathan 1989; Whitty & Menter 1989). Individuals differ markedly in their ownership of social and economic resources, differences that profoundly affects their abilty to compete in the educational market place (Whitty & Menter 1989; Bash & Coulby 1989).

Even parents who are in a position to evaluate fully all available choices, will be constrained on several levels by those supposed choices. Firstly, as noted above, the philosophy of individualism denies the effect of class, ethnicity and gender stratifications, and instead maintains that everyone has an equal chance to succeed, and responsibility for that success (or failure) is their own. Wider forces that limit the choices available to people are also ignored. For instance the Parents' Charter claims to offer parents the information they need to influence their child's education (DES 1991 p.1), but overall control of the system is not open to question. In metaphorical terms, the government has opened the 'shop', however dilapidated it may be, and so any complaints about the quality of the 'products' must be due either to shop-assistants' inefficiency or consumer carelessness when making choices (Vincent 1992).

Secondly, many parents' will feel that to safeguard their children's future, they must act as 'rational consumers demanding a product in line with the requirements of the enterprise culture' (Jonathan 1990 p.118). In so doing, they may make choices regarding the style of education that their child receives, that they would not otherwise have wished to make.

Thirdly these choices in aggregate may have adverse consequences both for their child and others. For example, a parent, aware of the additional funding that a CTC commands, may feel it is in her child's best interests to apply for a place, even though she may be concerned about the imbalance in funding between CTCs and 'ordinary' schools (Bash & Coulby 1989 p.114). Thus her application suggests approval for the existence and philosophy of CTCs in particular, and of the right to choose in general (see also Ball 1990 p.33). It may be argued that the sum of such individual choices does not always benefit society overall. A few children may attain a place at a well-resourced CTC, but many attend under-funded schools - ever vulnerable to cuts in the

level of staffing and resources (Jonathan 1990). The logic of open enrolment itself suggests that it will eventually lead to less not more choice, if some schools close due to waxing and waning of public approval (Simon 1988). Moreover, a school trapped into a downward spiral of falling rolls, low morale, and fewer resources can offer less and less to its existing pupils. Ranson comments that choice of school cannot be treated like other consumer choices. 'If I purchase a chocolate bar..my "purchase" has no effect upon the product..but my preference for a school, privately expressed together with the unwitting choices of others will transform the product,' (Ranson 1988 p.15). A school with a relatively low class size for instance, may see a dramatic increase in the pupil-teacher ratio if it becomes popular. Hirsch refers to this situation as resulting from a 'tyranny of small decisions' (quoted by Adler et al 1989 p.221). Such reliance on 'neutral' market forces could result in fundamental changes to the appearance of the state education system, (for instance moves towards racial segregation in schools, see Vincent 1992).

Gutmann (1987) and Jonathan (1990) argue that the state has some duties of 'trusteeship' towards all children, as a vulnerable group. Thus their education should not be left solely in their parents' hands, regardless of how effective those parents are as participants in a race already structured so as to be unequal. Chubb & Moe (1990) present an opposing view. They argue strongly for the end to direct democratic control of American schools, which they claim causes bureaucracy and inertia, thereby inhibiting the fundamental reforms essential for improvement. Parental choice and professional autonomy are seen as the key to change. These mechanisms will result in greater differentiation between schools, and therefore greater motivation and commitment from students, parents and teachers to 'their' supposedly freely-choosen school. Chubb & Moe's position also minimises the structural limitations imposed on individuals by class, ethnicity and gender variables which constrain parents' ability to operate within such a system. They also recommend an essentially false distinction between education and politics, presenting the two as entirely separate spheres.

"Direct democratic control stimulates a political struggle over the right to impose higher order values on the schools through public authority, and this in turn promotes bureaucracy - which is both a crucial means of ensuring that these higher-order values are actually implemented at school level (by personnel who may not agree with them) and a crucial means of insulating them from subversion by opposing groups and officials who may gain hold of public authority in the future," (Chubb & Moe 1992 p.167).

As earlier sections of this chapter have suggested, reliance on the market is not a value-free philosophy, any more than professionalism, school autonomy or parental choice are neutral ideas. The values on which these philosophies rest may be submerged, but this does not detract from their powerfulness.

Flew (1987) also argues in support of opening up the market to allow parents' unlimited choice of school. He differentiates between political power and economic power, maintaining that parents need only the latter not the former.

"The political power conferred by a right to vote constitutes in many cases an extremely unsatisfactory substitute for the economic power provided by the right of exit and transfer," (1987 p.101).

Similarly Chubb & Moe contend that parents, having chosen a school, should then be encouraged to withdraw, offering teachers simply their passive support. "Schools tend to prosper when outsiders trust them and leave them alone," (Chubb & Moe 1990 p.164).

In contrast, Adler et al (1989) employ Hirschmann's concepts of *'Exit, Voice or Loyalty'* (1970) to argue that dissatisfied 'customers' have an alternative to 'exit', which is to use their 'voice'; that is to stay and work together to change the present situation. This is a collective rather than individual response and as such it faces direct political opposition from the New Right. As Westoby comments,

"Making 'exit' easier may well atrophy 'voice'; voice may be loudest, and perhaps of greatest effect when monopoly conditions prevail, and customers are securely 'locked in'," (1989 p.71).

Westoby also notes Hirschmann's proposition that the results of 'exit' are more certain than those of 'voice'. The publication of school 'league tables' aims to increase the certainties of exit for the

individual, making that a far more attractive option than the uncertainties inherent in collective action.

Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated on the relationships between the central state and parents, making brief references to the historical relationships between parents, local authorities and schools. Common to all these three sites is the exclusion of parents from decision-making processes. However, the local state has, at times, made gestures towards increased public participation, although these have been limited by the strong tradition of officer autonomy in local authorities, stemming from the immediate post-war period. Tightening financial restrictions have constrained recent local experiments with grass-roots democracy. Later empirically-based chapters examine aspects of the current relationship between parents and one local authority.

Some schools too have tried to become more open institutions, emphasising 'partnership' between teachers and parents. However, as this chapter shows, this requires schools to overcome their historical emphasis on education as compensating some groups of children for their home background. Furthermore, as teachers have had to fight to attain and retain their professional autonomy, they have tended to define appropriate parental contributions in accordance with their own interests. Again, these issues are explored empirically in later chapters.

The central state's relationship with parents is largely determined by its view of their contribution to fulfilling its main concerns; that is to maintain hegemony and service the economy. This is part of a larger pattern whereby the particular 'needs' the education system has fulfilled have changed over the past 100 years. Keypoints in this process can be identified. The 'need' in the post-war education system was to increase the productivity of the workforce, and to accommodate demands for increased social equality. The 'need' for a shift in emphasis towards vocational education in 1976, and increased teacher accountability was occasioned first by

employers' complaints about the irrelevance of education to the world of work; and second by alleged parental concern, underwritten by the media's focus on teacher autonomy. During the 1980s and 1990s, the education system has been given a new agenda which offers parents a seemingly powerful role. 'Parents-as-consumers' is the mechanism through which disparate elements of Conservative ideology - individualism, freedom, consumer choice, morality, discipline and order - are bound together in the education system.

These changing 'needs' illustrate Foucault's emphasis on the subjectivity, the 'regime-relativity' of truth which suggests that a society will generate truths to support its power structure (Gutting 1989 p.276). (This does not mean however that 'truths' in opposition to a regime are unable to emerge, Gutting 1989 p.277).

To conclude: the 1988 Education Reform Act, and related polices have given parents power as individual consumers which some, mainly middle-class parents, are able to exploit. What parents have not been offered is the collective political power to influence the decision-making which determines the organisation of their children's education. The next chapter examines in further detail the possible roles on offer to them.

Chapter Two: Footnotes

[1]   This view conflates party politics with a broader use of the term which is concerned with conflicts of interest between different social groups.

[2]   The Skeffington Report (MoH 1969) argued that local communities should be offered more information about developments in planning. This should then result in fewer disgruntled residents, and thereby a more efficient planning process. However, Ward (1976) comments that genuine participation must go beyond being informed about decisions taken elsewhere, and should include members of affected areas deciding on priorities and making decisions themselves.

[3]   Some commentators noted that many schools adopted comprehensive principles very cautiously, and clung to features of the selective system, such as rigid streaming and didactic teaching styles (Benn & Simon 1972; Ford 1969).

[4]   The progression of the Black Paper writers from their original position of reacting to developments in the education system to advancing their own proposals for radical transformation, mirrors the growing influence of the New Right during this period (Chitty 1989 p.52)

[5]   Despite Bennet's own protestations, his report was simplistically presented in the media as claiming that 'traditional' methods of teaching were more effective than 'progressive' ones (CCCS 1981).

[6]   Dale (1989) includes a typology of several, quite diverse groupings which comprise the New Right.

[7]   Particular aspects of the legislation appealed to different groups. For example the National Curriculum and testing was welcomed by some black parents who argued that it would ensure their children

received the same education as others, free from possible teacher prejudices (Focus Consultancy 1988).

[8]   There have been reports that parent governors who do try to act as representatives for the parent body, by canvassing parental opinion for instance, have been reprimanded for so doing (TES 20/4/90). Also parent bodies, especially in large inner-city schools are diverse in terms of class and ethnicity, whereas parent governors are more likely to be white and in professional or skilled occupations (Thody 1989).

[9]   Ted Wragg satirised this attitude in the TES (25/1/91).

> "[This school] aims to stay safely in the middle of the league table where we belong. We intend every single child to get a solid row of 2's."

[10]   Preliminary findings from Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz (1993) suggest middle class parents are able to operate the market model more effectively than many working class parents, but that choice of school is a complex process, with exam results being just one factor.

CHAPTER THREE

PARENT PARTICIPATION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION:
THE PRESENT DAY

Introduction

Since the Plowden Report (CACE 1967), parental involvement in education has become an accepted part of professional 'good practice'. Many initiatives — such as home-reading schemes, parent-helpers in the classroom, parent-teacher consultations, curriculum evenings etc — have become familiar to teachers and parents nationwide, and articles on new projects regularly appear in the education press. However, that same press also features dissenting voices; parents declaring that they need to be informed about their children's day-to-day classroom experiences, and whole-school issues, alternate with teachers bemoaning parental apathy and amorality [1]. This chapter provides a context for later empirical data by outlining recent home-school developments. Waller (1932) famously described teacher and parent as 'mutual enemies'. Firstly, this chapter examines the underlying values and beliefs that structure this suspicion, and identifies current trends in home-school programmes. Secondly, it analyses the current and potential roles available to parents within the state education system.

Problematizing Home-School Relationships — class, ethnicity, and gender.

Over the last century, educationists' approaches to home-school relationships have changed considerably in style and emphasis. Parental roles, once confined to ensuring that children attended school, have expanded to include the provision of ancillary help within the school, and even a role as educator in conjunction with teaching staff.

Once the potential of parental influence upon the child's attitudes, behaviour, and perhaps ability entered the professional

consciousness, educators sought to induct parents into school norms (see the Haddow Report, Consultative Committee 1931, and the Plowden Report, CACE 1967). Hewison describes Plowden's approach thus;

> "Parents were seen as essentially passive 'supporters' of the activities of schools: a 'supportive' home provided a child with appropriate language skills, an appropriate interest in books and learning, and even appropriate role models..children from supportive homes arrived at school well-equipped to learn from their teachers; children from unsupportive homes provided teachers with much less satisfactory educational raw material," (1985 p.45).

This quotation describes the middle-class values structuring the state school system, which parents are required to emulate. 'Norms' of child development evolved from the experiences of middle and upper class children in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Yet it was against this 'norm' that working class children were also measured and often found lacking (Steedman 1985). Therefore, parents, especially mothers, required careful guidance to ensure that they exercised their influence in pursuit of the correct goals (David 1990; David 1980).

As teachers are pre-dominantly white, middle-class individuals (Musgrave 1979), their relationships with working class parents are shaped by an imbalance of structural power (in class terms at least). Teachers also have recourse to their professional identity, which may enable them to remain dominant in a relationship with parents with whom they share a social class position (although this is disputed by Lareau's research, 1989). Individual access to teacher discourse is moulded by the process of socialization into the profession. It is also refined locally, through staffroom conversation which reflects both the school's general ethos on home-school relations, and the reputations of particular families. Many parents lack access to an equivalent forum. Brown comments;

> "Through actual interactions, spoken or written, an image of 'what parents are' is built up within teacher discourse. This acts to build up a 'normalizing' image of parents and parenting practices, which in turn provides..a standard against which to judge 'actual' parents. This is however, at a high level of generality, although the inscribed qualities might be highly specific...Placed in relation to this 'general', 'normal' or even 'natural' parent, are specific groups of parents who may diverge in some way," (Brown 1993 forthcoming).

One identifiable, through heterogeneous group of parents who may be seen to diverge from the norm are ethnic minority families, particularly non-white groups. Research has consistently found evidence of stereotypical and negative attitudes towards black pupils, (Tomlinson 1984; Wright 1987; Mac an Ghaill 1988; Gee 1989; Gillborn 1990). The same attitudes extend to their families. When Tizard et al (1988) asked white teachers about their experience of black parents, 70% mentioned a negative attribute in reply (see also Townsend & Brittan 1972; Smith 1988; Howard & Hollingsworth 1988) [2].

Unsurprisingly, black groups and individuals often respond with disillusionment and suspicion of the white dominated education system. An ACER (Afro-Caribbean Educational Resource Centre) conference revealed considerable wariness of home visiting amongst its participants. One asked, "are they coming with a set of values and assumptions that imply our way of life is inferior?" (1986 p.17). Indeed the tone employed by 1960s compensatory initiatives lingers on. A more recent project described by Macleod, attempted to 'involve' Muslim parents in their young children's education. Home-school liaison teachers (HSLTs), (mainly monolingual), visited parents at home to "explain school policy and practice" (1985 p.2). Macleod illustrates the 'problem' of "parents who fail to conform" (p.14), by describing a mother who did the ironing throughout the HSLT's visit.

> "She showed no sign that she had even the remotest understanding
> of the value of the...intervention programme - or indeed any
> motivation to understand what was going on," (1985 p.30).

Macleod continues, not by suggesting any reasons for this reaction - perhaps the woman resented the invasion of her privacy by someone intent on showing her how to interact with her child - but by warning the HSLTs to guard against being treated like childminders!

However, Tizard, Mortimore & Burchell (1988), also writing about the involvement of ethnic minority parents, adopt a parental perspective. They note that few teachers visit minority parents at home or spend time in local social or religious centres (1988 p.75; see Mac an Ghaill 1988). They describe the monocultural nature of many schools in terms of curriculum, staffing and ethos, where racial prejudice may go unnoticed. It is, they conclude, hardly surprising if

some minority parents view their child's school with a mixture of wariness, bemusement and anger. Although multi-cultural approaches to education became more common during the 1980s, many schools include such strategies as one-off events rather than as part of an on-going programme (Brar 1991). The researchers suggest that teachers need to make links with individual parents, perhaps through home-visits, and that the school needs to make links with community groups. They argue that minority parents, sometimes educated in different and often more formal school systems, may have severe reservations about child-centred education, especially learning through play. They comment that schools need to listen to these viewpoints, discuss them and go some way towards meeting them. They might also have noted that although many schools have at least a nominal equal opportunities policy to tackle issues such as verbal abuse, parents are rarely involved in its planning. Additionally, alterations to the political climate since Tizard's study, have rendered equal opportunities issues marginal for many practitioners (Epstein 1993; Ball 1990; Troyna & Ball 1989).

Much literature on home-school relations speaks routinely of 'parents'. Yet particularly in primary schools the overwhelming majority of parents, involved to some extent with the school are women. The use of 'parents' can be seen as an advance from the once-common and overtly paternalistic 'mums'. As Newman comments,

"'Mum' is a demeaning word, implying warmth and emotion, but no imagination or thought. It deprives the person referred to of her individuality, turning her into a homely stereotype," (1983 p.245).

This is illustrated by this 1976 quotation, from a community education co-ordinator, describing the effects of opening a Parents' Room.

"A fundamental change is taking place in the parents' daily routine: the placid plod to school to deliver and collect the little ones is now one of purpose...The chat is no longer confined to the gossip 'tit-bit' of the day, but is more concerned with the school programme. Rearranged and streamlined washdays are a necessity if mum is to fit herself into a group," (quoted in Rawling 1988 p.66).

'Parent' at least includes the possibility of male involvement. However, Burgess et al (1991) noted in their recent study, that the

slippage from 'parents' to 'mums' persisted and was common amongst nursery educators (1991 p.102; also David 1990). If practitioners think solely of women, this has a corresponding effect on the types of parental involvement offered. Burgess et al (1991) found that women helpers were assigned tasks traditionally designated as 'female' occupations, such as sewing and cooking. It is fairly common in early years education for mothers to spend time at school as the young age of the children blurs the boundary between 'carer' and 'educator'. This makes it easier for the mother to share some of the teacher's role. In addition, teachers of young children (overwhelmingly female themselves) traditionally hold a low status position within the profession (David 1990). This may make them more willing to develop relations with parents, but parental contributions will still be carefully limited in order to maintain the professional/lay person distinction. Thus parental tasks are either manual ones, or ones which cast the mother firmly into a supportive role, such as hearing a child read.

Women, especially in the early stages of their child's education, are also subject to considerable pressures to conform to an idealized image of 'good mothering'. Specific practices, (notably a child-centred approach), are normalized through the agencies of teachers and healthcare 'experts', as well as the media. As noted above, state education has always been seen as a potential remedy for the inadequacies of working-class mothers (David 1980; David 1990; Griffith & Smith 1987). As many 'school-approved' activities stem from the cultural practices and values of a specific socio-economic group, (the white middle class), white working class women, or women from ethnic minorities are presented with an image of 'good mothering', which for various economic, cultural or ideological reasons they may be unable or unwilling to fulfill (Duxbury 1987; Walkerdine 1985). For example, child-centred approaches are less likely to be adopted by those in an economically insecure position (Walkerdine 1985). Failure to maintain this image can cause feelings of guilt or inadequacy; if the woman rejects or is unaware of the ideal, she risks being branded by professionals as a 'bad mother'. As Urwin comments,

"To the emphasis on mothers as central to the completion of
infants' emotional needs, which we have come to associate with
the normative appropriations of psychoanalysis, such as Bowlby's
work, we now have an orthodoxy which stresses mothers'
contributions to infants' intellectual and social development as
well," (1985 p.196).

Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) further develop these ideas by 'unpacking'
the concept of the 'sensitive mother'. This requires women to educate
their pre-school children in two ways; firstly, by giving them
experience of early number and language ideas by turning household
tasks into 'learning experiences', and secondly, by teaching them
social skills. Walkerdine & Lucey argue that the 'sensitive' mother
ideal oppresses women who ascribe to it. Their study suggests that
these mothers made little time for themselves because of the pressure
of constantly interacting in a 'sensitive' way with their child. Again
failure to match the image could provoke severe guilt (Walkerdine &
Lucey 1989). Similarly Griffith & Smith argue that once a child is
school-aged, her mother has little opportunity, and less power to
intervene in the classroom. Yet if a problem arises concerning the
child, the likelihood is that the mother will assume responsibility
for it (1987 p.94-5).

This chapter argues that if the effect of class, ethnicity, and
gender remain submerged during consideration of home-school issues,
the resulting debate will be superficial and perfunctory. Three
particular illustrations are advanced to support this contention. The
first is the reliance on consensual language, such as *partnership,
dialogue, involvement, sharing,* which feature strongly in home-school
literature, thus editing tension and conflict out of the relationship.
Such consensual words and phrases, although vague and lacking
specificity can be powerful in constructing norms for home-school
relations (see references to Edelman in ch.1). The terms suggest a
warm 'community-spirit'; if this is not achieved both teachers and
parents are vulnerable to feelings of disillusionment and inadequacy,
and the initiatives may lapse.

The second factor illustrating the occasionally superficial
nature of home-school discussions is the assumption of a positive
correlation between parental involvement and children's educational

achievement (eg Jowett et al 1991; Stacey 1991; Lareau 1989; Hackney Council, LBH 1989b; ILEA Research & Statistics 1985). On closer examination, the exact relationship is unclear. What kind of involvement triggers such improvement, and how is that improvement defined?

There are two main claims in this area. Some projects argue that their results reveal a quantifiable increase after a period of close parental intervention in the curriculum (Dye 1989; Hewison & Schofield 1982; Hewison & Tizard 1980). Others claim a more general improvement. For instance, frequent, positive home-school contact is assumed to result in the child feeling happier in the classroom, and thus achieving a higher standard (Stacey 1991; Hackney Council, LBH 1989b). With reference to the first group, Hannon examines several home-reading initiatives and the evidence supporting their claim for higher achievement. He identifies several problems with reading tests. Do they test recognisable reading behaviour, or do they ask the child to decode out-of-context words? Are they prone to cultural bias? Other variables can also affect results, such as levels of existing parental involvement, and the attitudes of staff (Hannon 1989; Boland & Simons 1987). For instance, Dye's study (1989) claims that basic skills tests showed the increased achievement levels attained by her 'experiment' group. Yet as the intervention was only for a short period, it could also be claimed that the parents and teachers could maintain maximium enthusiasm for this limited time, thereby provoking temporary rises in test scores. Hannon concludes, "we know..that in some circumstances, parental involvement improves scores, whereas in other circumstances there may be virtually no improvement," (1989 p.39). He adds that at least there does not appear to be any evidence that parental involvement *decreases* achievement levels! [3]

Awareness of such problems leads advocates to make more general assertions concerning the value of parental involvement for children's learning. In theory, positive parent-teacher relationships will result in trust and congruence between home and school, which will then help the children progress further and faster. However, improvements in parent and teachers' social relationships do not necessarily increase the amount of interaction over educational issues (Smith 1988; Tizard

et al 1981). Secondly, increasing the congruence of home and school often means in practice that the home is required to change to match the school, something which many parents will be unable or unwilling to undertake. Therefore, the case for a direct link between parental involvement and achievement remains unproven. Conclusive evidence is difficult to attain because of the many variables involved [4].

A third illustration of the home-school debate's somewhat superficial nature is its vulnerability to trends (Torkington 1986). This results in one particular innovation being seen as sufficient to 'solve' the 'problem' of home-school relationships. One such example, particularly prevalent in Hackney in the mid-1980s, was the establishment of parents' rooms in primary schools [5]. A more recent example is home-school contracts (see below). As single strategies however, such initiatives can have only limited and temporary effects.

Parental roles

The accompanying diagram (fig.1) outlines the roles currently offered to parents with children in state schools. Four main possibilities are identified: *the parent as supporter/learner, the parent as consumer, the independent parent,* and *the parent as participant.* The first option is preferred by many professionals. The recent influence of the New Right on the education system seeks to modify the dominance of the supporter/learner model by introducing the concept of parent-as-consumer. Independent parent describes the role many parents actually play, whilst parent-as-participant is seen as less common in actuality, but potentially very valuable

1) The Supporter-Learner Model

This section argues that, as illustrated by the diagram, many current strategies in home school relations are directed by professionals, and place parents in the broad supporter/learner category. Their function is to support the professionals by assimilating their values and behaviour. Thus parents may be required to support school events (Tizard et al 1981; Bridges 1987; Bastiani 1988a), and act as teacher aides in the classroom or at home.

Parental roles in state education (fig.1)

Parents' role	Supporter/Learner	Consumer	Independent	Participant
Function	To support professionals and adopt their concerns and approaches	To encourage school accountability and high standards	To maintain minimal contact with the school	To be involved in governance of the school as well as the education of own child
Mechanisms	- Curriculum support via professionally-run schemes - Attending school educational events - Supporting/organising school social & fund-raising events	- Choosing a school using 'league tables' and provisions for Open Enrolment - Receiving information as detailed in the Parents' Charter	Little home-school communication or interaction. Parent may provide alternative forms of education eg supplementary classes	- Parent governors - Statutorily-based parents' groups - Membership of local/national educational pressure groups
Focus	For educational issues - individual child/children For extra-curricular activities & fundraising -- whole class or school	For educational issues - individual child/children Limited involvement in management issues - eg voting for GMS status	Individual child/children	Potential focus on all aspects of education on range of levels: - individual child, - whole school, - local and national educational issues

a. Parents in the classroom

A parental role within the classroom represents considerable changes in professional attitudes since the almost total exclusion common in the 1960s (Tizard et al 1981). However, such arrangements are usually fairly ad-hoc and left to an individual teacher's discretion (Jowett et al 1991, although Mayall describes a more systematic project, see ch.8 below for further details).

Parental involvement in the classroom usually has two main aims. Firstly, to allow the teacher freedom from mundane practical tasks, and secondly, to make the parents more aware of the opportunities and constraints offered by the classroom environment. Thus parents become familiar with the rationale behind the teacher's working methods, and able to appreciate the difficulties and complexities of the job. However, traditionally teaching is an autonomous task, and having parents in the classroom is not welcomed by all teachers (Atkin, Bastiani & Goode 1988), as the following quotation explains;

> "The principal issue for teachers..relates to their status as professionals...Several [teachers] were clear that whilst help was acceptable with secretarial and office work, and in providing extra help on trips, they did not want parents in the classroom or having any part in the planning and implementing of the curriculum," (Mayall 1990 p.51).

b. Parents and the curriculum.

However, the most decisive trend in home-school relations in the 1980s was the involvement of parents in teaching basic curriculum areas (Edwards & Redfern 1988). The initiatives vary in emphasis. Some aim to educate parents and make them more familar with the teacher's methods, in the hope that the parents' will copy school activities at home (Smith 1988), while others involve parents in a more direct educator role (eg Merttens & Vass 1993). This latter group include home-reading and home-maths projects. These can be seen as marking a significant development in parent-teacher relationships. They acknowledge that parents are 'the child's first teacher' and offer a continuation of this role throughout compulsory schooling (at least at primary level). Hewison concludes that the most important factor about these interventions is that, unlike earlier compensatory programmes,

parental involvement in curriculum support,

"is based on an analysis of what parents can do for their children, not what they cannot. Compared to the 'supportive home' analyses, this leads to a very different understanding of the relationship between teachers and parents - a changed understanding which is shared by teachers, parents and children alike," (1985 p.53).

However, acting as classroom aides will not necessarily increase parents' understanding of teachers' methods, nor alter traditional demarcations (Smith 1988; Tizard et al 1981). The parent remains a 'passive supporter' (Hewison 1985). The difficulties inherent in changing these fixed roles is illustrated by an intervention planned by Tizard and her colleagues (Tizard et al 1981). Taking a broad approach to the curriculum, the project focused on activities designed to encourage parents to visit school and learn more about teachers' methods. Parents' meetings, toy and book library sessions, and 'open' sessions in the classroom were introduced. During the two year project parental presence increased, but many parents still confessed themselves confused as to the rationale behind many 'learning through play' activities. Nearly half felt that not enough was done to involve them, and their biggest concern was to know how to help their own child at home. Tizard comments that staff need to make their aims and methods explicit to parents. She also suggests that if teachers want parents to adopt the school's version of 'good practice', they should act as models, carrying out particular activities in the presence of parents. A year later, the researchers found that most teachers had dropped the structured parental activities, whilst retaining the opportunities for social contact. The staff were concerned to gain parental recognition of, and trust in, their professionalism so that they could teach without external constraints. Tizard notes that "the price that teachers pay for parental belief in professionalism may therefore be an apathetic even hostile parent body," (1981 p.105)..

The assumption of a link between parental involvement and achievement has led to more structured programmes, involving reading (eg PACT [6]; see also Jones & Rowley 1990; Tizard et al 1982; Hannon

& Jackson 1987; Hewison & Tizard 1980; Siders & Sledjeski 1978), maths (eg Merttens & Vass 1987, 1993), and general curricular programmes (eg Dye 1989; Loughrey 1991). These schemes involve direct participation in the education process, as parents supervise their child carrying out a particular task, sometimes at school, but more often at home.

c. A critique of curriculum programmes

Parental involvement in curiculum intervention programmes can be advantageous in 'de-mystifying' school for parents, although a constant dialogue with teachers is necessary to ensure that this process is happening. At their best such programmes can show parents how and why teachers work, rather than concentrating on what parents themselves should not do. Teachers are encouraged to become more open in discussing their pedagogy (Dye 1989; Loughrey 1991).

Curriculum intervention programmes can also establish a mechanism for communication between parent and teacher, which encourages a more interactive relationship. This is claimed by the IMPACT team who pioneered home-maths projects.

> "An interventionist project of this nature is bound to structurally alter the institutional base from which it runs. Until recently parents were generally involved in school if at all, as either fund-raisers or as unpaid primary helpers...[But] children learn first and foremost from their parents..IMPACT deals with this in a quite immediate and specific fashion," (Merttens & Vass 1987 p.24).

However, it is arguable that many curriculum intervention schemes seek to make the home function like the school. Parents are encouraged to structure their interactions with their children in ways that the school considers 'good practice'. There are of course variations in the way particular projects are implemented, and these are symptomatic of the school's view of its pupils' parents. (A parent-teacher discussion about reading, for example, can vary from a lecture with lists of rigid 'do's and don't's', to an individual or small group discussion which gives parents the opportunity to air their concerns). Whilst offering parents curriculum guidelines can be extremely helpful, many schools present parents with fixed models of good practice, and insist on their compliance (Jowett et al 1991). This

ignores the fact that professionals are often divided on preferred teaching methods. Parental criticism may be seen as a threat or an embarrassment, and opportunities for it to arise are minimised accordingly (see Hannon & Jackson 1987, and Brito & Waller 1993 for examples). Such rigidity also causes parents to respond by continuing to work with their children as they feel best, without recourse to the teacher (see Sharp & Green 1975).

Fixed models of 'good practice' as presented by schools contain culturally-bound assumptions about 'good' parenting. As mentioned above, the rigidity of such ideals can lead to parents feeling guilty and inadequate, and to professionals developing negative views of those who do not adopt such standards. Burgess et al (1991) note that;

> "Staff engaged in the education of young children often....attempt to change aspects of parents' behaviour...this devaluation of working class culture through initiatives which are aimed "to teach mothers how to get it right" (Finch 1984c p.15) gives professionals a dominance at odds with shared partnerships between parent and teacher," (1991 p.105).

Another related criticism of curriculum intervention schemes is that they present an apparent climate of openness, yet the involvement they offer can be carefully limited by the professionals (Burgess et al 1991). The researchers involved with IMPACT have themselves identified this problem. One team-member comments that parents are, in effect, "being asked to act as agents of the teacher within the home, carrying out teacher-set activities and delivering the products back to school," (Brown 1993). The IMPACT parents' booklets implicitly present a model of a 'good parent' as one who acts in accordance with the following series of imperatives - "'Be a GOOD LISTENER'. 'ENJOY working together' 'Why not sit down on the rug and have FUN together - make it a FAMILY time'" (Brown 1993). In the IMPACT diaries, which particularly solicit parental comments, the possible forms of dialogue are constrained through the parent-teacher relationship which clearly retains the upper-hand for the professionals. For instance, parents may not question how the teachers teach (Brown 1993; Brito & Waller 1993).

Curriculum intervention programmes represent a considerable

broadening of the parental role from the confines of acting as audience and fundraiser. Parents are now active rather than passive, as professional recognition and support is given to their efforts to educate their own children. However, teacher discourse still emphasises professional dominance, seeing parents as supporters, albeit active supporters (Brown 1993). Torkington comments on this fundamental weakness in curriculum-centred parental involvement (such as the schemes mentioned above) and school centred parental involvement (such as fundraising), by contrasting them with a third, parent-centred approach.

> "The rationale for the two previous approaches is that..schools are helped towards their objectives by parental involvement. The rationale for the parent-centred approach is that parents' knowledge of their individual children is far greater than that of a teacher, and that the teacher's knowledge and skills about children and learning in general should merely complement and build on the specific knowledge that parents hold – both these aspects are equal and essential for learning to take place.....Curriculum-centred and the school-centred approaches can be employed by teachers...without them ever examining their own attitudes and values, without them ever accepting the need to learn the skills of working with adults...and without looking at the implications of working with parents for their own professionalism," (Torkington 1986 p.14,16).

d. Home-School Contracts – "Promises of good behaviour"? (Sallis 1991)
Home-school contracts have recently received much attention and support (Labour Party 1989, 1991; Association of London Authorities 1991; Macbeth 1984, 1989; Jones et al 1992).

Macbeth proposes a minimum twelve point programme for home-school relationships, stressing the obligations of both parties. The school would provide a range of structures to support and encourage home-school contacts. The parents' obligations would be to respond to these initiatives and attend meetings when required (Macbeth 1989 p.20-21). An examination of sample contracts reveals that parental obligations are often specific and concrete, whereas school commitments are more general. One example reads as follows,

> "To provide a school service suited as far as possible to your child's needs and to your wishes, so far as is compatible with the provision of suitable instruction and the avoidance of

unreasonable public expenditure," (handout at Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Conference, 30/1/92, adapted from Macbeth 1989).

Contracts have been criticised on various grounds. Firstly, they "veer towards 'support for the professionals who know best' rather than equality between equally informed partners" (Tomlinson 1991 p.13). Secondly, even if such a professionally-dominated contract remains the model, the school must at least have made attempts to improve communication with parents, "before it could even think of tying them [parents], however loosely, to promises of good behaviour" (Sallis 1991 p.7). Third and most fundamental, is the socio-economic bias inherent in contracts. Many of the commitments the school requires from parents are easier for relatively affluent parents to comply with - somewhere quiet for homework for example. Attending parents meetings is easier for those with transport, money for child-care etc. Macbeth is quite explicit that contracts are about obligations - those of the school's as well as parents' - and that parents should not have the 'right' to opt-out. However, for many parents fulfilling such contracts would constitute a severe burden.

"The fear is that the emphasis will shift to lecturing parents on inadequacies they may be unable to remedy, and that those feelings of inadequacy will only be increased. Even suitable clothes for the weather, rationed television, not going to school late or too early...might seem things a school shouldn't pressurise parents about if it doesn't really understand their problems. Homes with such problems need all that a school can give children - even without return. Don't dismiss the possibility that close co-operation with the school could become just another social privilege," (Sallis 1991).

Macbeth suggests that the school can help parents fulfill their obligations, by for example, providing home-work space, or a creche (presentation, RSA Conference 30/1/92). This type of response fails to consider the possibility of working class resistance to the imposition of middle class values about education, and the corresponding assumption that the home should automatically support the school. A parent might not see the need to ration television, might find school meetings an uncomfortable, tedious experience, and might not value and support all the school rules.

Despite a theoretical emphasis on the importance of consultation

with parents, this process might extend no further than an unrepresentative group of school-supportive parents. The contract may then be presented to others with no allowance for discussion or alteration (Tomlinson 1991). Furthermore, a contract will not transform home-school relations; indeed it is more likely to reify the existing power-balance. Schools that have little parental involvement are likely to produce a contract featuring their idea of what parents want from the school and what the school wants from parents. A pre-existing and continuing dialogue with as many parents as possible is a pre-requisite if a contract is to be more than a professionally-written 'paper policy'. Tomlinson comments that,

> "Formalised contracts must be only part of a structure which gives parents more legal and participatory rights and have definite obligations to involve themselves in their children's schooling, and in which teachers are educated to regard working with parents as part of their professional duty," (1991 p.14).

Practitioners and researchers agree that a 'contract' would have no enforceable legal basis. Quite apart from the ethical implications, the potential number of. contested areas would be enormous. The language of sample contracts illustrates their aspirational nature, making enforcement extremely difficult. How could it be proved that a school had not "valued [a child] as an individual" or that a parent had not "helped my child to learn that he/she is part of a community both in and out of school" (Tomlinson 1991 p.13,15)? Furthermore, who would oversee the contract's implementation? Tomlinson suggests that contracts could be 'binding in honour only', perhaps with recourse to a local Ombudsman or to a new national body if either side thought the agreement had been wilfully broken (1991 p.16).

However, the fundamental flaw in the concept of home-school contracts remains. They propose a 'partnership', 'mutual obligations' between school and parent. Yet the power balance between the two is so weighted on the school's side that it is arguable that it is the school's duty to work towards gaining parental support without placing impositions on parents. Certainly, an automatic readiness from parents to recognise their new 'obligations' cannot be assumed. Historically, the control of the curriculum, the management, and organisation of the

school have all been carefully guarded by professionals. Parents need to be given more rights to participate in their children's education before they are asked to fulfill their obligations as defined by the school. The issue of parental rights is apparently central to the concerns of the present Conservative Government. The next section examines its assertion that it will ensure the recognition of these rights.

2) Parents As Consumers: The Parents' Charter — "rights..responsibilities and choices," (DES 1991 p.1)

The Parents' Charter claims to provide Government guidelines to regulate home-school relations in the 1990s. It gives parents the status of consumers, even once their original consumer choice - that of a school - has been made. This sits uneasily with their more traditional role as supporters/learners. The Parents' Charter is part of the Citizen's Charter, the Government's initiative to improve the standard of public services. However, there has also been speculation that the Parents' Charter is intended to enhance parents' positions in the education system with the specific expectation that they would support the Government's attempts to return to a more formal style of education (The Observer 13/1/91).

The Charter stresses individual parental "rights...responsibilities and choices" (1991 p.1). The then Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Clarke, promised that it will rid the education system of 'mystery', 'jargon' and 'impenetrable prose' (The Guardian 28/9/91). 'Five key documents' will enable parents to monitor their child's progress, and to compare all local schools. These include individual reports of the National Curriculum test results, regular reports from an independent inspectorate, performance tables for all local schools, a school handbook; and an annual report from the school's governors. Much of this information was already available to parents in many schools (TES 4.10.91).

The next section of the Charter, headlined 'The Right to Choose' stresses that parent may now choose between types of school, as well as the individual institutions. Grant-maintained schools, City Technology Colleges and independent fee-paying schools are all

mentioned alongside the majority, the latter being distingushed as 'local council' schools (DES 1991 p.8). The term 'comprehensive' is conspicuous by its absence. As noted in chapter 2, many commentators claim the apparent extension in choice is a chimera (Adler et al 1989; Bash & Coulby 1989; Jonathan 1989; 1990; Whitty & Menter 1989).

Parents are not, however, guaranteed a clearly defined or influential role once their children are at a school. Whilst, the Charter details parents' consumer rights of 'entry' and 'exit' from a school, and their right to information from the chosen school, their rights to respond to that information and enter into a dialogue with the institution are less clear. The section entitled 'once your child is at school' states, "You have a right to a proper education for your child and to know what he or she is being taught," (p.13). The next paragraphs appear to define a 'proper' education as the National Curriculum; a definition which parents have no 'right' to alter. The section continues by talking about how parents can influence their child's school. The possibility of becoming a parent governor is mentioned briefly, closely followed by voting for grant-maintained status (p.14), an option favoured by the government.

Parental participation in school daily life is more marginal (except for parent governors). Parents are expected to be concerned only with their individual child's progress, rather than, say, the conditions his/her class works in. In fact, they are allocated a supporter/learner role. Their duties include seeing that their child gets to school on time, attending school events, reading with their young children or giving their older children space to do their homework (p.18-19). Their 'voice' impinges upon daily school life only on specific occasions, to allow them to learn from the professionals how to help their individual child (also Chubb & Moe 1990).

The Parents' Charter is helpful in clearly specifying what information parents should receive from schools, and thus ending any irregularities in what schools actually provide - although the quality and the tone of the information can still vary greatly. The Charter also highlights the concept of parents' rights in relation to schooling; embedding the idea in the collective mind of the teaching profession and the wider public. However, it does nothing to support

those parents who for various reasons find it difficult to approach the school. Nor does it create a more equal relationship between teachers and parents. The two 'camps' are still kept apart. Indeed such a division is crucial, if parents are to act in accordance with government wishes and develop a role policing the education system (Johnson 1991; Dale 1989).

3) Independent parents

This term describes parents who have minimal contact with the school. For some this might be a deliberate decision, whilst others act as non-participants through circumstances. The first category includes parents who have become disaffected with the school. They might feel that their child is unfairly treated because of his/her ethnicity, religion, behaviour or personality. Such a perception leaves parents with several choices. They can confront the staff, and as a result may themselves be labelled as a 'difficult' parent; they may transfer the child to another school; or they may decide to minimise contact with the school. This is characterised as 'active non-participation' by Pugh & De'Ath (1989).

Alternatively, 'passive non-participation' describes a parent who may wish to have more contact with the school, but is prevented from so doing for various reasons. She may not be fluent in English, but there are no interpreters present at school events, nor does it send home translated notes. She may work long hours. She may have small children and no child care. Or she may simply be under a degree of financial or emotional stress that precludes involvement. School-inspired events may not meet parents' concerns or interests; thus a rational decision over the allocation of their time may exclude school events (Showstack-Sasson 1983).

Some parents may choose to supplement their child's formal education without reference to the teacher. This may be because they disagree with the teachers' pedagogy (Sharp & Green 1975), or lack faith in the school's standards. A coherent and widespread form of additional provision - supplementary schools - developed in response to this situation. Such schools were originally established by African/Carribean communities, to compensate for the perceived

inadequacies of the state system (Coard 1971; Tomlinson 1984). The founder of a Hackney black supplementary school commented,

"Without exception we said that Racism was the major reason why our children were failing in school. We complained, we advocated..but with little avail. That did not deter us...we began to set up alternative supplementary education institutions rooted in our community," (Jones 1986 p.2).

Supplementary classes now serve varous communities, concentrating on religious teaching, the children's home language or culture, and/or a reinforcement of the 'basics' to ensure that children are progressing at an appropriate rate. The relationship between parents and teachers is often more friendly, open and informative than in mainstream schools (John 1992; Jones 1986) [7]. Thirdly, community provision has a function beyond remedying the deficiencies of the mainstream.

"The supplementary education movement was seen not as re-active but as pro-active, and to be about positive education. It aimed to project positive images of black people, black achievement, black history, in a society where a person's worth was thought to be determined by the colour of their skin," (John 1992).

4) Parents-as-Participants

In order to develop a new participative dimension to home-school relations, some commentators (eg Sallis 1987; Tomlinson 1991) have suggested that legislation is necessary to raise the status of potential parental contributions. As Beattie points out, many initiatives in the supporter/learner category could be defined as *parent activity.* That is,

"Associational activity organised by or for parents whose children attend school. Its purposes may be quite diverse, but its main defining element is negative: it has no official or legal status in the eyes of the state, and therefore in the eyes of schools which are state institutions," (Beattie 1985 p.243).

Tomlinson (1991), proposing statutorily-based HSAs (Home-School Associations), argues that such groups have a better chance of survival if supported within a structure that gives them legitimacy. Thus she suggests that HSAs would be open to parents, teachers, governors and older pupils, and would discuss educational issues

rather than the more peripheral and mundane matters that often dominate parent groups (Moore 1990). They would be funded by a government grant, and be statutorily consulted about educational decisions at local and, through representatives, at national level (1991 p.16). However, the effectiveness of legislative change cannot be assumed. The last part of Beattie's statement, quoted above, suggests a direct causal link between recognition by 'the state' and automatic recognition by schools, (the context suggests that by 'the state' Beattie is referring to the legal system and to Parliament). As the education system is characterised by relative autonomy, this apparently direct link is fallible (see pp.3-4 above).

Tomlinson (1991) and Macbeth (1989) also advocate class associations whereby parents and teachers have regular group meetings about the curriculum and organisation of learning. School and class meetings would be supplemented with regular individual teacher-parent consultations concerning individual children's progress. Thus parents would have opportunities to participate at each level - the individual child, the class and the school (Macbeth 1989). Such changes would involve great alterations in current relationships between teacher and parent. Several schools in a recent RSA project have attempted innovations along these lines (although establishing whole school parents' groups seems to be less popular). Progress is slow, as individual schools endeavour to implement reforms that run counter to the dominant tenor of home-school relations (RSA Conference, 30/1/92; Jones et al 1992). Although unlikely to be wholly transformative, legislation could 'kick-start' the system into reform. However, changes in both structures *and* relationships are necessary if there is to be any discernible increase in participative processes in schools. Yeatman, writing about the democratisation of institutions, comments,

> "Democratisation..would involve the replacement of the hierarchical (vertical) principle of managerial/professional authority by non-hierarchical (lateral) principal of reciprocal exchange between differently positioned and skilled participants and contributors," (Yeatman 1990 p.24).

Many writers in this area advocate attempts to achieve lateral home-school relations (eg. Stacey 1991; Atkin, Bastiani & Goode 1988). Yet

the dominance of the supporter-learner model persists.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that many home-school initiatives ignore fundamental issues of ethnicity, class and gender, and therefore operate at a simplistic level assuming consensus. This is illustrated by the dominant model for parental involvement, the professionally-controlled supporter/learner role. There is little incentive for professionals to seek to develop alternative roles for parents, although the model has altered slightly during the past 30 years, allowing many parents the opportunity to collaborate with the school in helping their children with reading or maths. However, their methods are usually required to match those of the school.

Three alternative models for parental involvement are identified. 'Parents-as-consumers' is the latest development. However, an examination of one of the key documents in this area - the Parents' Charter - suggests that the aim of this model is to co-opt parents into a role as supporters of government-directed changes. Thus they are encouraged to exercise their influence outside the school, in relation to voting for grant-maintained status, or perusing 'league tables' in order to select a school. However, the boundaries between teachers' and parents' concerns and spheres of influence remain firmly drawn. 'Independent parent' describes those who reject both the former roles, and have minimal contact with the school, either deliberately or as a result of circumstance. They may however, use alternative forms of educational provision. Finally, this chapter identifies some of the changes which would allow parents to develop a more participative role.

Analysis of home-school relations illustrates fundamental divisions between different social groups. Understanding of this situation is vital if simplistic strategies are to be avoided. The next part of this thesis is an empirical study of the structures, events and relationships in one inner city LEA, and illustrates many of these points.

Chapter Three: Footnotes

[1]   The following examples illustrate the division between the two 'camps'. Two teachers' articles in the Guardian have similar arguments although the dates of publication are separated by about a year. Their titles, *'Sort out the moral climate - not the teacher'* and *'Home truths on the role of parents'* make their viewpoints clear.

> "I now question whether the home-school partnership has become distorted, giving parents a great deal of power, but expecting little back in terms of responsiblity and support," (Draper, 1991).

> "Poor parenting...parents with attitudes which if prevalent across society would make life unbearable", (Gooch, 1990).

By contrast parents comment on their exclusion from many aspects of school life,

> "I do not know if the teacher knows anything about his present capabilities..As their child enters school parents do not want to be presented with a school hand book which fobs them off with a philosophy of primary education. They want to know what is happening in the classroom each day." (Akass, TES 8/11/91; also Beckett TES 10/9/91; TES 15/1/93).

[2] Troyna & Carrington (1989) question the ethics involved in asking questions which may invite respondents to employ stereotypes.

[3]   Hannon (1989) suggests that the other, more qualitative indicators deserve attention if a project is to be fully evaluated. These include take-up rates, the process of implementation, and studying the views of teachers and parents. However, problems still remain in linking such data with levels of achievement.

[4]   The assumption of a link can be traced to 1960s' research identifying evidence of working class underachievement (Jackson & Marsden 1962; DES 1963), and suggesting that parental interest and involvement in education were strongly related to higher levels of achievement (CACE 1967; Douglas 1964). The implicit assumption is that working class parents have substantively less interest in education, which in turn detrimentally affects their children's progress. The

possibility that most parents are very interested in their children's education, but that middle class parents manifest this concern in ways that the teachers recognise, is not considered.

[5]   Parents' Rooms evolved from a recognition that many parents' found school an uncomfortable place, and that their non-professional status was underlined by their lack of space. Some schools went to great lengths to make their rooms welcoming, but the room itself is often insufficient to encourage parental presence unless it is part of a coherent programme.

[6]   PACT (Parents and Children and Teachers) was one of the first home-reading schemes and spawned many imitators. The child regularly takes a book home to read with an adult. A record card provides a means of communication between home and school. Other highly structured programmes have evolved for parents and teachers of children with particular reading difficulties (McNaughton & Glynn 1980; Topping & MacKnight 1984).

[7]   Teachers in two of Hackney's supplementary schools commented that despite encouragement, parents did not often stay in the classroom. The teachers' explanation for this was that parents' experience and expectations were shaped by mainstream schools, creating a barrier which supplementary schools had to attempt to break down.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCHING HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS.

Introduction

The empirical chapters of this thesis examine different aspects of the home-school relationship through four case studies in one inner London borough. This chapter considers the methodology used in this piece of qualitative research. The first section discusses traditions within the case study method, concentrating in particular on the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The second section addresses this particular study, describing its development. A final section details the factors that shaped its final form and considers alternatives.

Case study research - A brief discussion.

Case study research dates back to the 1920s' Chicago School (eg Whyte 1943). It enjoyed a revival in educational research in the 1960s, as disenchantment with positivism grew. By concentrating on the micro-level, case studies offered a means to study the inter-active, the personal, and the individual. Rob Walker comments,

> "Case-study is the examination of an instance in action. The study of particular incidents and events and the selective collection of information on biography, personality, intentions and values, allows the case-worker to capture and portray those elements of a situation that gives it meaning," (1980 p.33).

Case studies often possess the following characteristics: they are particularistic, concentrating on one situation; holistic in portraying events and interactions; often longitudinal; and largely qualitative, drawing on data gathered through, 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess 1984, quoted in Ball 1992) or biography (Wilson 1979). However, these features are not definitive as the flexibility of case study ensures an eclectic range of work which lays claim to this title (Elliott 1980; Atkinson & Delamont 1986). Case studies

have several advantages for researching complex institutions such as schools. They allow researchers to gather the perceptions and beliefs of different participants, thus enabling exploration of "what the institution means to individuals" (Walker 1980 p.190).

Case studies have also been fiercely criticised. The battle between positivists and advocates of qualitative approaches has been well-rehearsed elsewhere (eg Cohen & Manion 1980) and need not be repeated here. However criticisms have also come from qualitative researchers who themselves employ case study methods (Atkinson & Delamont 1986; Hammersley 1992). Three contentious issues, largely drawn from Atkinson & Delamont's (1986) critique, are discussed here. Firstly, case studies are too often atheoretical and "anti-intellectual" (Atkinson & Delamont 1986), with an emphasis on naturalism that masks a lack of interpretation and theoretical rigour (ibid). Secondly and relatedly, case studies are fragmented individual portraits which do not contribute to a wider understanding of social structures (Atkinson & Delamont 1986; Ozga 1990). Thirdly, that several aspects of the relationship between the researcher and the researched are problematic. These include the nature of their interaction and the effects of the researcher presence on the subject's actions and voiced concerns.

Traditions within the case study paradigm.
Instances within the case study paradigm are not homogeneous. Indeed, Stenhouse (1982) distingushes between classic case studies such as Lacey's *Hightown Grammar* (1970), evaluative case studies, and action research. It may be illuminating to briefly examine these three types in the light of the criticisms made earlier. An important caveat is that individual case studies may not fit as cleanly into this typology as the three-fold division suggests, nor is the model exhaustive.

The **classic case study** tradition is a direct descendant of the the Chicago School, (Stenhouse 1982; Simons 1987). It involves joining a particular social group and participating in and recording their activities over a leisurely time-scale. Traditionally the researcher's main audience is fellow academics, rather than the research participants (Walker 1980 p.35). Thus during the fieldwork, the

researcher maintains some degree of detachment from his/her 'subjects' (Stenhouse 1982). This is the traditional neutral role of the researcher, separate and apart from those studied. Indeed research manuals in this tradition warned of the dangers of 'unscientific' researcher intervention (see Oakley 1981) [1].

This method has structured some of the classic sociological studies, so could not be accused of producing atheoretical findings. In the second of the three criticisms outlined earlier, Atkinson & Delamont (1986) emphasise the importance of individual pieces of ethnography contributing to a "cumulative body of comparative sources" (Delamont 1978 p.68). They suggest that researchers should try to formulate 'formal concepts', arising from their work which can then be tested elsewhere. Indeed Ball (1980) comments that the value of an individual case study may derive not so much from its own terms, but rather from its potential contribution to the development of theory through comparison with other similar studies (also Stenhouse 1985).

Evaluative case studies provide strong contrasts. They are often commissioned by a sponsor to evaluate specific issues. Findings must apply to those participants and their relevance elsewhere is not considered. Time scales are shorter; the stance taken more pragmatic. Such close and immediate links with the participants led to concerns that respondents were being put at risk by the publication of data that could harm their position within the institution. Although offers of participant anonymity are standard, fulfilling that guarantee within the confines of a particular setting is often extremely difficult without severe distortion of the data (Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis 1976; Walker 1980). Thus prompted, evaluators began to address the issue of respondent-researcher relationships. Democratic evaluation emphasised collaborative relationships with participants, thus offering them some measure of control over the release of information (Macdonald & Walker 1974).

> "This places the case study worker in the position of having to
> *negotiate* his interpretations with those involved..rather than
> being free to impose them on the data. The shift involved is a
> shift in power, a move away from *researchers'* concerns,
> descriptions and problems towards [those of] the *practitioners'*,"
> (Walker 1980 p. 37).

However, the immediacy of evaluative case study methods - the characteristic which led advocates to address researcher-respondent relationships - has also resulted in criticism concerning the lack of theoretical rigour (Delamont 1978). Furthermore, as Walker points out, democratic evaluation with its emphasis on representing a range of perspectives is,

"conservative in that it presupposes values in the existing situation need protection...Democratic evaluation also attracts conservative support when the activity under review is commonly perceived as likely to get *dramatically* worse. Here the necessary changes would be arguably better-controlled by establishing as wide a basis as possible for fully-discussed cautious progress. It is potentially a way of screening out the possibility of really radical review," (1980 p.38).

This conservatism is also displayed by Simons who argues that case study presentations should be impartial vehicles for the provision of information on a particular topic. Other researchers would question whether researcher neutrality is ever possible, and this issue is further explored below.

Action research is also concerned with ensuring egalitarian relationships between all contributors to the research. All participants are involved in identifying areas for intervention and planning strategies, thus contributing to both the 'action' and the 'research' (Kelly 1985; Carr & Kemmis 1986). Respondents retain control of the data whilst losing their role as passive 'subjects'. The altered power balance allows all contributors to discuss their particular interpretations of events and relationships, free from the dominant opinions of an external researcher (Benyon 1988; Kelly 1985). Action research, like evaluation, is often focused on specific topics, but with the express purpose of producing change. It is flexible and pragmatic, altering the pace of change and the nature of the strategies to suit the environment concerned (Kelly 1985).

Action research also stresses the dialectical relationship between theory and practice. Glaser & Strauss's (1967) concept of grounded theory suggests that hypotheses and problems should be 'discovered' from the data, thus avoiding the imposition of abstract theories imported from the academically-dominated field of social

sciences. The main focus of the research should be the development of 'substantive theory', formulated for and arising from a particular empirical inquiry. This provides a response to teacher complaints that educational research does not seek to relate its findings to practice (Carr & Kemmis 1986; Kelly 1985; Troyna & Foster 1988).

However, action research is a generic concept embracing several variants. One debate concerns the status of participants in the research. Carr and Kemmis (1986) for instance stress the 'emancipatory' potential of participants defining their own problems and seeking joint solutions. Others, for instance the GIST (Girls into Science and Technology) researchers, argue that an outside research team can provide an impetus to teachers' reflections on their own practice (Kelly 1985; Troyna & Foster 1988). Both viewpoints acknowledge that as action research targets practice in a particular, small-scale, immediate situation, the outcome is likely to be reformist rather than radical. Carr and Kemmis argue that it is necessary to engage with teachers' actual concerns and practice in order to effect any change whatsoever, and that action research by teacher-researchers could encourage the establishment of 'critical communities', involving a 'collaborative enterprise of self-reflection' (1986 p.224). Kelly (1985) argues that the GIST form of action research can increase teachers' awareness of a particular issue, and allows researchers to work closely with them on related problems and concerns (see also Troyna & Foster 1988 on Argyris & Schon's model of collaborative research).

Identifying and maintaining a balance between the researcher's interests and the teacher's is critical to the success of action research involving an 'outsider'. The difficulties are heightened when contentious issues, such as equal opportunities are involved (Kelly 1989; Troyna & Foster 1988). Whitehead & Lomax (1987) suggest that intervention can provide a different perspective on the practioners' situation. However, they argue that the main focus of that intervention has to be the development of the practioners' understanding, and not the collection of data by the researcher.

This section has introduced three criticisms of case study research; that case studies are atheoretical, fragmented pictures of

individual situations, and that relationships between researchers and respondents are problematic. Classic case studies, evaluations, and action research have been reviewed in the light of these criticisms. Whilst some aspects of these points may be applicable to particular research projects or even some genres within the case-study paradigm, they are by no means entirely justifiable. This section continues by considering critical social research, an approach to research that seems to offer alternative answers to these criticisms.

Critical social researchers, concerned with the reformist nature of many action research and evaluative case studies, advocate a new focus on empirical methods. To achieve radical change, they argue, social research needs to centralise 'emancipatory' goals, and critically examine how the research process contributes towards the fulfillment of these goals. Lather argues for "research as praxis", that is "research that is explicitly committed to a critique of the status quo" (1986 p.258). Similarly Harvey argues,

> "Critical social research..wants to show what is really going on at a societal level. Not only does it show what is happening it is also concerned with doing something about it. Critical social research includes an overt political struggle against oppressive social structures," (1990 p.20).

Lather considers grounded theory an insufficient basis for emancipatory research as it is concerned only with the immediate situation, rather than underlying 'deep structures' (1986 p.262). Thus a priori theory is necessary to link the micro field of study to macro structures (Ball 1992). However, to avoid imposing the researcher's theories onto the researched, the relationship between the two must be carefully outlined. Lather comments,

> "Dialectical practices require an interactive approach to research that invites reciprocal reflexivity and critique, both of which guard against the central dangers of praxis-orientated empirical work: imposition and reification on the part of the researcher," (1986 p.265).

Gitlin et al (1989) also identify the relationship between researcher and participants as a crucial component of emancipatory research. Neither qualitative nor quantitative research has ever been a neutral

process (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983), and the researcher who "edits himself out of the text" (Gitlin et al 1989 p. 247) adopts a "spectator-like" pose, as if he or she were making no value judgements, and had no past or present which affected either choice of research topic, methods, or approach to the field. Acknowledging and critically scrutinising these values and prejudices is a crucial part of the research process (ibid p.249). Gitlin criticises one of his own studies for failing to do this,

> "It is a case of a leftist ethnographer arguing that teachers need to challenge the status quo, whilst himself maintaining [it] through his realist approach to ethnography," (1989 p.246).

Such a stance leaves the researcher no space in which to collaborate with respondents in order to enact change. Yet without that dialogue emancipatory research is not possible. Therefore, the effect of variables acting to shape and determine a researcher-respondent relationship should be considered. Various dimensions, such as social class, age, or professional status may be influential. Gender and ethnicity have attracted much academic comment, and it is worth identifying the main issues here.

In recent years many women researchers, informed by a feminist perspective, have highlighted the close bond they felt it was possible to form with their female respondents (Oakley 1981; Finch 1984a). This bond arises from a shared experience of being female in a patriarchal society which so often defines the female experience as second rate. Thus these researchers rejected the impersonal stance of the 'neutral' relationship, in favour of developing more equal and intimate associations.

In the field of race relations, many research projects conducted by white researchers but focusing on black communities have been criticised. Opponents maintain that the ethnocentric approach of some studies has ignored the effects of structural racism on researcher-respondent relationships (Lawrence 1982), and has resulted in a conservative, anthropological stance (Bourne 1980). Such a model has been exposed for its paternalistic arrogance which validates researchers visiting a community, gaining information and then

analysing 'their' data without further reference to that community (Bourne 1980). The critics were particularly incensed by the processes of dissemination, claiming that these often encouraged a pathological view of black communities.

However, acknowledging the justification of these criticisms does not automatically mean advocating the matching of researchers and researched. Even if this were desirable, it is not always practical, especially in fields involving a variety of social actors. Nor does a shared experience of gender, for example, negate other potential differences, perhaps of ethnicity and/or social class, of occupational status, religion or age (W.Ball 1991, 1992). Since each individual is constructed within various social discourses, it would appear to be more fruitful for the researcher to acknowledge and analyse possible biases.

Thus critical social research appears to answer the three criticisms aimed at case study research (see p.72). Far from being atheoretical studies of individual situations, case studies carried out as critical social research aim to provide detailed analysis of a particular cases, and to link that information to what Ozga (1990) recently referred to as 'the bigger picture'. In so doing, the relationship between the researcher and the respondent is explored carefully, as the aim of criticial social research is to be 'transformative' and "empower the oppressed" (Lather 1986 p.261). One way of attempting this, Lather argues, is by clearly supporting the powerless against the power-holders. However, in many situations the position is not clear-cut; those holding power in one situation may be constrained from above themselves, either in that or other situations (Hammersley 1992 p.109). Troyna & Carrington (1989) argue that an alternative and preferable solution to Lather's "unequivocal partisanship" is adherence by the researcher to the *values* underlying emancipatory research - "social justice, equality and participatory democracy" (1989 p.208). If these general principles are to inform the research, then there is a need for detailed scrutiny of the research process. This chapter now turns to consider the methodology employed in this particular research project.

The design of the research

This research takes the form of an ethnographic study of home-school relations in one LEA. Divided into its component parts, the fieldwork consists of case studies of two primary schools, Hill St and Low Rd [2], and two LEA initiatives - the establishment of a Parents' Centre, and three home-school co-ordinator posts. The case study method was particularly apt as it enables the exploration of particular lived experiences. The main method used to gather data was semi-structured interviews with respondents concerned with educational provision within the borough. They included parents, teachers, school governors, LEA officers and members, teacher trade union officals, parent action group members, and voluntary education providers. This wide field was necessary in order to get some grasp of the complexities and positional competition structuring the local education scene. Observation and document analysis were also employed. The main body of data was gathered over a period of four school terms (September 1990 - December 1991).

Arranging access [3]

The fieldwork was conducted in Hackney, a new authority, created in 1990 by the abolition of the ILEA. Parental involvement emerged as a key concern during the borough's consultation process (Focus Consultancy 1988, LBH 1989b, 1989c). Therefore officers greeted my research proposal with enthusiasm and support. They had plans to appoint home-school co-ordinators, and suggested that my research should include this scheme. Thus access to the LEA (and consequently the Parents' Centre and the co-ordinator project) was straightforward, so the remainder of this section concentrates on the potentially harder task of arranging access to particular schools and parents.

I approached five primary schools, which between them included the major ethnic groupings represented within Hackney. All the headteachers agreed to participate in the research. I had previously taught locally, which may have aided the positive response. I chose two schools, Low Rd and Hill St, because they provided several comparisons. They were both large schools, but situated at opposing ends of the borough. Both attracted an ethnically mixed population,

with specific groups of fairly recent arrivals; a Turkish-speaking population at Hill St and a Bangladeshi population at Low Rd. I gave only brief consideration to the headteachers' descriptions of home-school relations, as I expected, and indeed found a discrepancy between 'operational' and 'presentational' data (Van Maanen 1981) [4].

I spent five weeks in each school during the 1990-91 autumn term. I interviewed most members of staff, attended some staff meetings, and spent lunchtimes in the staffroom. I also attended a governors' meeting at each school, and talked to the chair and the parent governors. I decided on two strategies to contact parents. One was to attach myself to two classes (one infant and one junior) in each school, spending several sessions in each class, working with the classteacher and children. I then wrote to parents of the children in these four classes, explaining my project and asking them to take part. However, my second strategy was far more successful, depending as it did on personal, immediate contact with parents. At the beginning of my time in each school I was in the playground as parents delivered and collected their children, introducing myself and the project and asking parents to participate. I had a leaflet (translated into the relevant languages) on which I based my explanation. Fruitful though this was, I initially found it nerve-racking, as it involved 'cold-selling' myself and the study. I also contacted several individuals and community groups who agreed to act as interpreters. With their help I interviewed parents from all the major ethnic groups in the schools, although the proportions are approximate. (Further details are contained in the appendix).

Interviewing

An interviewer needs to develop a rapport with respondents to encourage them to feel comfortable, relaxed, and able to talk freely! As most of my interviews were scheduled to last just thirty minutes (although most continued an extra ten to fifteen minutes), this rapport had to be built up quickly, with the 'correct' tone set from the start. Measor comments that when interviewing "it is important to 'come over' as very sweet and trustworthy, but ultimately rather bland," (1985 p.62). Although I had reservations about adopting such a

gendered, stereotypical personna, I employed this style with people on first interview. In most cases my age and position as a doctoral student made me unthreatening [5], so that respondents appeared to relax quickly. However with individuals I interviewed repeatedly, it was hard to maintain a characterless facade, and had I attempted to do so it would have appeared as if I was dissembling, a point further explored below.

Parents chose to be interviewed either in their homes or at school. At Low Rd I had the use of an office and kettle, which allowed me to offer parents a drink, and generally fostered a relaxed atmosphere. At Hill St I interviewed parents in the parents' room or the library; neither was particularly congenial or altogether free of interruption. I interviewed teachers at school, LEA officers and members at their workplace, and other respondents either at work or home, as they wished.

In all interviews, I had a checklist of themes to cover. I started the interview, by explaining the nature of the project, and giving guarantees of anonymity. In the case of some LEA officers it was necessary to make clear that they would remain more easily identifiable than most respondents. I asked people if I could tape-record our conversation, offering to take notes instead if they preferred. Out of a total of 95 parents, 66 asked me to take notes. This was less common when I talked to members of other groups. Following Measor (1985), I was very aware of interview 'topology', and ensured that sensitive topics were not introduced too early. It is in the nature of semi-structured interviews that they do not always go according to the researcher's plan, but I tried always to start and finish with innocuous questions.

Analysis
Employing different methods of data gathering in the same situation permitted triangulation (Cohen & Manion 1980). These strategies included use of field notes derived from observation at meetings in various settings (staff meetings, education committee meetings etc), and, where relevant, document analysis.

Returning to Hill St and Low Rd two terms after my original visit allowed me to check my developing analysis with a few respondents and to track the development of particular plans. Similarly with the Parents' Centre I interviewed respondents over an eighteen month period, and spoke to most on two separate occasions. This ensured that the data shaped the evolving theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss 1967; S. Ball 1991). I also tried to use 'combined levels of triangulation' (Cohen & Manion 1980) to produce a written analysis that focuses on both micro and macro factors.

Once collected, the data required coding, analysis and dissemination. To code the data, I read through the transcripts, notes, and documents, highlighting extracts in line with the coding categories I had formulated. Each piece had to be photocopied, and finally re-sorted by those classifications (which altered slightly in response to the evolving data), (see S. Ball 1991).

As mentioned above, case studies have been criticised for being atheoretical, a criticism particularly applicable to some of the home-school literature (see ch.3). Therefore, this project's original aim was to fill the 'space' between these two extremes, by linking studies of local initiatives with wider themes; of citizen participation, and ethnicity, class and gender relations for example. It thus belongs to the 'meso' level of analysis defined by Hargreaves;

> "One very fruitful way of clarifying the macro-micro relationship..would involve undertaking studies in different educational settings and spelling out the links between them...It is a mistake to regard education policy as belonging exclusively to the world of macro theory...policy still has to be negotiated and implemented through interaction..One might reasonably hope to see future research projects based..on processes in two or more linked settings, drawn from such places as classrooms, staff meetings, LEA offices, teachers union branches and so on," (Hargreaves 1985 p.43).

This project set out to describe and analyse these complex processes of interaction and negotiation, both between different levels of the state education system, and between the system and 'outsiders' such as parents.

Critiquing the research process

The preceding argument emphasises the importance of continual reflexivity throughout the research process, to allow for alterations and improvement. However, some considerations only become clear after the empirical work is finished. In that case the value of reflexivity resides in the longer term, in that it can contribute to the planning of the next research project. Applied to my own study, this process has identified several problematic features. These are assessed below, and the reasons for the project taking its particular direction are outlined.

Despite the advantages of critical social research outlined above, this study is not seen as an example of this model. Although the analysis stresses the unequal power relationships between home and school, the constraints surrounding the study were such that the research could not, in Harvey's words, 'do something about it' (1990 p.20). For example, the analysis suggests that developing parents' groups outside the school might be an effective way to address the school's domination. However, for several reasons this was not a feasible direction for the study to pursue. The relationship between participants and the researcher would be difficult to negotiate and much affected by power differentials arising from a range of dimensions including social class and professional status (Ball 1992). Secondly, too close an identification with outside groups might make research access to schools harder to obtain. If this were so, only parents' perspectives would be fully explored. As teachers are the power-holders in most teacher-parent interactions, a focus on parents might seem in keeping with Lather's commitment to the 'underdog'. However, teachers, particularly in primary schools where the workforce is largely female, are also subject to strict controls and limitations on their activities (Zeichner 1990; Seifert 1987). Thirdly, a departure from a traditional research style can prove difficult for a research student, uniquely vulnerable by virtue of status, to the constraints of the "academic mode of production" (Stanley 1990, quoted by Ball 1992). Undertaking a Phd is seen as an 'apprenticeship' to an academic career, a socialization into the 'norms' of the profession,

which by its nature encourages conformity to existing models of research, rather than attempts at innovation.

Altered Plans

A delay of eighteen months in the appointments of the home-school co-ordinators had several results for the study. It significantly curtailed the time available to study the scheme, so that the data was confined to the process of establishing the project in schools. During this time, the Parents' Centre had developed from a possibility into a reality, and I gathered data on its progress. However this approach meant that the study tends to centre on LEA officers and other professionals, and exclude parents and classroom teachers. Thus in the co-ordinator schools most data comes from heads rather than staff. However, this is at least partially justified by the head's key role in implementing change (Ball 1987). Whilst my contact with teachers was slight, I had, regrettably, even less contact with parents. However, by the end of 1991, two co-ordinators had had little opportunity to develop links with parents, thus few would have gained an impression of the project. Similarly, the Parents' Centre data concentrates mostly on the views of the workers, other LEA officers, and several parent volunteers. Access to the views of other parents was limited as they did not start to use the Centre in any number until the later part of the research period. Even then their contact with the workers was limited to particular situations and issues. Too close a collaboration with one particular group in the research field is problematic, especially when that group are the power-holders. However, analyses of local authority initiatives are a somewhat neglected area of empirical home-school research, which has tended to concentrate on parent-teacher relationships in individual schools. Additionally, those reports which do exist are more descriptive than analytical (eg Macleod 1985). As this study stresses the need for a higher level of participation by parents in all levels of the education service, the role of the local state in hindering or encouraging this development is vital. However, had the study concentrated on parental and community perceptions of the nature and

provision of education, this might have identified some avenues to more radical changes in home-school relations.

Researcher-respondent relationships: interviewing.

As described above, many social researchers have sought to avoid creating a hierarchical researcher-respondent relationship, feeling that it narrows the potential for respondent involvement and emancipatory research (Gitlin et al 1989). Efforts to ensure a more equal relationship should therefore pervade all aspects of the relationship, from obtaining access to dissemination, with the interview as the core.

In this context, it is clear that semi-structured interviews have several advantages. They allow respondents to introduce and develop themes important to them, thereby giving them some control over the interview process. They also allow a more natural, conversational style to pervade the encounter. I was able to interview some respondents, mostly LEA personnel, several times; this again tilts the balance in favour of their perceptions and experiences. By contrast, I spoke only once to most parents, although there were two exceptions: a small group (6) at Low Rd and Hill St whom I re-interviewed two terms after my initial visit, and the group of parent governors originally involved in the Parents' Centre's establishment. I also conducted just one interview with councillors, most teachers (an exception being the headteachers at the co-ordinators schools), and members of all other groups.

If a researcher's respect for her participants is to be a determining element of their relationship, this might also encompass recognition of the respondent's right to discontinue the interview. On two or three occasions I spoke to parents who were under such pressure that I abandoned my interview schedule for other topics. One woman told me that a man accused of sexually abusing her daughter was in court on that day. Obviously under those circumstances, asking for her views on curriculum evenings or home reading schemes would have been insensitive in the extreme. Other examples, also served to remind me that for families undergoing financial or emotional problems, liaison with the school comes understandably low on their list of

priorities.

As noted earlier, the nature of the interaction between the researcher and the researched is affected by several variables; gender, class and ethnicity being the dominant three in this study. Although many of my respondents were women, we did not always share the same social class or ethnicity. This was especially likely when respondents were parents, as they were mostly working class and often belonging to a different ethnic group. This disjunction had the potential to affect our relationships, and this can be seen most clearly in the discussion of contentious issues. At one school a black mother told me about an incident involving her son and the class teacher. She felt her son had been treated unfairly but did not volunteer a reason for this until, right at the end of the interview, she suggested that one cause might be the family's adherence to Rastafarianism. I later re-interviewed a close friend of this particular woman. She made it clear that both women felt the teacher was racist in her treatment of the black children in her class, and that they had made this point to the school. Of particular relevance in this context is not the details of this case (see ch.7) but that the first woman was not willing to discuss such a serious matter as racism with a white stranger.

However, allowing respondents a degree of control over the interviewing process can help mitigate this situation. For example, 'race' and racism were also issues in discussions with Bangladeshi women at Low Rd. However, here the women seemed much more ready to share their views, no doubt influenced by the presence of a local female, Bangladeshi interpreter, and the fact that the interviews were conducted in groups, a situation chosen by the women themselves.

It is certainly arguable that the shared exerience of being female caused an initial positive feeling in my relationship with respondents, and that many of them may have felt uneasy discussing their children and home lives with a man. However, gender is not necessarily enough to bridge the gap caused by other differences. Being a white middle class woman without family responsibilities (as I was) suggests a different range of experiences to those of, say, a black working class woman with children.

Another element important in determining relationships between some respondents and myself was my past experience as a teacher in Hackney. This certainly helped my access to schools and provided an initial topic for conversation with staff. Since I shared with many teachers (although by no means all), a similar profile in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender and professional status, I was constantly aware of co-option into a professional viewpoint. The problem for me in this case was not 'going native', but ensuring sufficient detachment to prevent me from uncritically accepting teachers' version of events. This process was eased by the obvious differences within the teaching body in the case-study schools, concerning pedagogy, and definitions of professionalism (see ch.6).

Respondents can also be given control over the interviewing process by being provided with a transcript of the interview on which they can comment. However, for a lone research student the quick production of full transcripts did not seem feasible. However, I did offer transcripts in situations where the respondents voiced particular doubts about the interview. One example of this was the co-ordinator of a black supplementary school. He had been interviewed frequently, and felt his views had often been mis-represented. We agreed that I would send him a transcript of the interview so that he had a chance to comment on it. In this way he was not confined to an entirely passive respondent role.

Dissemination

I found the process of dissemination problematic. I had arranged to provide feedback to Hill St and Low Rd in the form of reports, with summaries for parent-respondents. Each of the short reports commented on different aspects of parental involvement, (open evenings; parent-teacher relationships; views of particular minority group parents etc.), and ended with a list of practical recommendations. They stressed the need for LEA support if a school was to prioritise the development of home-school relations. To avoid giving the impression that staging more school-managed events for parents would automatically develop 'good' home-school relations, the reports also referred to the imbalance of power between parents and teachers.

At Hill St, the headteacher and I discussed the report after I had sent copies to the school. She was positive in her manner, notwithstanding that her main point was that for several organisational reasons the school was unable to implement any of the suggested changes! Several Hill St teachers and parents also showed interest in the reports. At Low Rd however, the reaction from the school management appeared more hostile. The headteacher commented briefly that the document had "seemed like a bad HMI report", but was unwilling to discuss it further. Problems arose again when I had to approach the school for the home addresses of some parents in order to send them summaries. I had previously obtained explicit permission from both headteachers to use their records as a source of parents' addresses. Indeed, I had used the Low Rd records in this way just a few months previously. However this time an embarrassed school secretary informed me that the school was not willing to give out parents' addresses, but that if I left the letters with them, they would send them out via the pupil post. She added, rather desperately, that this would save me the cost of postage. The pupil post is of course unreliable, and at least one of my letters did not reach its intended destination. Nor did the reports appear to reach junior staff.

On reflection, the reports were flawed by their separation of understanding and application (Gitlin et al 1989), as the research findings did not connect with the concerns of the researched. Some respondents apparently experienced feelings of betrayal,· being unprepared for the nature of the research findings (Ball 1984). Stenhouse (1985) warns of the dangers of using inaccessible language, and I had tried to avoid doing so with a fair degree of success. So the main source of my unease was the disjunction between the brief and somewhat bland reports and the much fuller, more critical version I had prepared for this thesis. At Low Rd however, my 'bland' comments had not been perceived as such. It seemed as if my attempts to establish a rapport with respondents had worked against the opportunities I had had to develop an open and egalitarian partnership with them. Punch asks whether fieldwork is "inevitably interactionally deceitful?" (1986 p.71). He suggests that researchers

dissemble, unconsciously or semi-consciously, to gain access to the field and to gather data. This might mean for example that the more controversial implications of a research project are 'played down' with potential respondents, or that an interviewer appears to agree with respondents' views when in fact she does not share them. Punch concludes that this results in elements of covert research in a supposedly overt research project (1986 p.40).

In the circumstances I would argue that, concerning the feedback to the schools, I had few alternatives. Presenting a more detailed sociological analysis, would have required an attempt to persuade respondents that the findings actually focused on the effects of structural limitations not individual ones. I also felt that it was not acceptable for me to present a highly critical report to people working in an already somewhat stressful environment (which both schools were on occasion), without a firm commitment to help them to develop their home-school relations. Without a similar commitment to parents to work with them to turn their criticisms and concerns into action, the reports also had limited impact for them. Yet my own position as a student on a time-limited grant prevented me from making such arrangements.

The question of feedback to the Parents' Centre and the Home-School Co-ordinators raised a related set of problems. Both initiatives involved a study of just a few individuals working within pressurised environments, marked in several cases by inter-personal conflict. Disseminating my findings and threading my way through this complex tangle seemed an almost impossible task. In addition my analysis again drew attention to structural factors which constrained the officers involved and about which there was little individuals could do. To stress such factors might risk lowering morale still further, although the existence of institutional limitations also served to minimise the 'blame' that might appear to be apportioned to individuals. However, preliminary officer responses have been positive.

It seems that the methodology used has more in common with the classic case study tradition than any other model; the opportunities it presented for egalitarian research were limited. Given such a

situation, to what extent is it possible for a researcher to say that she has obtained 'informed consent' from respondents? Burgess (1989a) identifies this as a neglected 'grey area'. He outlines some of the problems involved, commenting that it is often difficult to give firm undertakings of the way in which data will be used, before the researcher knows exactly what data will be collected. Furthermore, negotiating access usually takes place with senior people in the organisation, and consultation with those in more junior positions may well be scanty. On arrival at both Hill St and Low Rd I found that members of staff knew little about my proposed role in the school. Similarly, the co-ordinators and the Parent Centre workers came into their posts to find that I already had the agreement of their line management to study their work. Although they were always welcoming, it would seem inaccurate to say that their consent was given in an entirely free way.

In addition, as I cultivated a non-threatening personna it is possible that people accepted my presence without thinking through potential difficulties. Quite often my attempts to explain how I would safeguard people's precise identities were brushed away with the comment 'I have nothing to hide'. However, the reaction of the headteacher at Low Rd shows that some respondents could not maintain this initial openness.

There is no definitive answer to these situations, although identifying them as problematic is a first step towards a solution. Punch (1986) concludes that a certain amount of 'impression management' is common to all social relationships, and that as it is often employed by the respondent as well as the researcher, this is tolerable in a researcher-respondent relationship. He deems it unacceptable if a researcher dissembles in order to consciously manipulate the interviewee to his/her disadvantage. Certainly, conducting this research has brought home to me the importance of dissemination. It is obviously difficult, at an early stage in the project, to arrange the final format in which data will be disseminated. However, an initial agreement between researcher and participants on this issue is helpful in order to establish clear expectations on both sides.

Conclusion.

This chapter has briefly reviewed the case study paradigm and some of the most common criticisms levelled at it. It concludes that they are far from proven. Case study research can provide detailed data concerning a small number of cases, and link this empirical research with an elaboration of theory. Critical social research has been particularly valuable in furthering the debate about researcher-respondent relationships, stressing the political nature of research, and emphasising its potential to effect change. This particular study is more modest in its aims and outcome. However, this chapter stresses the importance of reflexivity, both for aiding the process of analysis and also for gathering valuable lessons to apply to future projects.

As concluded above, this research was conducted within a modified version of a classic case study tradition. Particular attention is paid to researcher effects on the field site and in interviewing situations. Although the data analysis is still that of the researcher alone, the concentration on researcher-respondent relationships ensured participants had some control over the style and organisation of the interview. The process of dissemination is seen as particularly problematic in the context of this study. In future studies this could be mitigated by all research participants agreeing at an early stage on the form of the dissemination. This chapter concludes that no one methodology can offer a complete solution to all the possible pitfalls integral to empirical research. However, critical social research has done much to bring ethical issues to centre stage. As Burgess concludes, "a review of ethical problems and dilemmas should be at the heart of reflexive practice by those ethnographers who are working in the field," (1989a p.74).

Chapter Four: Footnotes

[1] This traditional view of a researcher-respondent role has been challenged by Oakley (1981) as being a male-constructed and dominated research paradigm.

[2] Hill St and Low Rd had no particular home-school policies.

[3] The remainder of this chapter provides a reflexive account of the research process. Therefore use of the first person pronoun seems appropriate.

[4] Van Maanen (1981) defines 'presentational data' as,

> "those appearances that informants strive to maintain in the eyes of...outsiders...Data in this category deals far more with the manufactured image of idealised doings than with the on-going practical activities actually engaged in by the members of the group," (cited in Loveland 1988 p.206).

In contrast, operational data "documents the running stream of spontaneous ..activities..observed by the ethnographer while in the field," (ibid).

An example of this was the parent governor surgeries at Hill St which the headteacher initially presented as very successful. However, when I talked to other respondents, I soon found out that no parents had visited the surgeries.

[5] Respondents not familiar with the intricacies of academic hierarchies would probably have focused on the link with a university which they may have found alienating.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY: A PORTRAIT

Introduction

This chapter examines the social, economic, and political characteristics of the fieldwork site, the London Borough of Hackney. In so doing it provides a context in which to set data from the following case-studies of the schools and the Parents' Centre. This chapter looks first at the borough as a whole, and focuses on the council, and in particular the Education Directorate. It describes the difficulties faced by the young education authority and identifies contributory factors in the local, and in particular, the national scenes. One such factor was the tight financial restrictions imposed by central government, which severely limited the authority's ability to either avoid or address several problems.

The London Borough of Hackney

> "[TV documentaries suggest] that this section of the East End is riddled with police corruption, invaded by militant squatters, plagued by rats and infested with cockroaches...It is the poorest borough in Britain, with the highest level of street crime..." (Independent 24/4/92)

> "...One of two or three contenders for the Most Deprived Borough in Britain," (Harrison 1983 p.32).

> "In Hackney even the cockroaches are scrawny..." (Guardian 19/3/91).

As the quotations suggest, Hackney's popular image is of an area with multiple social and economic problems. Media portrayals concentrate on dramatic and negative facets of life in the locality, frequently presenting it as depressed and forlorn; the archetypal inner city, fostering every kind of social, economic and psychological problem (Harrison 1983; Wright 1991). Although this is by no means the entire picture, statistical evidence does corroborate the extent of the

difficulties faced by some residents. Five of Hackney's wards are amongst the twenty most impoverished in London. In June 1991, the unemployment rate was 18.3%; the highest of all inner London boroughs, and nearly four times that of a prosperous outer London borough like Kingston [1]. Hackney's population is largely working class, although recent years have seen the influx of middle-class residents, as gentrification has spread. However, the majority of the population live in council housing. Despite frequent large-scale renovations much of this is poor in quality. In 1988, nearly 30% of the council's housing provision was in an 'unsatisfactory' condition (LBH 1989a p.75).

A low standard housing stock has been an enduring weakness in Hackney (Harrison 1983). Its genesis can be traced back to the first half of the nineteenth century, the borough's most rapid period of development, as the population quadrupled (Harrison 1983 p.39). In response, housing was quickly erected, but much of it was poor in quality. The same pattern of quick but flawed redevelopment was repeated after World War II, and 85% of current council stock was built post-1945 (LBH 1989a p.74). Ironically these attempts to replace dilapidated Victorian housing resulted in the construction of some of the borough's most serious high-density 'problem' estates.

Another long standing key to Hackney's decline is the nature and fortunes of the area's traditional industry, the rag trade. Still an important source of employment today, this industry is characterised by fluctuating patterns of work, low pay, a multiplicity of small employers, and an easily exploited workforce consisting largely of immigrants and women (LBH 1989a p.65). Foreign competition has also greatly reduced the size of the industry in recent years.

Central government attempts to address poverty in Hackney have been spasmodic and varied, reflecting influential ideologies of the time. Early this century, municipal initiatives sought to establish public amenities and to clear the slums (LBH 1989a p.3). In the 1990s, the individualistic ideology of the New Right meant that inner city areas competed to 'win' central government funding. In 1992, Hackney was successful, and gained £37m in 'City Challenge' funding.

Hackney's population

London's East End with its cheap housing and opportunities for casual work, has always attracted immigrants with few options open to them. In the 1950s and 1960s, earlier Jewish immigrants were leaving Hackney, and their places were taken by a new population, particularly from the Caribbean. Hackney's population remains ethnically diverse. Just over half of the borough's residents are of English, Scottish or Welsh origin (LBH 1989a p.35). 1991 figures show that nearly 16% of the population were of Caribbean origin, over 50% of the total black and ethnic minority population [1]. Recent years have also seen an increase in the number of residents originally from Bangladesh, and Turkish/Kurdish-speaking areas of the Mediterranean and Middle East. The borough's overall population is slowly stabilising after sharp falls in the post-war period. It is now a predominantly young population; in 1987 nearly 50% of residents were under the age of 30 (LBH 1989a p.23)

Popular portrayals of the inner city tend to blur the distinction between an economically impoverished environment and a morally impoverished population (Murray 1989). Thus inner city areas and their residents are seen as synonomous with a breakdown in law and order and family cohesion. The former characteristic may be influenced by the criminalisation of black youth in the popular imagination (Keith & Murji 1990). Hackney's long history as a poor working class area has also contributed to its negative image. Golding & Middleton describe how public attitudes to poverty, fostered partly by the media, view the poor as inadequate, seeing their situation as the result of individual misfortune or blame, thus rendering "invisible..structural poverty," (1982 p.239-40). This phenomenon is further discussed in relation to the case studies (chs.6 & 7).

Hackney Council

Hackney has a long history of being a Labour controlled area with a strong activist labour movement (New Statesman & Society 8/3/91). The Council remains Labour dominated; in June 1992 there were 45 Labour councillors, 8 Conservatives, 6 Liberal Democrats, and 2 Independent

members. However, the ideologies of those in the ruling group have altered dramatically since the early 1980s. By the late 1970s left-wing activists were taking control of Labour branches in London. They were a heterogeneous grouping, who shared concern over previously submerged issues such as racism and sexism, and were determined to respond assertively to the New Right's rise in mainstream politics. They criticised traditional Labour policies as being paternalistic, and unrepresentative of the increasingly heterogeneous urban populations (Lansley et al 1989). In 1982, this loose alliance gained control of several London councils including Hackney (Lansley et al 1989 p.28). These new urban left councils were committed to collectivist policies and high-profile equal opportunity initiatives. For example, Hackney made largely successful attempts to increase its own black and ethnic minority workforce to levels that reflected the local population (Ouseley 1990).

The new urban left councils experienced common problems. The tabloid press quickly labelled their policies and activities 'loony' (Jenkins 1987). One false, but notorious story concerned the supposed banning by Hackney Council of the nursery rhyme,'Baa, Baa Black Sheep' because it had racist overtones (Lansley et al 1989 p.128). In addition, new urban left councils were affected by a 'crisis of roles'. Activists believed in greater political direction of administrators by members. The potential of a committed officer workforce in implementing radical policies was clear to members, but less appealing to some officers who clung to traditional local government ideals of (apparent) neutrality and professionalism . There was also a conflict of interest with the trade unions, stemming from the Left's expectations that the unions would work with them in campaigns against central government, rather than against them in support of their own union members (Lansley et al 1989 p.111). The impact of these issues in Hackney is explored below.

In the same period, new urban left authorities were also struggling with central government's suspicion of an autonomous, politically active local state. The key to control for central government proved to be successive moves during the 1980s to curb local state spending. The Conservatives introduced rate capping in

1983; a move which provoked a fundamental split in the Labour Left, between those who believed in confronting central government by refusing to set a rate, and those who supported setting a rate but manipulating their finances through deficit budgeting (Lansley et al 1989 p.37-8). Hackney was capped and finally set a legal rate in 1985, causing the Labour leader to resign. Creative accountancy kept Hackney and other councils temporarily buoyant, but obviously had a limited lifespan. The introduction of the poll tax in 1990 further constrained the financial autonomy of local authorities [2]. By the late 1980s, the splits amongst Labour activists, the lack of support from the national party and the determination of the Conservative government to impose its will, led to a change in climate in Hackney and other Labour councils. The 'new realism' stressed service delivery, efficiency, and accountability (Lansley et al 1989 p.195; Jones 1989; Epstein 1993). Talking about the era of new urban left dominance, the present council leader, John McCafferty commented,

> "The basic mistake was not integrating our political perspectives
> with our responsibility to deliver services. I've never believed
> efficiency is incompatible with socialism," (New Statesman &
> Society 8/3/91 p.19).

However, during 1991, there were several blows to the Council's attempts to establish a reputation as efficient and effective. The first was the accusations of fraud and corruption amongst council officers (Time Out 23/10/91; Hackney Gazette 25/10/91). The most serious of these was the 'cash for keys' scandal in the housing department, where staff were accused of sub-letting properties for cash [3].

Dissent within the Labour group was also a feature of the latter half of 1991. Several councillors resigned, accusing the leadership of appropriating decision-making power, and displaying racist and sexist attitudes. With such a numerically dominant majority, committee and full council debates were unlikely to produce any changes in the policy approved by the Labour Group. The only real threat to this process of rubber stamping was an internal split such as this. However, in the event the rebellion remained small, and although a by-election caused by one of the resignations saw a marked decline in

Labour support, the party held the ward, and the leadership maintained control of the party without prolonged difficulty.

These internal problems combined to produce a phenomenon known as the 'Hackney Factor'. Councillors acknowleged this as a widespread loss of faith in the Council amongst its electorate. However, the borough's difficulties must be placed within a local and national context. As the statistics show, Hackney Council provides services for a large inner-city area which suffers severely from unemployment, poverty, and a crumbling housing stock (LBH 1989a p.78). Furthermore central government's intolerance of political pluralism, and the corresponding financial constraints had a demoralising effect upon many local authorities. Gyford comments,

> "In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising if crisis management becomes the norm...long term planning appears futile, and sheer survival replaces a commitment to service delivery and innovation," (Gyford et al 1989 p.98).

The Establishment of Hackney Education Directorate.

"At least we'll get this right," [4]

This section considers the establishment of Hackney's Education Directorate, the relationships between the various parties involved (officers, members, the teaching unions, and a parents' action group), and lastly, the events of the LEA's first twenty months.

Until April 1990, education services in Hackney were managed by the ILEA. The Authority had developed along similar ideological lines to many Labour Left councils, and was equally unpopular with the Thatcher Governments of the 1980s. Under Frances Morell's leadership, high profile initiativies were introduced in an attempt to combat racism and sexism (ILEA 1983). However, as the fortunes of the new urban left in the capital declined, the more moderate Neil Fletcher took over at County Hall (for a critique of Fletcher's policies, see Jones 1989 p.151-157). One of the features of his period in office relevant to later events in Hackney, was the deterioration in the

relationship between County Hall and the local branch of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), the Inner London Teachers' Association (ILTA). Despite the ILEA's new-found moderation, it was still vulnerable to government accusations of bureaucracy, extravagance, and inefficiency. The 1987 Education Reform Bill proposed that the inner London boroughs should be allowed to opt-out and run their own education services. However an amendment provided for the out-right abolition of the ILEA, and the transfer of all its services to the boroughs by April 1990. Paradoxically, several of the boroughs, including Hackney, were regarded by the Government and the tabloids as just as 'loony' as the ILEA. Hackney, like other Labour boroughs, displayed little enthusiasm for the transfer. The ILEA had redistributed finances from richer boroughs like Westminster towards poorer boroughs like Hackney and Tower Hamlets; the latter were uncertain about their financial capacity to cope, particularly with the poll tax providing an added question mark over local government finance. However, when it became obvious that abolition was certain the boroughs' reluctance dissipated somewhat. In fact, the relationships between them were marked by an element of competition rather than co-operation (TES 27/1/89; ILEA 1989b).

Each borough had to produce an Education Development Plan (EDP) by February 1989. Hackney's EDP was produced after what was acknowledged and praised by those involved as very wide-scale consultation. This process included a survey on the views of black and ethnic minority parents (Focus Consultancy 1988). The EDP's early themes were equal opportunities, under-5s education, special needs, parental involvement, the educational needs of black and ethnic minority populations, and the establishment of a community college. The report's tone, however, tends more towards description than prescription [5]. The LEA's slogan emphasised its commitment to both "Equality and Excellence".

Gus John was appointed as Hackney's Director of Education. His previous ILEA post for community education and his personal involvement in the Black Parents' movement meant he supported the borough's plans for increased 'partnership' in the educational process. Funding fears remained. The Government provided transition

grants, but conditions are expected to worsen when these expire in the mid 1990s. The uncertain financial future was acknowledged early on as a potential barrier to many of Hackney's plans (LBH 1989b p.7).

Officer-member relationships

Before moving onto specific events, this section considers the general issue of officer-member relationships, and how these might have affected policy formation. All such conclusions must necessarily be tentative as the administrative culture was not the main focus of this study. Hill (1972), in his critique of public administration, identifies two models of politician/officer relationships. The first, *administrative politics* identifies officers as the main source of power, able to devise and implement policy. Members are seen as very reliant on officers, allowing the latter to encourage councillors to share their values and objectives. The second model, *ideological politics* derives from increased political polarisation in local government. In this case, both officers and members formulate and implement policies, but initiatives come primarily from members and new officer recruits tend to share the majority group's ideological sympathies. Such politically sensitive recruitment should, in theory, by-pass any officer-member antagonism. In some cases officers could be resentful of councillor 'interference' in their professional domain, and councillors, in their turn frustrated by the administrators' control over the political agenda (Loveland 1987). However, self-selection by officers appears increasingly common. Cross & Mallen (1987) point out that chief officers, once traditionally 'career officals', are now more likely to apply to an authority whose policy direction they support (also Gyford et al 1989 p.155-56). The Education Director in Hackney is an example of this, as can be inferred from his past employment history. A Hackney councillor described appointments to the Education Department thus;

> "[Party political input] is reflected in the job descriptions drawn up for officers. It would be inconceivable I think for a Thatcherite Tory to get a post, not because one discriminates on the grounds of politics, but because one knows what one wants – in terms of equal opportunities, for instance, and community education, the two pivotal things," (senior Labour councillor).

Councillors on the Education Committee felt that members could rely on officers to proceed without much intervention by themselves.

> "There was a relatively high level of political direction which was provided initially through the Education Development Plan and acts now as parameters or main channels of that direction...The political direction is no longer as great as it was because...what happens now are slight adjustments to that course depending on various constraints and limitations," (senior Labour councillor).

The meaning of this passage is somewhat ambiguous when one considers that the EDP was itself drawn up by officers; the amount of direct member input was difficult to ascertain but seemed slight. Certainly senior officers, whilst agreeing to the self-selection theory, attributed their relative autonomy to their professional knowledge, which councillors did not share.

> "The borough, whatever else it was good at, knew very little about education when it took over...the members depended quite heavily on the level of organisational competence officers could bring...When one considers the sort of policy documents I put through the Committee in the early days...we [officers] have had an enormous amount of political support, and been given quite a lot of space," (Director of Education).

Hackney Education Directorate appears to exemplify a variant of the 'ideological politics' model, which is both more diluted and more established than the ideal type. Firstly, Hackney's long history as a Labour controlled borough, and recent past as a left-wing council means that members could, by the time the Education Directorate was established, depend on its senior officers being in broad ideological sympathy with the majority group. The ideal type is somewhat diluted by the less radical attitude of the current majority group. The new emphasis on service delivery within budgetary limits leads officers and members to share a common preoccupation: maintaining provision within the current financial confines. In order to achieve this members have to rely heavily on officers' professional expertise. An Opposition councillor commented,

> "There's far too much political direction from the councillors, I think, [although] the boot may be on the other foot now as the officers have to stick to very tight financial guidelines and are

giving the councillors very few choices," (Conservative councillor).

Thus, it appears that there was no great tension between LEA officers and members, thereby enabling both parties to present a united front against their critics.

The Education Directorate: site of struggle, April 1990-December 1991. Among the events of the first twenty months, two persistent themes emerge. One was the effect of financial constraints, and the other the relationship between the Directorate and the teaching unions. The combination of these forces often placed the Directorate in a defensive, reactive mode, restricting the time or energy left for innovation.

As stated earlier, adequate financing had been a concern since the initial proposal for the ILEA's abolition. Dissent over the very first budget during the period leading up to transfer set the tone for future committee meetings. Thus one shadow education committee meeting (Feb. 1990) was dominated by acrimonious discussions of whether or not initiatives, suggested as possibilities in the EDP but which could not be implemented inside the majority group's cash limited target, could be defined as 'cuts' or not. Union leaders claimed that money that should be spent on education was appropriated to support other directorates, although this was consistently denied by Labour members.

The 1990-1 and the 1991-2 budget both came close to overspending and considerable cuts had to be made. The price of school meals rose, voluntary redundancy and early retirement packages were introduced to cut staff numbers. Building maintenance budgets were reduced, supply budgets cut, and pupil-teacher ratios rose. Hackney's first year in charge of education ended with a (temporary) recruitment 'freeze' of school staff. It must be emphasised that Hackney was not the only council to act in this way. Camden, Lambeth, Lewisham and Tower Hamlets amongst others, all took measures to limit their budgets.

The second persistent theme of the Directorate's first year was the negative relationships between the officers, Labour councillors, and members of the largest teaching union, the Hackney Teachers' Association (HTA) [6]. From the start the relationship was not

straightforward. The HTA leadership had been active in ILTA during the teachers' strikes of 1984-7. The assertive attitude of the larger trade union was itself 'credited' by some commentators as contributing to the ILEA's downfall (Blackstone & Hunter 1988). As many Hackney staff were former ILEA employees, some mutual suspicion was undoubtedly present from the outset. In addition, the Hackney branch was considered one of the more militant in ILTA.

> "There's been a shift away from the happy days of trade union power at the Town Hall, and more emphasis on service delivery, so inevitably there's going to be conflict. But we don't have such bad relations with NALGO or NATFE, or NUPE. It is only the NUT. ILTA itself saw the Hackney NUT as beyond the pale," (senior Labour councillor).

Union-Directorate differences revolved around two issues. Firstly, the union supported a 'no-cuts' position at odds with the councillor's 'new realism'. Secondly there was conflict over the status of the union representatives. One union member gave the following example.

> "We refused to have parity with parents [during consultation] on the community college. We didn't think it was appropriate. There should be a level of in-house consultation before it goes out to the consumers. The unions were put down a level there, downgraded to consumers when we are employees," (HTA officer)

This implies the existence of a power structure with parents at the lowest level. Unsurprisingly, the HTA's primary, perhaps exclusive concern was as a trade union, to protect their members' interests. They employed highly visible means to do so - Education Committee meetings were often picketed, handouts distributed, and the HTA helped to mobilise several parental protests. There were even a few examples of 'marriages of convenience' between left-wing union officials and Conservative councillors. The HTA representatives were certainly an irritant for the ruling group. Their apparent unwillingness to compromise (or give in to the majority groups' ruinous plans depending on one's position) led the Labour councillors to constrain them as much as possible. The DES Circular 4/90 (DES 1990) which limited the number and status of co-opted members on education committees, gave the majority group the opportunity to heavily curb teacher union

representation. Personal differences between various HTA members, officers and councillors worsened and prolonged disagreements. Officers and members accused the union leadership of trying to obtain personal power.

> "HTA is dominated by a few individuals who I personally have very little time for. I don't believe they are representative of the teaching mass in Hackney..When push comes to shove, we are the people who have had crosses put against our names..and we will take the decisions ultimately. If that means upsetting the teachers, so be it," (Labour councillor).

> "[The HTA slogan is] "We want more money, we want more time, we want more consultation, why don't you let us run the system?" (officer)

The unions accused the councillors of incompetence and corruption.

> "Lies, Damn lies and Hackney council press releases...The Council have demonstrated a crass arrogance more akin to Caucescu just before his fall than an education authority!" (HTA newsletter to members 25/6/91).

This situation persists. As recently as the summer of 1992, the Council and the HTA were buying space in the local paper to attack each other.

Key members of the HTA responded to their marginalisation from the Committee by concentrating on alternative fora, such as the parent governors' group, and a teacher-parent action group, Save Hackney's Education Services (SHES).

Parents, unions and the LEA

SHES was another contested issue between the union and the council. Established in response to the ILEA's threatened abolition, it was conceived as a forum from which parents, teachers and governors could lobby to protect and improve Hackney's education service. During 1991, it remained small but vocal. It had considerable problems in establishing its credibility with the Directorate, being seen by officers and most councillors as an unrepresentative group dominated by the HTA. The union and key SHES members denied this. Certainly HTA members initially played an important organisational role, but during 1991 they were replaced by a group of parents, all women. By 1992, the

executive members were all non-HTA parents. However, the SHES leadership (although not necessarily the wider membership) remained highly supportive of the teachers. In one sense, the close relationship between SHES and the HTA was inevitable as the union provided SHES with support and information about the LEA (information which was often criticised by the Directorate as inaccurate). SHES's position was that ideally cuts to the education budget should be completely avoided, but if absolutely necessary the savings should come from the central administration budget. This position was close to that of the HTA, so SHES acted to lend added (and to the LEA spurious) legitimacy to the union's claims. In view of SHES' lack of compunction about publicly criticising the Council, it was treated by the LEA with the upmost suspicion (see ch.9). The reasons behind the authority's wariness can be further explored by comparing SHES with voluntary groups in Newton's (1976) Birmingham study. He identifies the characteristics of successful pressure groups, concluding that their members utilise their informal contacts with officers rather than councillors; they aim for piecemeal changes rather than general policy change, and are not militant in stance, politicised, or highly visible. SHES however, aimed to be extremely high profile. Its members worked within the political arena; not establishing and sustaining informal links with officer, but lobbying and leafleting councillors, and attracting publicity for their cause. Many of SHES's key members were white middle-class women, in some cases members of the Labour Party. They might be expected to have considerable affinity with the councillors in terms of social class and broad ideological commitment. However, Cross & Mallen comment that "in general, [pressure] groups are only going to be successful if their objectives fit within the objectives of the local majority group," (1987 p.142).

The bond between the HTA and SHES was strengthened by the emphasis of leading HTA members on the value they placed on parental and community involvement in education. Ironically the HTA leadership and the Director of Education expressed their support for parental participation in similar terms. They both claimed to support independent parental organisations, and parental participation in the

management of education. However, an HTA officer emphasised the potential of parent-teacher relationships,

"...a model of parental involvement where the parents have been involved in everything, and are quite confident to lead on a lot of questions...When it actually works, it's because the teachers are committed to that..Every LEA hates it..because of the alliance between teachers and parents, and the organic position, especially from the working class point of view. There's nothing to distingush them [working class parents] from teachers. They know that if there isn't the resources in the school, then their kids aren't going to get as good an education."

The Director however emphasised the potential of parental organisation outside the school (see chs.8 & 9), seeing this as the only way parents, particularly ethnic minority parents, can make their own voices heard, independently from the patronage of education workers.

"I have attended a range of open days organised by community education projects, and..you would find a dinky cold hall packed with parents all very keen on discussing education, looking at their children's achievement within the community provision they support, articulating the other things they would like to see, and being quite willing to be part of the management committee."

He contrasts this with the situation he finds in Hackney.

"Everytime I go to a gathering of parents - meetings of the parent governors group, or a meeting [of the governors] at Westdown school in relation to the parental participation project which they have just ejected [see ch.8], or deputations to the Education Committee - I am constantly confronted by groupings of white, middle class people. Some 63% plus of students in Hackney schools are black or Turkish or whatever..Those people who are traditionally disadvantaged, who the system fails most spectacularly are precisely the ones around which least advocacy is done. Quite often you find white teachers who are parents or white parents who are middle class and share the same interests as teachers articulating their case in a very sophisticated manner."

These themes - the effect of social class and ethnicity on parent-teacher alliances - are returned to in later chapters.

Events: April 1990 to December 1991.
In its first twenty months as a LEA, Hackney operated against a background of constant uncertainty and change. Several elements at

both national and local level contributed to this. National factors included, firstly, problems with collecting local revenue, as rates of Poll Tax non-payment were high in Hackney (see footnote 2). Secondly, the changes from the 1988 Education Reform Act were in the early days of implementation, putting the borough's teaching staff in particular under severe pressure, and arguably lowering the levels of tolerance they showed their new employers. A significant amount of headteacher and administrator time was also taken up by preparations for Local Management of Schools (LMS) due to be phased in by April 1994. This section focuses on three main events: teacher shortage, problems with payroll, and the publication of an HMI report.

During this time teacher shortage was a severe problem throughout the south-east, and especially in East London. DES figures for January 1990 showed that Hackney had the second-highest vacancy rate in England at 12.5%, beaten only by Newham at 13% (The Independent 18/7/90). During 1991 the situation eased slightly, reflecting London's depressed housing market, and also the incentive packages to attract new recruits that all the London boroughs now offered (TES 5/7/91).

However, in Hackney and some other boroughs, by the end of the summer term 1991, success in recruitment and retention had combined with an estimated overspend on the staffing budget. A staff census, finally completed in 1991 showed that there were more teachers than the ILEA had estimated on transfer, and indeed more than the number of authorised staffing posts. Thus just a year after an extensive recruitment drive, the Director was talking of how schools could be "helped to a clearer view of their staffing and over-staffing" (Committee Meeting 23/7/91). The borough had more teachers than it could afford.

The teacher shortage, although a regional phenomenon, did not help to boost the image of the new Directorate with parents. During the same period, the LEA's reputation was affected by an internal event - the payroll fiasco. The borough had decided not to accept the help of the London Residuary Body with payroll. Delays in completing the staff census meant that officers were working with ILEA data, which subsequently proved out-of-date. As a result teachers and

education workers were not paid properly for several months after transfer. In some cases ancillary workers, mainly low-paid, part-time, female workers were not paid at all for several weeks. Afterwards, neither councillors nor senior officers could defend the situation, nor deny its adverse impact upon Directorate morale and confidence among education workers and parents.

"Payroll undermined, seriously undermined, two years hard work building up morale and confidence in the schools. To begin with, when ILEA Abolition was announced, everyone in the borough thought 'Oh Christ, this is the end!' Then we worked and worked, did all the consultation, went to see everyone and so on, people began to feel better and optimistic that perhaps we could do better than the ILEA. Then payroll came and plunged everyone into despair," (officer) [7].

Problems with payroll were at their height during the summer term 1990. At the end of that same term a critical HMI report, "Schools in Hackney: Some Issues", was published. In the primary sector HMI had visited 73% of the borough's schools and witnessed nearly 400 lessons. They judged 42% to be unsatisfactory, (compared with a national average of 30%), with a similar percentage in the secondary sector. The report acknowledges the poverty of many Hackney residents, and the severe teacher shortage as mitigating factors (HMI 1990 p.11), but all areas of educational provision received criticism (p.3-4).

The press interest was marked and stories appeared under sensational titles such as "Pupils run riot in Hackney's school chaos" (Daily Telegraph 18/7/90) and "Scandal of Britain's school disaster area" (Daily Express 18/7/90) [8]. The HMI's inspection took place before Hackney became an LEA, and the new authority is praised as being "determined to tackle the problems and to establish its priorities urgently," (HMI 1990 p.1).

Officers compiled a twelve point Action Plan, covering all aspects of school life. It also endorsed HMI's comments that improvement will be generated most effectively by an active partnership between the LEA, the schools, the unions, central government, parents and the local community (LBH 1990 p.2). This was ironic given the disputes between interest groups which marked the

Plan's passage through Committee. Teachers, parents, and opposition councillors accused the majority group of stifling debate. The chair denied this, but commented that the Committee's role was not to put forward "detailed amendments", but instead "to discuss in general terms this excellent plan" (Committee Meeting, July 1991). Later, the chair commented,

> "We employ people at relatively large salaries to run the education service, and if HMI says there's something wrong..I don't think you can swan around getting the views of people on the streets. We employ professionals to put things right. Just as one wouldn't expect councillors or parents to inspect schools [9] and do reports on them, neither would one expect lay people to say how to put things right."

However, the next chair of education was concerned to allow - or at least give the appearance of allowing (see p.8-9 above) - parents and other groups a voice with which to influence formal decision-making procedures. A forum, to be known as Hackney Education Partnership (HEP), was proposed. Its membership was to be wide-ranging, and include community group representatives and parents. However, by the end of the research period, its exact role remained unclear (see ch.9).

Conclusion

During its first twenty months as an education authority, Hackney LEA was beset by a number of local problems. These included instances of administrative shortcomings, fierce acrimony between the LEA and its employee's largest trade union, and a particularly severe teacher recruitment and retention problem. However, the LEA's ability to address these difficulties was constrained by national factors. These included the decrease in the amount of central government money given to the Council in general, and the Education Directorate in particular; a nationally imposed and unpopular form of taxation; the changes to the school system caused by the 1988 ERA; and the widespread teacher shortage. Limited finances had a profound effect upon education policy and planning. For instance, in order for Hackney's budget to remain within cash limits, increases in the

percentage spent on staffing (which were necessary to attract more staff) had to be balanced by cuts in the grants to youth and community groups (Committee Meeting, July 1991). Initiatives in the EDP, such as cutting pupil-teacher ratios, were postponed due to regular budget difficulties. Even the instances of maladministration were often exacerbated by understaffing. Thus the LEA faced the fundamental difficulty of trying to deliver sketchily-resourced services in an area of economic deprivation. Recruitment freezes, a lack of permanent and supply teachers, and dilapidated buildings did nothing to raise the morale of Hackney's teachers, or administrators, nor increase parental confidence in the LEA.

The primary concern of senior officers and members was to maintain as much of the service as possible within current financial limits. They were criticised, by the HTA amongst others, for not contesting those limits with central government. However, as the earlier sections of this chapter describe, the Labour Left no longer saw such action as appropriate. This meant that attempts, such as HEP, to involve parents more closely in the management and organisation of the education service appeared to be designed to give parents information and win their support for Directorate decisions, rather than mobilise parents to campaign on Hackney's behalf to central government.

Local government services are slowly emerging from over a decade of intense financial pressure and ideological hostility. The climate is perhaps slightly more favourable on an ideological level since the change of Prime Minister, but no less financially hostile. In these circumstances, Hackney sometimes gives the appearance of being trapped in a downward spiral caused by the need to undertake constant exercises in damage limitation. Its first twenty months appear to have been largely marked by crisis management rather than innovation and forward planning. Stability of funding could ameliorate this situation. Unfortunately, as the government's transition grant expires during the next few years, Hackney will be forced to continue trying to maintain a service within ever tighter cash restrictions.

Chapter Five: Footnotes

[1] These are internal, unpublished statistics from Hackney Council.

[2] Department of Environment figures (Hackney Gazette 12/6/92), showed that by this date Hackney Council had collected only 52.8% of the total poll tax for 1991-2.

[3] The Housing Department had been at the centre of controversy before, when the CRE had found it guilty of racial discrimination (CRE 1984). The Council responded with a successful programme of action (HCRE 1989).

[4] A Conservative councillor suggested that this was the view of the majority group as the Council took control of local education services.

[5] Westminster's EDP (Westminster Council 1989) for instance, is much clearer in its proposals for change, although it has other flaws. Its model of community languages was criticised by the ILEA for its racist overtones (TES 6/1/89).

[6] The HTA (the local branch of the NUT) was the largest and most active of the teaching unions in Hackney. However there were several occasions when joint action was taken with the other teaching unions.

[7] In fact the council enquiry into payroll laid most of the blame at the door of the Finance Directorate, rather than Education, although the report also criticised poor planning and inadequate staffing and communication in both sections (Hackney Gazette 18/1/91).

[8] The Director felt that Hackney attracted a disproportionate amount of negative press attention, and indeed a review of the newspaper coverage during 1990-1992 does suggest some justification for his view.

[9] The Chair made these remarks before the Government's plan to introduce lay inspectors.

CHAPTER SIX

HILL STREET AND LOW ROAD SCHOOLS:
THE TEACHERS' VIEW.

Introduction

The next two chapters explore parent-teacher relationships in two Hackney primary schools. This chapter has three main parts. The first consists of introductory information about the schools, their populations, and existing forms of parental involvement. It also introduces the organising concept for these two chapters: that the school 'community' comprises several fragmented social groups. The remainder of this chapter and chapter 7 develop this theme. The second and third parts of the chapter examine parent-teacher relationships, using data drawn mainly from interviews with teachers. Thus part two explores teacher definitions of the 'good parent'. Part three concentrates on relationships between teaching staff, in order to assess the degree of professional unity within each staff group and the priority given to home-school issues.

Hill St & Low Rd Schools

Hill Street School was a squat, brick building, occupying a large concrete site. The main playground displayed recent attempts at beautification with small trees, raised flowerbeds and benches. However the building itself needed decoration and repair [1]. Inside there was no central area or reception to provide a focus. Each storey had a main artery, a long gloomy corridor that ran the length of the building. Classrooms, relatively well-sized and well-lit areas, were spaced out along the corridors. The staff had tried to ease the building's severity with plants and attractive displays of children's work, but deficiencies in design and maintenance remained.

The school roll started at 311 in 1990-91, and was rising. Over half the children had English as their second language, speaking 18 different languages between them. The largest group spoke Gujerati.

Many of these children were Muslim and their families were well established in the area. By contrast, the second most common language was Turkish, spoken by recent immigrants. Nearly half the children received free school meals, and 41% of families had no wage earner at home. The second largest occupational group (29%) had semi or unskilled manual jobs [2].

The head, Jane Horton, (all names are pseudonyms) had been in post two years. It was her first headship. The school had 15 full-time teachers. One staff member, Ms. Raju, had formal responsibility for home-school relations, but another, Ms Tsongas, who had a senior post for equal opportunities, was more closely involved in many home-school events.

Low Road School was a Victorian building. Spacious but now increasingly shabby, such three-decker buildings can be seen all over the borough, physically dominating the surounding houses. Indeed Victorian public buildings were designed to emphasise the might of Education (schools), Health (hospitals) or the Law (prisons) (Grace 1978). However, Low Road was partially obscured by blocks of council flats. Access to the main entrance was down an alleyway. It was a large building, set, like Hill St, in concrete-clad grounds with a small grass area in the playground. The interior was remodelled in 1976, and had plenty of space for extra-curricular activities. Attractive displays of children's work brightened the corridors. The school also housed a self-contained nursery and a special needs class, the latter catering for pre-school and infant children.

During the school year 1990-1, the roll exceeded 400 children and looked likely to keep rising. Nearly 70% of the children were eligible for free school meals and 56% came from families with no wage earner. Nearly 30% of the school's population were Bangladeshi. Over 40% of the children spoke English as a second language, with Sylheti, a Bangladeshi dialect being the most common [2]. The head had an explicit open-access policy, so Low Road received children whose behaviour had proved too disruptive for other schools.

Jennifer Court had been headteacher for six years. When fully-staffed the school had 19 full-time teachers. During the research

period there were two classes closed from lack of teachers, and vacancies for bilingual support staff. Five teachers, including two on temporary contracts, were new to the school.

Forms of parental involvement - Hill St.

Ostensibly, there appeared to be many opportunities for parents to involve themselves with the school. However, closer examination suggested that some structures were ineffective, whilst others, like the parents' group, operated only within a particular sphere, and involved just a small group of parents.

1) The Parents' Association (PA)

Hill Street's PA concentrated on organising fundraising and social events. By the Autumn term 1990, an internal dispute had reduced its active membership to four or five individuals. However these 'survivors' organised a Christmas Bazaar, an event that shed light on the PA's status within the school. Without consulting the Parents' Association or the staff, the head decided to hold the fund-raising event, commenting, "They [the PA] can argue amongst themselves as to who does it, but I know one of them will."

After the event, the PA parents felt they should have a say in spending the bazaar's proceeds. They wished to provide a Christmas treat for the children, and booked a showing of the cult film, 'The Hero Ninja Turtles'. In an angry meeting some teachers argued that the film (reputedly quite violent) was unsuitable for children, and anyway the school should decide how PA money was spent. The PA did finally take the children to the film, but the affair left bitterness on both sides, and the association disbanded, its members feeling their time and effort were not valued.

This affair reveals several attributes that characterised Hill St's PA. Firstly, its main brief was fundraising. This precludes using the PA as a forum to discuss educational issues, or as a link between governors and parents. Secondly, it was composed entirely of white parents, several of whom knew each other outside the school. Thus other parents considered the PA 'cliquey' and unwelcoming (12 out of 45 parents specifically mentioned this as an explanation for their own

non-involvement) [3]. Thirdly, personal quarrels bedevilled the PA's history severely denting its credibility as a coherent force. Fourthly, the number of parents involved regularly was always very low, although other volunteers could usually be found to help during actual events. Reasons given for non-involvement by parents varied. Some (4) fought shy of getting involved in disputes and arguments; some (15) were not prepared to commit the large amount of time and energy that fund-raising required; some (6) erroneously expected the PA to be very formal and bureaucratic in its organisation. Fifthly, the PA received little support from teachers. Apart from Ms. Raju and Ms Tsongas, who had responsibility for home-school liaison, the staff considered it something of a joke.

> "A lot of it [PA business] is hot air-ish...It can get quite nasty; there's a bit of a power struggle going on, and because of that the rest of the staff doesn't take it very seriously," (teacher, female).

To most parents, the PA seemingly offered nothing worthwhile. It did not address their interests or concerns about their child's education, nor provide them with a foothold into the life of the school, nor offer them a support group to discuss issues related to their own children or the school.

2) The Parents' Room

The PA's marginal status is further evident when the Parents' Room is considered. The room was nominally open to all parents, but only used regularly by the PA and parent governors. The room, originally a waiting area for the medical room, retained its institutional air. It contained old furniture and discarded reading scheme books. The walls were decorated with out-of-date notices, and health education posters. Fieldnotes, recording my first sight of the room, conclude with "..seems like a junk room." The school used the room for 'left-over' activities as well as 'left-over' furniture. Children not attending school assemblies spent the time in there, Urdu and Gujerati classes taken by outside teachers were held there, as were detentions. One teacher commented, "Who wants to go in there at the moment? I wouldn't. The kids are taken in there as a punishment!"

Few respondents commented on the room's condition, even when interviewed there. This, although initially puzzling, can be explained by the fact that nobody felt any responsibility or sense of possession over it. The head felt that the Parent's Room should be redecorated and newly re-furnished. She also felt that parents should raise the money to fund this themselves, as "that way they'll use it." However, as there was no sign of parents feeling any ownership towards the room, this seemed unlikely to happen.

3) Parent governors.

The school had three white parent governors (one woman and two men). When asked about their experiences as governors, all three commented on the large amount of literature and the many changes they were expected to keep pace with (see also Golby & Brigley 1989; Golby et al 1990). However, they found the other governors welcoming and supportive, and they maintained mostly positive relationships with the headteacher, Jane Horton. All three visited the school frequently, and at the head's suggestion, held regular surgeries so that parents could voice their comments, questions, or complaints to a governor and another parent.

> "[Holding the surgeries]...was Jane's idea. It was a good idea...it was more to take the pressure off her because obviously every day there are several parents outside her office waiting to see her, and she does have a lot to do..and it was to give us a little more contact with the parents. But they're not interested," (female parent governor).

Certainly, the response rate was low, in part because many parents (16) did not know who the governors were. However, all three parent governors focused on parental uninterest.

> "I think it's fair to say that a lot of the parents aren't very interested...it's a massive child-minding operation, isn't it? That's the problem, they are interested up to a point. Their son or daughter gets to the age of 8 and can't read, and they think 'what's gone on for the last three years?' But if they're getting on OK, they don't want to get too deeply involved," (parent governor, male).

Such views would appear to hinder the development of stronger links between the governors and the parents. Parents' responses highlighted

an additional issue: the confusion surrounding governor status. Nearly all asserted that they would rather directly deal with the class teacher or head if there was a problem, rather than wait for a governor's surgery. As one parent governor explained, "If people have a problem, they go to the top. They don't go to the oily rag, they go to the mechanic." He also commented that governors themselves were uncertain of their role (see also Golby et al 1990 pp.8,21)

"I don't know how much power and responsibility I've got in the school. I don't think many parent governors do, or even governors period. None of us really know what we've got and what we've got to do, and no-one's really told us," (parent governor, male).

The staff considered the parent governors to be somewhat unimportant. One or two were even unsure who they were. The head described the governors as the school's link with the parent body;

"It just hasn't got across yet [to parents] that [they] have a big say in how the school runs and that [the parent governors] are their representatives for putting their point of view forward," (headteacher).

However, she also viewed them as potential aides, saying "the ideal thing would be to involve them in admissions. That would then be taken away from the secretary and myself and given to parent governors." However, these two roles are not obviously complementary.

4) Parents Meetings

For most parents, contact with the school was through parent evenings. There were three main types: 'meet-your-teacher' (MYT) evenings at the beginning of term (to inform parents of the topics children would study that term); an annual parents' evening in July when parents were offered individual appointments; and occasional curriculum workshops.

The individual appointment sessions attracted a much larger reponse from parents than the initial MYT evenings. For parents who attended both, the distinction between talking about the curriculum, and their particular child's progress was artifical, as the following teacher realised;

"We're doing this [holding MYT evenings] supposedly to fulfill some requirement of the National Curriculum, that parents be told

what their kids are learning.. In my opinion, the parents who do show up only want to know 'How is my child doing?'...It'd be much nicer to have the parents come in [individually] mid-term..so you could sit down to talk, see any problems and work on them during the year. I was shocked to find that the only time we actually do that is at the very end of the year. When it's too late," (teacher, male).

Hill St's first workshop focused on books. The teachers set up 'stalls' with attractive and informative displays on various topics, including a home reading scheme and bilingual books. Staff expressed themselves 'pleasantly surprised' by the turn-out. However, the workshop was slightly unfocused, as several teachers claimed to be unclear as to its aim. Therefore parents needed to have specific questions or comments to discuss with the teachers if they were to extract the most value from the event.

Another two initiatives were aimed at parents and children on an individual basis. One was the introduction of Bookworm, a home reading scheme in some classes. The other initiative was the Primary Learning Records. This was a detailed teacher assessment system, which included parent and teacher conferences, "to encourage two-way communicationbe tween home and school, to let the parent(s) share their knowledge of the child at home and at school," (ILEA 1989a p.12.). However, owing to the difficulties of providing supply cover, conferencing was soon restricted to the nursery and reception classes.

Forms of parental involvement: Low Rd.
There was no parents' room at Low Road, no parents' association, nor any regular parent-teacher meetings. The lack of home-school contact had been periodically discussed by staff, but little action taken. The two years prior to the research period had been particularly unstable with regard to staffing; and survival, in terms of getting through the day, had been the staff's main concern. Their lack of enthusiasm for closer contact with parents was illustrated by the organisation of the autumn term parents' evening.

1. Parents' Meetings
During the research period the head reminded the staff that they had

previously made a commitment to invite parents into school to discuss the children's work. The head disliked the 'traditional' open evening, seeing it as the school putting on an annual display for the children's parents to admire, but not discuss. She stressed the advantages of a more interactive conferencing format.

> "What often happens is that teachers feel they know the parent and relate to the parent, but when you look at what they are actually relating about, it tends to be lost coats or bullying or help on an outing. If the meeting is about how the classroom is to be organised or how the curriculum is to be structured, then I think you have a different style of relationship," (headteacher).

However because staff were unused to planning such meetings, she left them to choose their own arrangements. Many of these appeared to have been organised to suit the teacher rather than the parents. For instance one infant teacher held a coffee morning at 9.45am. As school started at 9am, this meant that parents were expected to bring their children to school, go home, and reappear 45 minutes later. This time also excluded working parents. Thus although teachers voiced support for regular parents' evenings in interview, some displayed so little interest in planning their own meetings that their actions belied their words. Certainly, it had taken the head's insistence to ensure that all the staff arranged meetings. During the previous year only one teacher had done so voluntarily.

2. Parent Governors

Low Rd's parent governors had a lower profile than those at Hill St, reflecting the lower level of home-school contact generally. Many parents (35 out of 50) and some teachers (5) had little idea who they were. In fact there were two governors in post, and two vacancies.

The two incumbents shared the same concerns as those at Hill St; difficulties in digesting large amounts of information, and confusion over their status. One governor, a black woman, had been involved in pressing the Directorate to ameliorate the school's teacher shortage. Although she felt that she had helped to hasten the acquisition of a teacher, she appreciated the limits on her power.

"They say we have more power now, but I don't really think so. I don't think you can go over certain heads, you haven't the authority to demand that things happen as a parent governor."

Both parent governors wanted more home-school contact. The governor quoted above suggested that, given encouragement, parents would attend school events if they were arranged. The other governor, a white woman, shared the attitudes of the Hill St parent governors, maintaining that many Low Rd parents were simply not interested in their children's education. Thus she made little effort to establish links with other parents, nor did she encourage staff to do so.

The school as 'community'?

Despite the differences between the two schools' approaches to home-school relations, it was possible to identify at both, parents who were bemused by school procedures and methods, and who retained an unfocused sense of unease about their children's progress. The teachers often assumed that parents were uninterested and apathetic.

At Hill St, several parents and teachers diagnosed the cause of this situation as a lack of 'community spirit', defined as a sense of belonging, ownership, and common purpose. One teacher with experience of teaching in the Caribbean, contrasted it with the impersonality of home-school relationships at Hill St, saying "school becomes like a bank. You just go to the bank to get your money, you're not concerned with the upkeep of it." Some respondents (16) suggested that more school social events would give adults a chance to mix and get to know each other so that "we could become a big, happy community" (mother). Two teachers suggested two different remedies. One advocated a role for the school commensurate with that of a traditional community school providing facilities for the locality.

"The social contacts and the educational side they go together, but we've got to build up respect first by being seen to be doing something either for the children or for the community...Coronation [School] has a good thing going with their Panjabi and Bengali parents because they're doing things with the mums...English lessons...a health club," (teacher, female).

However, extra out-of-school community activities will not necessarily result in a greater feeling of shared purpose amongst those using the

school (see p.21 above). In contrast, the headteacher talked of the need for 'shared values', which she felt are more readily found in denominational schools.

"The fact that they [parents] latch onto a church school is either because of the morals, or because the ethos of the school is in accordance with them, and one of the things that goes hand in hand with that are high morals and discipline. Whereas in a state school you have to create the ethos of the school - can you see the difference? With parents in a church school that's one barrier already crossed."

This statement begs the question of how such an ethos would be created. Would it be, for example, an imposition by the profession of their particular definition of 'high morals'? Would other groups be able or willing to participate, and would a common framework emerge from the disparate groupings contained within an inner-city school? This chapter goes on to examine these questions, but first, considers the situation at Low Rd.

No-one at Low Rd spoke of trying to establish a 'community spirit'. The staffing instability and pupil mobility meant that many parents and teachers had a remarkably low level of contact with each other. It was as if the school was too large, too unwieldly, and in too much of a state of flux for consensus to be envisaged. One teacher commented on the school's impersonal nature.

"Because there isn't a lot of contact with the parents we must seem a bit faceless, a bit grey. The school is not evidently part of the community. Playcentre...has plays and visits out into the community. It may well be that to the parents, children disappear into the school day and that not that much comes out. We don't have a school fete, or a sports day or any school teams. We don't have anything outside the school day. I think it's quite flat," (teacher, male).

Parents too often commented on the lack of traditional primary school activities. A few, however, had a different perception largely due to the personality of the head, Jennifer Court. Many respondents commented that she always gave generously of her time to talk to them, and that the school generally had a 'caring' ethos. One woman concluded,

"At Low Rd they're concerned with what happens at home as well as at school. At [a local secondary school] all they want to know is about school," (Low Rd parent).

However such individual help and support was necessarily limited to only a few parents, and often focused on social and behavioural rather than educational issues.

Chapter 1 argues that even schools in heterogeneous areas tend to assume that their pupil's families comprise a 'community', a spatially-defined group of people, sharing interests and values. If such a 'community' does not exist, schools may try to create one focused around the school (as the Hill St teachers quoted earlier feel they should be trying to do). However, such an analysis is somewhat simplistic. Just as area-based notions of 'community' assume a consensus of interests because of shared residency, school-based notions of 'community' assume a similar consensus based on common attendance at a school. Yet such unity cannot be taken-for-granted. Temporary agreements on specific issues may arise, but consensus is unlikely to prosper, unless differences in values and attitudes (stemming from occupational divisions, ethnicity, religion etc) are addressed (see p.15-17 above).

The systematic collection of data regarding the Hill St and Low Rd localities was beyond the bounds of this study. However, the schools themselves display features of Thomas' concept of nominal communities (1986, see also p.15 above). Both were characterised by the isolation of individuals and small groups. Thomas comments that a community situated towards the 'nominal' end of the continuum has few collective institutions, and those that do exist have a low status. Hill St's PA is a prime example of this. There were many factors causing the Hill St and Low Rd 'communities' to fragment and divide into distinct groups with occasionally tense and competing relationships. The roles of professional and lay people were clearly differentiated, and both these groups were further sub-divided by adherence to particular values and priorities. Ball (1987) employs a 'conflict perspective' to explain this relationship. It emphasises,

"'The fragmentation of the social system into interest groups each with its own particular goals and ..the interaction of these groups..especially the conflict processes by which one group

tries to gain advantage over another. Interest groups cluster around divergent values,'" (Baldridge 1971 p.14, quoted in Ball 1987 p.18).

This is not to suggest continual open hostility, as the daily routine often ensures a surface calm and unity (Ball 1987). The primacy of maintaining the everyday functioning of the school may legitimate and reinforce divisions between the different groups so that, for example, the limited role accorded to parents is accepted to some extent by both parents and teachers. As mentioned earlier, a primary division exists between professional and lay actors. A key explanation of parents' marginal role in both schools was the staff's view of parents and the parents' reaction to this.

The 'Good' Parent.

Hill St.

In 1975, Sharp & Green carried out a study of the dynamics operating within three child-centred classrooms. After interviewing teachers and parents they formulated a concept to describe how relationships between home and school were shaped: the 'good' parent (1975 p.200). Meighan summarises as follows:

> "Parents are expected to avoid either being interfering, by questionning school critically or admitting to direct teaching at home, or neglectful by not providing required clothing and skills of neatness and tidiness. The good parent defers to the school and the professional claims of its teachers," (1986 p.61-2).

This section examines how appropriate this stereotype was for teachers at Hill St and Low Rd. The data gained from interviewing the Hill St teachers about their views on parental roles, showed a high degree of similarity between individuals' substantive views, although there were differences with regard to detail [4]. There was a pervasive deficit model of parents, so that casual questions to me, such as, "Have you found out how apathetic the parents are yet?" were regarded as acceptable in the staffroom. Parental interest was equated with parental presence, which was generally low. There were exceptions; Ms Tsongas frequently liaised with the PA and community groups, and established friendly relations with the parents of her own class.

Indeed all teachers had positive relationships with some individual parents.

The nature of the neighbourhood was identified as a prime reason for the presumed parental indifference. All the teachers mentioned the social and economic pressures to which they felt parents were subject. However, while some staff stressed this aspect, others highlighted Hackney's reputation as a working class area,

> Male teacher: "This is only my opinion. In Hackney I don't think parents value school. School is a place to send their kids. Not all parents have great expectations of their kids. The ones that do and that are worried do make an effort to come. The ones who don't come, I'm assuming don't come either because they are busy or because school was just something they had to get through. At 16 they go and be a brickie or whatever. I don't deny that there are people who would come if they could but really can't because they don't have the time."

> CV: "So there is a difference between parents who have a practical reason for not coming and those who.."

> Teacher: "..Just don't bother, yes."

Another teacher commented,

> "It's such a tough strained area the school is in. So we try and foster a feeling of morality in school, that it's good to be calm, and to do good things, and to work hard to gain an end," (female teacher).

The class-based nature of this analysis is clear. As chapter 3 illustrates there is a long tradition amongst educators of attempting to alter working class attitudes to education, generally perceived as being negative. The Plowden model views the school as an agent of compensatory education, attempting to 'rescue' the children from the disadvantages inherent in their working class backgrounds (see p.29-30 above).

Thus a fundamental part of being a 'good' parent is to have an overtly positive attitude towards the school. The following comments by teachers add further detail to their ideal. Firstly, she (for it is generally women who take responsibility for contact with the school, see p.53 above) would ensure the children developed a "sensible attitude to school: that it's a place of learning and one does expect certain types of behaviour to happen" (female teacher). Also,

"Lots of parents are quite ignorant of what we are trying to do....You can tell who talks to their child, some children just aren't used to listening and talking at all.....for me, it's automatic that if you've got a young child, if you're going shopping, to say 'shall we have a big one or a little one?' or when they're getting dressed,' do you want your blue socks or your yellow ones?' (female teacher).

This quotation illustrates how one particular style of communication with one's child is seen as the ideal, and set above all other forms (see also Tizard & Hughes 1984). As noted in chapter 3, the ability to be, and to demonstrably be, a 'sensitive' mother is a major part of being a 'good' parent.

The 'good' parent also behaves in a particular way in school. A teacher expands on this concept;

"It's a good idea [to have a parents' discussion group], but you're only as good as the calibre of parents. If the parents are not able to cope with the situation then the whole system breaks down. [It's] a very good idea when you have parents who are very sensible and can see how to do things. But if you don't have that and you leave them in that situation then you have all the chaotic results [reference to the personal disputes within the PA]. It would need to be done very gently, and you would have to have a training system," (female teacher).

With regard to parental involvement in the classroom or with the educational minutiae of the child's day, the 'good' parent has a well-defined, if narrow role.

"There's a tendency [amongst teachers] to feel that if parents come in and do things other than reading, and so on, well I suppose it is a mystique about teachers, and if it breaks down, parents might be encouraged to say, 'Well shouldn't you do so and so?' Whether that's a good or a bad thing, I don't know," (female teacher).

Some teachers (5) were nervous about having parents in the classroom. One teacher who received regular parental help admitted that.

"I feel teachers aren't used to parents coming in and out..you can feel watched, spied upon, I feel I can't raise my voice...I don't know why I feel that," (female teacher).

Thus parental help was carefully controlled. Parents were often directed towards a class they did not have children in, (making the situation more nervewracking for them) or towards a more general

support job. One woman, Ms McCall, spent her afternoon off work helping in the library. She rarely saw the teacher-in-charge and felt isolated. A new classification system had been introduced, which she did not understand, but no-one had mentioned or explained the change to her. The teachers had sent notes out asking for volunters to help around the school, and several teachers had commented with disappointment on the poor response. However, Ms MacCall's experience was unlikely to encourage others.

The jobs that parents were asked to do around the school, often revolved around domestic tasks traditionally associated with women (see p.53 above), such as sewing or cooking. However teachers were also enthusiastic about parents acting as a resource, talking to or working with the children on a topic on which they had expertise. In this role, the parent would attain the status of a visitor, and thus present little threat to the teachers' position. However, presenting oneself as an 'expert' required a certain amount of confidence, and this may explain why few parents responded to this invitation. Overall, the role of parent as helper was limited by the staff, in order to maintain rigid boundaries between the professional and the lay person. This would prevent parents attaining 'insider' status, as this mother of a new child wished to do;

> "I think it will help [make me feel more of a partner with the school] if I actually have a chance to go in [to help] and become part of the staffroom, you're accepted as part of the school. That would be my aim eventually so that they know I'm friendly..and I could get more of a first hand feel for things."

However, achieving this sort of access may well have proved difficult at Hill St.

All the Hill St staff qualified Sharp & Green's 'good' parent definition in one important respect. The teachers at the schools involved in their research, disapproved of parents helping their children at home, feeling that parents could not replicate the school's child-centred approach. However, Sharp & Green discovered that those children whom the teachers thought 'above average' completed 'school' work at home with their parents, although parents felt that they had to keep this secret (1975 p.208). By contrast, all

the Hill St teachers said they welcomed parents working at home with their children. However, they seemed unaware of the many parents, particularly of infant age children, who saw themselves as conducting educational activities with their children.

So at Hill St, the essential elements of a 'good' parent were as follows: working at home with the child, producing a well-behaved child susceptible to reason, with a good grounding in pre-school skills. The parents themselves attend all school events, and initiate interaction (although not too much) with teachers.

The good parent role is fairly narrow; several parents who took part in the study, appeared to have overstepped the boundaries between appropriate professional and parental concerns. One woman, Ms Hamina was new to England and keen to learn more about her son's schooling. Her eagerness however was seen as intrusive by the classteacher who described her as "what we call fussy, a fussy mum, she's alright you know, but a bit of a fuss-pot" [5]. Parents who were generally supportive of the school, but had disagreed with the teachers on particular issues were similarly viewed. One such couple, despite much seemingly ideal behaviour, were deemed "very difficult when they don't get their own way".

Most staff stressed the need to build up relationships between themselves and individual parents. In theory, they prioritised 'befriending' parents of the children in their own classes so that they could rely on their support with regard to the child's behaviour and academic progess (see also Tizard et al 1981 p.111). Two or three individuals actively attempted to do this, whilst others initiated interaction with parents only when a particular problem arose. All the Hill St teachers expressed considerable reservations about parents commenting on, or being involved in decision-making, particularly where the curriculum was concerned. Two reasons were given for this. Firstly, parents were not seen as possessing the necessary professional expertise. Secondly there was a feeling that parental involvement in decision-making would sink any initiative in a myriad of conflicting opinions.

The head, Ms Horton, retained a strong model of the 'right' sort of parent. The PA's few remaining parents did not fit this ideal. As

they were all indigenous in origin she was concerned that this prevented other parents from becoming involved. Her solution was not to expand, but to re-constitute the parents' group;

> "The other thing I inherited when I came here is the on-going fishwives thing..the petty power struggles....With some parents [I'm] waiting for their kids to leave and attracting at the same time more parents in, particularly from the ethnic minorities. It's not a healthy situation [at the moment]. To me it's like a boil that will hopefully come to a head, burst and disperse. Meanwhile you're trying to get some nice strong roots coming in."

Thus the PA's acrimonious demise did not overly concern Ms Horton. She intended to encourage other more 'suitable' parents to the group. Professional interference in selecting parents is likely to result in adherence to the 'good' parent ideal, a stereotype of the deferential but interested parent, based fundamentally on white middle class values. This is already a tendency in the selection of parent governors, as many are persuaded to stand by teachers (Pascal 1988, 1989). Thus at Hill St, the definition of a 'good' parent is informed by the teachers' social class and occupational perspectives, which serve to limit parents to a role both supporting and subordinate.

The 'Good' Parent: Low Rd School.

Before considering the Low Rd teachers' concept of a 'good' parent, this section examines teacher-parent conflict. Past incidents of verbal and physical abuse towards staff from parents, although not the determining characteristic of most teacher-parent contacts, had negatively affected teachers' perceptions of the parent body. For several years before the research period, there had been a marked increase in such assaults, and their legacy was discernible in the attitudes of the present staff [6]. In a 1988 letter to an LEA officer, the headteacher, Ms Court stated,

> "Parents are most often around in the early mornings, lunchtime, and at the end of the day. I find that it's vital to be around at these times, to act as a litmus paper. A lot is averted or defused in this way...Gradually effective relationships build and small pieces of grit don't become boulders...The families we are taking into school are without doubt getting more difficult and we are certainly vulnerable to our 'open admissions' policy...The commitment, caring and creativity of the staff is unrivalled. Yet

the pathology is all around - in the bloodstream of the place.....Is harrassment [of staff] increasing and if so why? Is it happening more at Low Road or is it general? What are the features of the area that make this an outcome? "

She identified possible reasons to explain the rise in harrassment of teachers. A few - such as having clear boundaries for behaviour and staff changes - related to the school as an organisation, but most concentrated on individual families ('general frustration and despair in families', 'individual biographies') or wider social pressures (tv violence, increasing racial tension, government and media portrayals of teachers). Another set of Ms Court's notes finished with the frustrated question:

"How is it that so many professionals dismiss what we are experiencing day to day and tell us to 'have higher expectations' or 'to lose the deficit model of Hackney children'? Why is our CONTEXT denied?" (Headteachers' notes, March 1989)

The tone of this extract demonstrates the tension that teacher-parent conflicts create within the school. Such incidents also reflect the constant stress affecting many local families. However, by focusing on the undeniable pressures upon some families, there is a danger of forgetting that the school is not a neutral institution, but helps to shape the context in which it operates. Its effects are undoubtedly more minor than those of the areas's poor standard of housing, or its high unemployment rates, but are nevertheless discernible. The period 1988-90, co-inciding with the rise in the harrassment of staff was a time of disruption within the school with high levels of teacher turnover and inexperienced staff. The degree to which such organisational disarray affects the standards of learning and behaviour within schools is often not appreciated by those not in daily contact with them. By contrast, the research period of 1990-91, saw a decline in such incidents, co-inciding with a clarification of expected standards of behaviour from the children and more stable staffing. However, teachers retained the feeling that they were in the front line battling against unreasonable, potentially violent families.

"Some of the staff feel threatened by just having parents in the

classroom and if you saw the way some of them just come in and let off steam, you'd understand it!" (Teacher, female)

It is arguable that the underlying causes of such aggression lie in the parents' structural location within society. Ms Court had attempted to strengthen the school's links with social services, housing departments, police and health service. This is explained by the school's need to know what is going on in other areas of the children and parents' lives in order to understand conflicts that might surface at school. This approach is common in schools in areas of multiple deprivation and has been influenced by the ideology of reformist community education (see ch.1). The rationale is that the school should no longer appear remote from other concerns in everyday life, nor blind to outside influences affecting the children's enthusiasm and willingness to learn. However, this type of contact with other agencies operates over the heads of local families (see also Baron 1989 p.95). The school appears to form part of a 'wall' made up of the caring professions, backed-up by the police, and designed to 'manage' the local population. The families themselves remain 'cases' or 'clients' and have no entry into the power structure of such institutions.

The amount of blank walls some parents met with in an attempt to run their lives was guaranteed to induce a severe sense of frustration. The area's housing was of low quality, but getting repairs done was a long protracted process and getting re-housed appeared a near impossibility. People also experienced stress, and conflict with their neighbours and within their own families which increased the burden of tension. The following quotation is from a woman whose economic situation was, she felt, more secure than many.

"It's a poor area, housing conditions are bad, it's not just education, there are other social problems. You try and keep the children settled and calm but look at the bad housing, the unemployment. I'm not trying to make excuses for the kids not learning, but parents do try to keep them on a steady keel and present some form of normalcy. My husband was unemployed for almost two years. That's not just a one-off thing, here it's almost normal...There's just too many factors. What can you do?.....I said to the councillor, 'Look at this place, it's not centrally heated, we can't even get our repairs done.' This is

just basic living, we're not asking for a swimming pool in the backgarden. All they want is your vote," (Low Rd parent).

This sense of having to battle to improve or just to protect one's position and belongings, increases the likelihood of conflicts between parents and teachers starting because the parent is defending his or her child, often on non-educational matters. This, in some cases, exclusive, individualistic focus was even more apparent at Low Rd than at Hill St. Yet this did not mean that the parents thought their own children were incapable of doing wrong; several respondents acknowledged how difficult it was for the school, and sometimes themselves, to manage the child. However, they often perceived the school's criticism of their children as an implicit criticism of their parenting ability, and in self-defence would turn the complaints back against the school. One parent finally responded to what she perceived as constant disparagement of her child with the words: "You deal with it, you're the teacher. You never say nothing good about him." Significantly, I heard of two occasions when teachers not involved in an incident had been verbally abused by parents. In these cases the teachers were seen as part of the school establishment rather than as an individual with a particular role within the school.

For many parents the school was another institution seeking to exert control over their families, but over which they apparently had no control. The school made demands of them (send your children to school regularly and punctually, make sure their behaviour is good, read to them at home etc), but there seemed to be no effective channel through which parents could present their demands. Anger grew from frustration; but it also served another function, motivating parents into tackling those who worked in the school, who understood how it operated, and who could (seemingly) determine their children's future (see also Grace 1978; Carspecken 1990).

The teachers, however, perceived the situation quite differently, feeling themselves vulnerable as potential victims of parents' often mis-directed anger. Experience of a few abusive parents had contributed to some teachers' seeing parents' lifestyles and personalities as 'abnormal', which helped to legitimise their exclusion from school. This was reflected in the way teachers often discussed

parents in terms more aptly applied to their off-spring (see footnote 5 on p.127 above). However their negative views were most strongly reflected in casual derogatory comments both male and female teachers made about the sexual morality of particular women.

"Her children have all got different fathers, she's not 'Mrs.' at all!"

"Some of these kids don't even know where their mum spends the night, if you see what I mean."

"Oh, he's terrible [the child] and she's awful!..Of course, she's not the mother really, she's his dad's girlfriend."

Two mothers who met at a battered womens' refuge and now shared a flat commented, "We have to tell everyone we are sisters, otherwise they'll think we're gay...they don't like us round here anyway." The implication of such remarks is that women who do not live within a traditional nuclear family are inadequate as mothers; they are deemed so for disrupting conventional notions of sexual morality. Such condemnations have a long history of being manipulated to control women's sexual and moral behaviour (Macintyre 1985). Similar constraints do not apply to men. However, not all women are subject to the same degree of prurience. For example, it seems unlikely that middle class women would be judged on their ability to be a parent by whom they were having a relationship with [7]. With the cutbacks in the Welfare State, unorthodox families that cannot provide for themselves economically are seen as likely to be suffering moral poverty too (Isaac 1990; see p.35 above).

Such value systems are pervasive. In the playground, insults about a mother's sexuality ('Your mum's a slag') are understood by children as one of the severest types of verbal attack (TES 28/6/91). Strong norms delinate the limits of acceptable sexual behaviour (Cowie & Lees 1981; Stanworth 1981), and girls can be made aware at an early age of the need to behave modestly. One Low Rd parent told me her nine year old daughter had been described on her school report as 'flirtatious'. Her mother had challenged the teacher over this saying that her daughter may be a 'tomboy' and often played with boys, but she did not 'flirt'. However, she did not challenge the intrinsic

appropriateness of the concept, rather its application to her own daughter. Neither did she ask for the offending item to be removed, nor did the teacher offer to remove it.

Here sex and class discrimination interact. For the working class women of the Low Road area, sexual behaviour is one characteristic that contributes towards the picture of them as the 'underclass' (Murray 1989). Such comments were not made about mothers at Hill St. It is arguable that Low Road parents, because of the greater degree of poverty in the area were seen as living less 'normal' lifestyles than their Hill St counterparts. Golding & Middleton (1982) conclude that explanations for poverty that focus on individuals' failings - 'blaming the victim' - are widespread and co-exist with a persistent belief in the existence of an irresponsible welfare 'scrounger' figure (also Taylor-Gooby 1985). The prevalence of such ideas within society has the potential to affect all its members, including teachers. Certainly, more casual comments employed by some teachers suggested that they employed such stereotypes ("The parents' were all in the pubs, instead of doing PACT", commented one). Some teachers at Low Road however, especially the (all female) senior management team (SMT), stressed the severe social and economic pressues which prevented parents becoming more closely involved with the school.

> "The parents are all interested, if it's your child, you're interested. It's either pressure of work, or they think you're the teacher they'll let you get on with it, or possibly language differences. A couple of children in the class, their families have got so many pressures, home pressures, emotional pressures, social pressures, they're just glad that someone's looking after the children during the day," (member of SMT).

However, Low Rd parents were not offered the same opportunities for parental involvement that other schools provide. When I asked one parent if there had been school social events for parents, she laughed,

> Ms. Castle: "People do that way out [in the suburbs]. This is the East End, they wouldn't do that here."

> CV: "Is that because the teachers wouldn't do it, or the parents wouldn't be interested?"

Ms C: (pause) "I don't know. If they did discos even for the kids..we could come in and help. They could give something a try."

Ms Castle had had regular contact with the school, concerning her son's behaviour. She was aware that home-school communication on issues other than discipline was limited, and disliked this minimal relationship. However, she accepted it as the norm for an inner-city school. She discerned quite clearly the social class differences that characterises the two 'sides'. However, she was unaware that she, and parents like her, were seen by the teachers as responsible for this situation through their apparent lack of support for the school.

Even within the locality, class-related differences were perceived. Low Rd was in a deprived part of the borough, an area the teachers saw as inhabited by poor working class residents, unwilling or unable to take an interest in schooling. One teacher compared Low Rd to a school in Crossways, an area with pockets of middle class residents, (Hill St. was located on the fringes of this area);

"You can go up to Crossways, I spent four terms there, there's much more parental involvement. Sometimes when the transport was bad, I'd be doing the register for four classes in the hall when the teachers hadn't made it on time, and immediately you'd have a group of parents saying 'what can we do to help?' I knew you could put three parents in a room, tell the children to read and they'd be fine. There were always parents around. Here I wouldn't do that," (female teacher, SMT).

In comparison with Hill St, there were fewer opportunities for parents to respond to invitations to visit the school. Thus, the staff had little evidence on which to equate parental interest with parental presence. However, teachers apparently assumed that parents, whether due to apathy or practical problems, would not turn out to visit the school in large numbers. In accordance with these beliefs, the autumn term open sessions were organised half-heartedly, and thus did receive a fairly poor response.

Therefore Low Road staff held a slightly less traditional view than was prevalent at Hill St, of how parents should behave in relation to the school. The 'good' parent came in informally to talk to the teacher and showed interest in the child's progress. Teachers could

rely on her support if the child was disciplined. Staff had adopted this more nebulous definition in response to the type of parent they felt the school had. It must be stressed again that not all the staff adopted a uniformly negative view of all parents. Some of the more established teachers, especially the SMT, had built up informal contacts with individual families, and commented on their friendly, mutually-supportive relationships with individual parents. However, this included only a small proportion of the children in their care, often, though not exclusively, those who proved troublesome.

In summary, this section has shown that staff at both schools did hold an ideal of a 'good' parent, although their definitions, particularly at Low Rd, were less fixed than those identified by Sharp & Green. However one main theme runs through all three variations: a 'good' parent should adopt the role of supporter/learner in matters connected to both behaviour and work. Other research has shown that this desire for parental support is equally important for teachers working in middle class areas (Miles & Gold 1981; Lareau 1989). However, the teachers at Hill St and Low Rd also displayed a tendency to employ a deficit model of working class culture which shapes their opinions of the parent body.

The next section of this chapter focuses on the teachers who staff the two schools and their inter-relations. Although they were perceived as relatively unified bodies by the parents, united by their shared professional concerns, they were also divided by several factors, such as their position in the school hierarchy, and their different aims, philosophies, and interests (cf. Ball 1987 p.8).

Staff relationships: Hill Street and Low Rd Schools.

Despite the existence of positive, friendly relationships between individuals, the atmosphere in Hill St's staffroom was often tense. There were two main reasons for this. The first was a noticeable difference in teaching styles and philosophies between those who organised their classes along child-centred lines, and those whose approach was far more formal. Secondly, many teachers concluded that

the headteacher allowed them a very limited role in decision-making.

On the second point, Ball describes the task of headship as achieving control of the organisation, and at the same time encouraging commitment (1987 p.82). The way a head endeavours to resolve this contradiction shapes his/her headship style. Ball continues by identifying four ideal-type categories:

> "*Interpersonal* heads rely primarily on personal relationships and face-to-face contact to fulfill their role. In contrast, *managerial* heads have major recourse to committees, memoranda and formal procedures. The *adversarial* tends to relish argument and confrontation to maintain control. Whereas the *authoritarian* avoids and stifles argument in favour of dictat," (1987 p.87).

Ms Horton's style was managerial. Whilst she was generally admired and respected for her organisational ability, several teachers also commented that she tended to dominate decision-making procedures, keeping staff at a distance, and maintaining control with formal management techniques, emphasising documentation (Ball 1987 p.97). For instance, staff were required to submit detailed weekly timetables for Ms. Horton's comments. As Ball notes, while bureaucracy is supposedly supportive of democracy, the relationship between the two is not straightforward. Indeed several teachers commented that they had no clear idea of the headteacher's priorities;

> "There should be a line of authority. But you do get the situation where heads come in to consult and you get the feeling, or you have the knowledge perhaps, that the decision has already been taken," (teacher, male).

> "I like her, I don't have that much contact with her [the head]. I haven't sussed her out. Sometimes I think she's thinking one way, and then she goes and does something different," (teacher, female).

Thus Hill St's staff rarely operated as a team, and had not negotiated an agenda of priorities regarding the school's prevailing pedagogy and ethos. Conflicts about the values and aims held by different people were rarely articulated. However, more outright personal conflicts occasionally became visible. For instance, the entire staff was involved in a contest between two opposing candidates for the teacher's place on the governing body. These characteristics

contributed to the staff's relationships with parents. As mentioned earlier, Sylvie Tsongas was very isolated in her attempts to build up the PA and encourage other parents into school. One male teacher commented on this,

"Sylvie who I was speaking to last week, because I've never really spoken to her before, and her responsibility is home/school, that sort of thing. But speaking to her last week she feels on her own, and feels a bit frustrated because she wants to do these things [plan events for parents] but I don't think the other teachers have been..you know..positive."

The head's style also distanced her from parents. Thirteen parents specifically commented that Ms Horton, was always 'busy' - too busy to talk to them. One parent governor expressed concern about this,

"You don't see Jane. Sports Day, the parents were invited along, Jane wasn't there. And people are starting to think, what does she do?..People don't [come to us if there's a problem], you see, so it builds up, and every now and again you get an explosion...We were spoilt, one head we had, Ms Dateon, she did something, ..didn't seem much at the time, she was in the playground...in the morning and ..when the kids came out. She saw every parent who brought the kids in, and that had a great effect on the parents," (Parent governor, male) [8].

Hill St did have stable and consistent staffing, despite differences between individuals. In contrast, staffing discontinuities hindered Low Rd's teachers in their attempts to form a coherent body. In addition, the nursery and special needs class were 'semi-detached' from the school with their staff only occasionally visiting the staffroom, outside formal meetings. The staffroom's physical structure hindered free mixing and conversation between individuals. A fixed partition divided the area into two rooms, and teachers sat in small, fairly fixed groups. During the research period it was noticeable that the three African/Caribbean teachers rarely visited the staffroom. However, there appeared fewer of the obvious professional differences that divided the Hill St staff, as the permanent Low Rd teachers shared a similar child-centred approach to education. (Conclusions are necessarily tentative here, as the topic is outside the bounds of this study). However, as detailed above, they shared with Hill St the low

priority accorded to parental involvement.

The style of the headteacher, Ms Court, differed greatly from that of Ms Horton. The former's manner corresponded most closely to that of an interpersonal head (Ball 1987).

"There is an emphasis on personal interaction, face-to-face contact between the head and his or her staff. There is a preference for individual negotiation and compromises," (Ball 1987 p.88).

Ball argues that the style of an interpersonal head can mask the operation of power. Issues are discussed informally on an individual basis rather than in the public arena of a staff meeting. One teacher, who had been at the school for over five years, but who was not part of the SMT, commented on this situation.

"It's very much the head and deputy [involved in decision-making] and [the head] keeps alot of information to herself in terms of power. It's a contradiction really. She gets on with people, but in terms of the school she keeps things to herself. I don't think people do feel involved in decision-making. We'd have to be pretty forceful to get into that really."

Another misgiving concerned the head's ability to manage the school, and this is dealt with in more detail below.

Unlike Hill St's headteacher, Ms Court encouraged parents to come and see her. This was partly for ideological reasons, to "create a spirit of willingness..[it] is important that people feel they can come and see me". Consequently, she would become involved in non-educational problems. The other reason was to divert any parental anger and criticism away from staff.

"If a person comes in and they are extremely angry – not all our parents are like this – and they are listened to, it completely disappears and then you can say 'we don't have coats stolen all the time,'or 'I'm sure the teacher didn't say that', or 'if someone had realised..', this sort of approach. But if my door is shut, this can backfire. The angry parent will go down to the class teacher and put it all on the class teacher when children are there or whatever," [9].

The headteacher knew that some teachers felt that close and often personal contact with parents was not part of a head's job. She defended her position thus;

"I do know a lot about what goes on, and I talk to the children and the parents a lot, but an inspector came in at one point and I got a tight feeling of anger because I felt the message was coming across that I would prefer to be a social worker rather than a teacher. That is not true at all. It is important to have a sense of other dimensions. But unless a parent is in acute distress, I do not do social work...I would resist very strongly [the idea] that I'm doing an awful lot of things I shouldn't be,"

Thus teachers at both schools show signs of being divided on professional and personal lines.

It can be easily understood why teachers generally, and particularly heads, were not keen to encourage possible dissenting parental voices into the school situation. Changes resulting from the 1988 ERA, organisational upheavals following the transfer of education from the ILEA, and a marked teacher shortage, combined to make 1990-91 a particularly pressurised time for Hackney schools. Most Hill St staff were involved in after-school or lunchtime activities, and had a lengthy working-day. One young female teacher commented,

"For me, my job here is to teach the class, and I'm in charge of art, so something has to give. I was keeping my head just above water, but then the head spoke to me about some other things she wants me to do, and I got that feeling of 'oh, I can't cope' coming over me again. That's the first time I've felt it this term [a month into the term]. For [job] satisfaction you need to get half of you out of the water..A lot of it [the workload] has been crisis management [and therefore low on job satisfaction]."

At Low Rd, working in an understaffed environment with several children who displayed disruptive behaviours, placed considerable strain on some teachers.

"I was nearly at the end, ready to throw in the towel. I went to [an exhibition], and seeing all those normal looking people, beautifully dressed, I just freaked. I felt I was mentally ill, I was crumbling. It was as if there was a glass wall between me and all these normal people," (senior teacher, female).

It is obviously difficult for a disparate group of highly pressurised individuals to embark upon innovation requiring motivation, and a clarity of ideas concerning direction and goals. However, as earlier chapters show, parental participation is rarely a priority in schools, and Hill St and Low Rd are no exception. The differences and divisions

between the different groups that form a school community have a long history and have only been tackled spasmodically by individual schools. For most, there is no incentive to do so.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that both school 'communities' are fragmented, being comprised of different interest groups. The main division is between professionals and lay people. This chapter has concentrated mainly on teachers' views, showing that professional definitions of a 'good' parent allocate them roles as supporters of the school, responding positively to staff requests. This ideal is found to be fairly consistent amongst individual teacher respondents. However, in general terms, neither staff body operated as a particularly coherent group, with pedagogical differences at Hill St and staff turn-over at Low Rd presenting particular problems. Thus both schools faced difficulties in planning whole-school policies. In addition to these issues, however, present attitudes and arrangements for parental involvement suggest that it was not accorded priority in either school. This chapter also comments on the headteacher's style which is seen as making an important contribution to the schools' ethos, thereby influencing professional and parental impressions of the institution.

The next chapter continues to examine the different groupings within the two school 'communities', employing data taken mainly from interviews with parents.

Chapter Six: Footnotes

[1] Many schools in Hackney were in a poor physical condition (Hackney Gazette 25.1.91).

[2] All statistics are for 1990-1991, and were supplied by LB Hackney's Educational Research & Statistics section. The borough averages were 50% of children registered for free school meals, and 35% having no wage earner at home (see ch.8 for further statistical information on Hackney's schools).

[3] 45 parents were interviewed at Hill St and 50 at Low Rd, making a total of 95 (see appendix and ch.4 for further details).

The text of this chapter quantifies the numbers of respondents who made the particular point at issue. However, as ch.4 explains, interviews were semi-structured to allow the respondents to discuss the issues they saw as important, thus avoiding imposition of the researcher's agenda. Therefore, the number of respondents given, indicates only the number of people who commented specifically on the point made. This does not mean that other respondents may not have shared the particular opinion voiced. For instance, 16 parents expressed specific concerns about developmental approaches to reading and writing. Although parent-respondents were asked their views about their child's progress, they were not asked for their opinions of particular teaching methods, unless they themselves referred to some aspect of classroom practice. This was to avoid making the interview seem like a test of parents' knowledge (Sharp & Green record considerable parental embarrassment when the researcher probed their knowledge of classroom methods, 1975 p.208). Therefore, it can not be concluded from the evidence available that exactly 16 out of the total 95 parents were concerned about 'developmental' methods. This study does not aim to quantify parents' and teachers' views on a range of issues specified by the researcher. Rather, it is an attempt to explore parents' and teachers' feelings and perceptions about each other. These, it is argued, are often nebulous and semi-articulated,

and can not be reduced to the sum of their responses to a series of closed questions.

[4] No discernible correlation was found between the differing views of teachers and their length of service, although it may be reasonably assumed that the concept of professional autonomy would not have proved such a strong rationale during more recent training courses (see ch.2). Younger teachers were often more informal in their approach to parents, but this did not mean that their relationships were substantively different.

[5] The teacher's language here would be more appropriate if applied to her infant charges.

[6] The head was concerned that I should be aware of incidents where parents had been abusive, and gave me copies of her personal notes, and letters to parents and the LEA. In contrast, the head at Hill St volunteered no such information.

[7] Mothers in lesbian relationships are possible exceptions to this (Epstein 1993).

[8] Two teachers suggested that Ms Dateon was not particularly positive about closer home-school contact, but saw her playground stint as a duty, and a way of maintaining a high-profile stance, clearly in control of her school.

[9] Ms Court also implied that as the staff group was "mixed ability", some teachers might react in a way that would worsen an encounter with an angry parent.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HILL STREET AND LOW ROAD SCHOOLS:
PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

This chapter looks in more detail at parental opinions, including attitudes towards other parents, and impressions of the two schools. The first section concentrates on parent-teacher relationships, highlighting parental perceptions of the curriculum and discipline. The second main section examines whether parents are reluctant to become further involved with the school. It identifies some experiences and perceptions of black and bilingual parent-respondents. Racism and class-based differences are seen as two factors preventing parents coming together as a group. The chapter finishes by considering parental responses to collective action.

Parent-Teacher Relationships:
Hill Street and Low Road Schools.

The setting of parameters for parental roles was influenced by the images staff held of parents. These were structured, as chapter 6 shows, by teachers' professional and social class status. As a result, many parents felt distanced from the schools. Thirty-eight parents (out of 95) found visiting the schools intimidating. They may not have known their way around, nor have met the individuals they had come to see. They may have been reminded of their own dislike of school. Parents from all class and ethnic groups mentioned these reactions.

Some working class parent-respondents perceived the social class and occupational divisions between themselves and the teachers (Lareau 1989). Several (6) mentioned that the teachers talked down to them, as if they were children themselves (see footnote 5 in ch.6). "I hate it! I think, don't talk to me!" (mother, Hill St). Others related incidents when they felt they had been firmly put in their (subordinate) places.

"On his first day, I was in the class with him, and he did a
picture. I told him to write his name on it, I thought that's
what you did at school. [The child wrote his name in capital
letters as his mother had taught him] The teacher said to me, 'Oh
no, we don't like that.' They like them to go to school with
nothing," (mother, Low Rd).

Another woman resisted showing deference to the professionals' status.

"I tend to treat the teacher not as the teacher but as someone to
talk to. I've always been on first name terms with the teacher. I
don't like saying 'miss' because I find it makes you inferior as
if they are better than you," (mother, Hill St).

At each school there were particular teachers that parents praised for
their friendly manner. However although a positive relationship with a
teacher may make it easier for a parent to approach him or her, it
does not necessarily mean the parent will receive more detailed or
exact information about her child's progress (see p.57 above). This
section continues by examining two areas which highlighted the nature
of parent-teacher relationships. The first is parents' experience of
the curriculum; the second concerns the differing views on discipline,
held by some parents and teachers.

Parents and the curriculum

Parents at both schools felt they were kept relatively well-informed
on organisational matters via letters home. However, it was where
curriculum content or teaching methods were concerned, that
misunderstandings could arise. At both schools, parents received much
of their curriculum information "third hand" through their children.

Fifty six parents said that they saw increased involvement with
the curriculum as a priority. Their interest was mainly directed
towards finding out more about what the children were taught and how.
A smaller group of parents (12) were interested in commenting on
curriculum policies. However, the majority, especially at Low Rd where
some parents and teachers had very little contact with each other,
wanted to find out how things were currently organised, as the
following two parents explain.

Ms Castle: "Even to get involved to find out how they teach reading, visit them during the day, sit in the class for half hour or so [would be good]. I know the kids will show off, kids are all the same."

CV: "Do any parents help in the classrooms that you know of?"

Ms C: "No, I've never heard of people doing that at all."

Ms Lind: "I think that would be quite interesting, because you only know from your kid's point of view what goes on," (Parents, Low Rd).

Another parent said,

"The school should let you get involved..I would like to know more about the teaching, I want to know why they do the things they do," (mother, Low Rd)

Nearly all Low Rd parents felt that the teachers should arrange regular open evenings. The school operated an 'open door' system and two parents specifically said they preferred to choose the time they visited. However, 'open door' systems alone only attract those parents sufficiently sure of themselves within the school setting to initiate discussions on their child's progress. Ideally, they also need to be familiar enough with a primary school regime to ask detailed questions. Otherwise, the teacher, unaware that the parent was coming, met vague questions with vague answers. Most parents wanted specific invitations to visit school.

"In [my daughter's] nursery the teachers were sort of like friends, if you had a problem, you could go to them. Here a couple of things happened and I wasn't sure that I could go to the teacher, and you don't know them. I used to take her to the door and wait outside, so at least I used to see them. Now she goes up on her own and unless you're called up, you don't even get to see them," (mother, Low Rd).

Invitations were especially important to a group of Bangladeshi women who pointed out that the language barrier prevented them from chatting informally to classteachers. Individual appointments sessions were the most popular option with parents, as these offered privacy, and allowed them to ask questions without feeling as if they were 'interfering'.

As a result of the overall low level of teacher-parent contact,

many parents made links for themselves. For instance, Ms Hamina at Hill St, unaware of the educational justifications for sand and water play, commented that it was a good idea to have a class sandtray as Hackney children rarely visited the seaside, (Tizard et al, 1981, recorded similar misunderstandings). Two parents of children due to transfer to secondary school related tales their children had told them of bullying and drug abuse in the secondary schools. Such stories circulated annually amongst top juniors in Hackney, and doubtless throughout the country (TES 26/7/91). However, both women, lacking information and experience of the schools concerned, were subject solely to the grapevine, and the poor public image that Hackney's secondary schools appeared to possess.

In several cases, even when parents received information directly from teachers, there was still misunderstanding and confusion. Teachers (and researchers) possess much 'taken-for-granted' educational knowledge (Tizard et al 1981 pp.65-6; Smith 1988). It is easy to forget that parents are not privy to much of this information. To give just one example, a parent who asked about maths teaching in her granddaughter's class did not recognise the name 'Scottish maths' as referring to a commercial scheme (Scottish Maths Project) but interpreted it as maths from Scotland. Even parent governors were not necessarily apprised of curriculum policies. One commented,

> "I found out the other day that we were [teaching reading by]
> doing the 'real book' method. I just thought we were reading
> books! I knew they weren't Janet and John which I did [at
> school]. I've never heard of that in my life!" (Male parent
> governor, Hill St).

A few (4) parents were unaware that Hill St no longer used a formal reading scheme. Generally newer approaches in primary education were unfamiliar to parents. Some teachers complained of parents' traditional views of learning - "some parents force their children to sit and learn the alphabet, that's awful!" (Hill St) - but they had not made a systematic attempt to explain and defend their methods, in this case, their reasons for abandoning a highly structured reading scheme. Likewise Low Rd's infant classes operated a developmental approach to reading and writing. But there had been no coherent effort

to justify this approach to parents. Thus many had only a partial idea of its rationale, and felt that children's writing should be more strictly corrected or wanted them to learn the alphabet by rote (16 parents from both schools specifically mentioned these concerns).

Such a process takes time and regular contact; one meeting to explain 'progressive' methods may cause more misunderstandings than it resolves. Not all parents will be convinced, of course, by a teacher's explanations, although most parent-respondents were concerned only that a method of teaching, any method, seemed to work for their child. Teachers who believe strongly in employing more progressive methods to teach basic skills are missing their opportunity to present their case to parents.

However, teachers were occasionally reluctant to give detailed information, perhaps because, as this mother suggests, they wish to maintain the boundary between professional expertise and lay ignorance.

> "I went to [visit local] schools to see what kinds of [reading] methods were in vogue...It wasn't easy to find that sort of thing out..most treated it as 'this is something we deal with' Very negative really. I don't think they grudge you the time to listen to your questions, but they don't really think that's your role...One head was telling me about the high standards of reading and writing they have there - above average. Well, that's very interesting, but I wasn't worried about my child being behind anyway. They didn't tell me anything in much detail. Perhaps they thought I didn't really want to know," (parent, Hill St).

Most Hill St and Low Rd teachers were keen for parents to help their children at home (see ch.6). Some, however, insisted that parents copy their particular methods, which they presented as the only 'right' way of proceeding.

> "A few pointers to parents could be helpful, like the little booklet that has been prepared for Bookworm [the home-reading scheme], saying how to read with your child....like for example it's extremely important to know the alphabet in order, but also to know the sounds. 'CAT' - it's not phonetic to say 'see-ae-tee' as the sounds. That kind of training, I think, is what the parents have to have," (teacher, Hill St).

However, there were teachers in Hill St who would disagree with the primacy this teacher accorded to learning the alphabet (see p.136). This clash of teaching styles meant that staff occasionally contradicted each other, thus further confusing parents.

Official reports on the curriculum (eg. Cockcroft, DES 1982) often stress the development of whole-school policies precisely to mitigate such confusion (but see Brown 1992 on the danger of imposing one particular model of 'good practice' in different settings). Many parents would have welcomed guidance on the school's approach to basic maths for example, but it appears counter-productive for teachers to condemn the use of other methods, (perhaps stressing mental maths rather than practical maths). Certainly some parents knew that staff would disapprove of methods they used with their children, and therefore were reticent about their efforts.

Parents at both schools intervened in their child's education; in nearly all cases they acted independently of the teachers. One mother at Low Rd, conducted an intensive reading programme, buying a batch of second-hand reading scheme books and reading with her son every night for six months [1]. Several (11) parents at Low Rd commented that having a series of supply teachers had left gaps in their children's education, which they tried to fill. One mother said sharply, "I wonder sometimes if I'm teaching her more than the school is."

Some parents sent their children to local supplementary schools, which concentrated variously on religion, home languages and cultures, and basic education. Despite the economic deprivation which characterised the area, two Low Rd parents had employed private tutors to help their children with reading. They expressed considerable embarrassment over this, feeling it was something they had to keep hidden from staff.

Two groups of parents appeared to have more frequent and productive contact with teachers. One group were the parent governors, particularly those at Hill St. They were in a privileged position, insofar as they saw teachers regularly and felt at ease with them. They could use their position to attain information about their children, as this governor recognised;

CV: "Are you kept in touch with how your children are getting on?

Mr Sidney: Um..yes..but only I think because we ask...and it's my position. I meet teachers in the staffroom and things like that. For a true answer to that you'd need to ask someone who wasn't a parent governor, someone who didn't even come in and help." (Hill St).

The second group were parents of children with recognised special educational needs. At both schools parent-respondents whose children had been referred for statutory assessment said that they felt fully involved. One woman commented that her son's referral to the educational psychologist enabled her to air her views on her child's school experience.

"That's the only way to get to say [what I think] really. You can't just go up to a school and say 'we think this and that'. Know what I mean? It's only because we got the opportunity to say it that we did. [So if there hadn't been that situation] it would never have got said," (Low Rd mother).

Another Low Rd mother commented that "if your children are well-behaved, you don't get to go up the school." This worked both ways; one parent suspected she would have been far less involved in her daughter's schooling "if Anna had been normal".

The teachers in the Low Rd special needs class had closer relationships with parents than was common in the rest of the school. There was a system of home books where staff and parents could write messages. All parents wrote occasionally, and some regularly. Parents could also ring teachers directly, and were encouraged to visit during the school day (all had done so at least once). These parents were amongst the few who felt confident enough to question staff on curriculum content and teaching methods.

"We've had some almost arguments. One mum and dad came in and said, 'This education system is awful, you're just messing around.'.. But at least it's out in the open and there is still a dialogue, although it's clear they think we've the wrong idea about Ricky," (special needs teacher, female).

Their children's special needs had caused these parents to be formally involved with their education, which, in turn, legitimated their questionning.

Most other parents, however, felt more powerless in their dealings with teachers. Some parents (26), particularly at Hill St, complained of feeling 'fobbed off' with reassuring general comments. This is illustrated by a teacher's description of his appointments with parents,

"I have a piece of paper which is my assessment, and I read it to them, and they look it over, and I try to explain what I meant by all that, and try and have a conversation to allay any worries, because they are always worried," (teacher, Hill St).

Parents were generally unsure of what questions to ask to elicit more detail, and some commented that teachers focused on the child's behaviour rather than academic achievement.

"They always say she's a good girl...but I think she needs pushing with her work. I have spoken to her teacher about it..but if you go up there and say anything, you always get the impression that they are busy and that you are a nuisance. Although they're very kind," (mother, Hill St).

"It's almost impossible to get a feel for what's going on. I really wanted to know more anecdotal detailed stuff, like how my son gets on with the other kids. I think if you don't know much about primary education the information is pretty unhelpful, well it doesn't really give you anything to latch onto. It's vague and reassuring, but in a way you don't want reassurance, you want to know the worst things that happen..not what the intentions are," (mother and student teacher, Hill St; also footnote 1 on p.69).

The combination of professional control and parental awareness of their lack of knowledge about the curriculum was apparent in both schools. This made it harder for parents to communicate their own knowledge about the child, as several women commented;

"Teachers can be the dominant partner because they have information parents don't have...But parents also have lots of information about the children. They may read better at home where they don't feel pressurised, they may know lots of things the school doesn't even have on the curriculum. I think the problem is getting those bits of your child into the school picture," (mother, Hill St).

Parent-teacher conferencing was designed to overcome this (ILEA 1989). One woman described the system at a neighbouring school.

"I got a letter to see the teacher, I thought he'd been in trouble, but what it was, was every parent in the class had a

time to go and talk to the teacher for half an hour. [We talked about] what he liked doing, does he have any problems?..That was a good thing..They don't have anything like that here," (parent, Low Rd).

Most parents were reliant on the teacher's judgements of their child's progress (see also Tomlinson & Hutchison 1991). On several (10) occasions people described, often bitterly, how they had found out that their child's achievement was below average, long after the teachers had presumably identified the problem. One Low Rd parent who had just learned that her 11 year old daughter needed extra help with her reading and writing, commented sadly "I didn't know she was behind. She seemed quite brainy compared to [son]". Her son was in a school for children with learning difficulties. A Hill St mother, concerned about her child's progress, summed up parental opinion by saying,

"[The teachers] will soon approach you if the child is playing up..they should approach you over their education..They shouldn't say, 'Oh, he'll be alright in a year's time, two years time,' because sometimes they're not."

However, parents who were unhappy about their child's progress rarely challenged the teacher, but instead would either accept the situation or make alternative arrangements. Often parents did not feel competent to question the teacher's professional judgement directly. Teachers were often unaware of parents' efforts at home, or their views on what they saw as deficiencies in pedagogy. In interview parents often expressed opinions on curriculum content and teaching. One Low Rd father fluently discussed what he saw as the disadvantages in developmental approaches to reading, and the advantages of phonics. However, when he spoke to his daughter's teacher about her progress, he expressed his concern in much vaguer terms, because he did not want to appear to be criticising the teacher. Thus his specific points remained unanswered. Formalised lay intervention in curricula issues was an unfamiliar concept to most parents, which could explain why so few voiced a wish to be involved in policy-making (see p.144 above)

In some cases parents' passivity sprang from a quite different cause. Some adults saw their child's ability and readiness to learn as

fixed. Their children either had "got it up there" or not. Two Low Rd
women drew a clear distinction between one's son and the other's
daughter. The little girl was 'forward' and 'brainy', whilst the older
boy "didn't like work... you can't get a child to learn if he doesn't
want to, it's not the teacher's fault, it's John's." Another Low Rd
mother commented "[My daughter] gets on alright here..she is above
average, I think it all depends on the actual child." A third woman
expressed confusion about the interaction between the effectiveness of
the school and the child's 'natural' ability.

> "My daughter is not good at studying. I don't know if the problem
> is her or the school. My [teenage] sons say it's the school..it's
> got worse [since they attended]," (translated response, Low Rd).

In his study of Croxteth Comprehensive, Carspecken also notes this
phenomenon of parents' viewing the child's ability as innate and
divorced from her learning environment.

> "Take the case of the working class parent whose child is doing
> poorly at school..their perception of their child's educational
> experiences could take a number of culturally shaped forms. They
> could blame their child for being lazy or thick...The real
> reasons for the child's negative experiences would likely be
> related to the difference between the culture of the school and
> the culture the child is growing up within...Working class
> families are more apt to interpret poor educational results in
> terms of personal faults..[rather] than to view them as a product
> of cultural disjunctions between school and home," (1990 p.11)

Such explanations stem from the meritocratic philosophy informing
state education (Carspecken 1990; see ch.2). Failure is seen as the
fault of individuals: usually the student's own failings (not making
enough effort, not concentrating, not having a positive attitude);
occasionally the teacher's (not able to keep control, using
ineffective, progressive teaching methods, or spending too much time
on 'political' causes such as anti-racism). People are not, however,
encouraged to question an education system dominated by the demands of
an exam hierarchy that continues to label many young people as
failures (CCCS 1981, 1991).

Whilst parents at both schools seldom queried teachers'
judgements on educational matters, they would dispute with the
teachers on non-educational issues. The head of Low Rd commented that

lost coats and headlice were common grievances. Likewise a frequent criticism at Hill St was the school's recent ban on children bringing drinks to school, and the manner of its presentation (a brief note with no explanation). Where these apparently mundane welfare issues are concerned, the teacher's role is one of carer rather than educator and overlaps with that of the parent. Therefore the latter can legitimately challenge the staff's effectiveness in this role. Parental opportunities to make an active and productive contribution in other areas, especially the curriculum, are circumscribed by widespread notions of professional exclusiveness. Generally the parents in this study did not feel competent enough to challenge this status quo. Thus many of their interventions into their child's education were carried out independently from the school, which in turn often assumed parental uninterest and apathy. Low Rd's headteacher is quoted above as saying that inner-city schools are often criticised for their low expectations of working class pupils. This study does not reveal whether this would be an accurate criticism of the attitudes of the staff at Hill St and Low Rd towards the children. It does however suggest low expectations held by the schools of their parents.

Parents' views on discipline.
Discipline was a lesser issue at Hill St than at Low Rd, and little material was collected on the subject there. Parents did mention individual instances where they were displeased with the disciplinary procedures, but there were few disapproving comments about general standards. This is not to suggest that all the children at Hill St were impeccably behaved, nor that all the Low Rd children were out of control! Rather, at Low Rd there was a clash of values between the head's beliefs about discipline and those of some parents. At Hill St there was no evidence to suggest that this conflict existed on any wide scale.

Over half the parent-respondents (32 out of 50) at Low Rd, mentioned their concerns with school discipline. Some referred to the environment or parental inadequacies as primary causes. However other parents (19) concentrated their dissatisfaction on the school and, in

particular, the headteacher. Frequent comments suggested that 'discipline should come from 'the top', the children 'ran rings round the headteacher' who was too 'soft'. Particular complaints centred around the perception that disruptive children when sent to her often ended up 'playing' in her office, and that playground fights and bullying were not followed up. Ms Court believed that disruptive behaviour was often a sign of unhappiness and needed understanding rather than a more authoritarian reception. This contrasted with the more traditional view of discipline held by some parents (from all ethnic groups), and some teachers (see Foster 1990 p.48 for similar clashes between headteacher and staff). The disciplinarian ideal is also informed by gender stereotypes, as illustrated by one mother's description of the head at a neigbouring school, who was male, and therefore 'naturally' more effective.

> "It's like at home, who do they take more notice of? Their father. I'll say 'don't do it' a couple of times, but he says 'DON'T DO IT!' once and they'll stop...The headmaster there is brilliant, no mucking around. Dave had spent some of his dinner money...and he'd made a little fire in a bin around the back so I took him to see the headmaster. He's still on home-report and it's been five weeks now. He said to him 'Straighten your arms!" and he was like this [immediately stiffens arms]. That teacher's got the respect of all the kids in that school," (Low Rd parent).

Ms Court realised that her credibility problems arose from her divergence from this 'norm'.

> "One of the strengths and drawbacks of pre-me Low Rd, was that they [the then separate infant and junior schools] were extremely well-run schools administratively, everything had its place, including members of staff. The children were well-behaved but I thought incredibly dull. My own view was that children should become responsible for their own learning...and that their linguistic abilities and cultures provided them with a tremendous resource that wasn't being built on. Part of my task was to take the lid off...When children were referred to me I had to go through the whole business of sitting down and gaining the child's trust. Some of the staff and parents...had been used to a more cut and dried punitive approach...There was a sort of mythology around that seemed to be fairly popular, that when the children were naughty, they were patted on the head and allowed to play. That suited some people's purposes....Yes, that's still a problem..[but] I feel supported in my philosophy now by the majority of staff."

The (female) deputy, whilst supportive of the head, had a sterner manner with the children.

> "Yes, we have different but complementary styles of dealing with the kids...I think I tend to be the first reference point. I'm in the playground and staff room more than Jennifer can be. The dinner ladies tend to come to me, the children do too now," (deputy, Low Rd)

Whilst this system might appear quite pragmatic and flexible, it does nothing to challenge the traditional punitive approach to discipline that the headteacher was trying to replace. She specifically referred to the school being "about children now, not this patriarchal sort of system." Yet parents, ancillary staff, children and some teachers were all familiar with this authoriarian mode of control; they constructed a hierarchy which identified the deputy as the effective disciplinarian in the traditional male mode, and relegated Ms Court to a more marginal position. She was seen as being 'soft' and therefore less effective. This contrast undermines the head's emphasis on understanding children's motivations, and giving them time and space to express themselves, although her rationale receives apparent support from most staff, including the deputy. A woman teacher described Ms Court as having tried to "change the relationships between teacher and children, being more open to individuals instead of treating everyone as a crowd". However, this new ethos, being simply imposed upon the school, met with disruption from some children and resistance from parents. Ms Court had begun to modify her approach somewhat. In particular, she stressed the need for clear boundaries and structures to regulate the relationship not just between teachers and children but also with parents.

> "After the emphasis on the children..valuing their contributions, listening to them, there should have been a period when we clarified our learning expectations, and instead there was a short period when I felt that the children were slightly holding the reins and exploiting the openness. Then I felt we needed more differentation. I began to be aware of things like boundaries, and a sense of belonging and appropriate activities..I do like being called Ms Court, whereas in my last school, I was Jennifer to everyone, but it's a question of appropriateness. When I was aware that things were getting child dictated rather than child centred I felt we [the staff] needed to be seen by the parents as

a reasonably tidy and organised group - trying to move into a
more appropriate teacher mode."

Ms Court's preferred mode of discipline owes its pedigree to liberal
progressive child-centred traditions, and had worked successfully in
her last school which had a predominantly middle class parent body.
However, it was not accepted easily by Low Rd's working class
population. (Carspecken, 1990, describes a similar disjunction between
parental and professional approaches to discipline). There was no
dialogue or consultation with parents about discipline policies or
procedures. Instead there was a reversion to more traditional
approaches, which were seen as 'appropriate' for Low Rd's population.

Thus, in interactions with both schools, parents were offered a
nominal partnership but in fact, kept in a subordinate position by
social class and occupational boundaries. Such an unequal relationship
can result firstly, in disjunctions in parent-teacher communication,
and secondly, in the continued existence of unresolved conflicts
between home and school. In this context, a few genuinely friendly
relationships between individual teachers and parents were
insufficient to permanently bridge the gap caused by professional and
social class differences.

Attention now turns to the issues dividing parents at the two
schools. The first area explored is ethnicity and racism; the second,
an examination of apparent parental reluctance to get further involved
in their children's education, either individually or collectively.

Parental reluctance, parental division:
Black and bi-lingual parents
Hill St.
Much of the literature on home-school relations concentrates on white
parents, or has been informed by a deficit view of ethnic minority
families (see p.50 above; also Tomlinson 1984). This section examines
several aspects of the relationship between black and bi-lingual
parents and the school.

During the research period at Hill St, there were no black
parents in the PA or governing body. Thomas (1986) argues that

economic and demographic factors, such as housing, employment etc. are often a result of racism and discrimination, and can adversely affect a black person's ability to participate in voluntary groups (see p.8 above). Several research studies have concluded that teachers may be influenced in their judgements of black children's ability by their behaviour rather than their school work (Wright 1987; Mac an Ghaill 1988) [2]. Gillborn identifies 'the myth of an Afro-Caribbean challenge to authority' (1990 p.19). He concludes that many conflicts arise out of the teachers' expectations of disruptive or challenging behaviour from African/Caribbean boys, and also their ethnocentric interpretations of the forms of dress, speech or even ways of walking adopted by the pupils (1990 p.200) [3]. Four of Hill St's African/Caribbean parents commented on this syndrome. They felt that they had witnessed examples of their children being labelled as 'trouble-makers', a process which alienates both parent and child. One parent described her experience.

"They think I think he wears a halo, but I know what kind of kid he can be...[But] the child who came to school was not the child who came home....Sometimes he's treated quite rightly, sometimes it's just the name of the child, regardless of who did what. If he's involved, he's the culprit..He's got a name that goes with him from class to class," (mother, Hill St).

Although this parent's tone is quite moderate here, staff distrusted her. One teacher who had not met her, described her as 'manipulative'. It appeared that the school did not feel that she was supportive enough of their attempts to discipline her son.

A Rastafarian mother, Ms Abrahams offered another example of this dislocation between home and school. Commenting on the conflict between her son and his teacher, she said she felt that the teacher concentrated on criticising her son's behaviour, and not paying enough attention to his academic performance. She believed the teacher treated the child badly, and had once attempted to humiliate him by "calling him like a dog" [4]. After this incident Ms Abrahams insisted that the boy be moved to another class. Although she focused her comments on her differences with this particular teacher, the incidents had clearly affected Ms Abrahams' view of the school (see

p.86 above). On returning to the school, I re-interviewed another black woman, Ms Watson, whose child was in the same class, and who also referred to the incident. In the following passage, she uses 'we' to denote a small group of black women who were friends. It also emphasises their separateness from the school establishment.

"The teacher - when we first heard of it, we thought it was just a one-off thing and it was the child - but we found she was picking on the black children in her group. There was an incident where she...said [to the child] that this is the way she'd treat her dog. And other little things we felt were wrong, were racist basically...It was specifically aimed at the black kids, if we thought it was the white kids as well we wouldn't have made too much fuss... We tried to put that over to the head but she said the teacher said she didn't do it that way [ie talk to the child in a way that was offensive]...she [the head] doesn't pay much attention to what you are saying...I don't feel comfortable around that teacher now. I don't have much contact with her now...[But] I think apart from that particular teacher and the head..all the others have done their best to be aware of all the different cultures and teach in the class to suit everyone and get all the kids involved. That teacher is just one, they're not all like that," (Ms Watson, Hill St).

The child's version of the incident and the teacher's obviously differ markedly. However, the important point in this context is that, irrespective of what exactly happened, the parents' perceptions of the school were adversely affected. Although both parents stressed that they had not adopted a uniformly negative view, they remained unhappy with the school's response, and maintained a distance between themselves and the staff.

Ms Watson suggested that black parents' own experience of schooling in England informed the sense of alienation from the education system which she recognised in many adults. She cited in support the ethnocentric curriculum, superficial attempts to introduce a multicultural perspective into schools, and low expectations of black children (she herself felt that she had been encouraged to concentrate on sport rather than on academic work, see Carrington 1983 for an account of how sport is used as a 'sidetrack'). The disenchantment of many African/Caribbean families with the education system is most pointedly reflected in the establishment of community supplementary schools (Tomlinson 1984).

Eight South Asian parent-respondents also revealed a similar sense of alienation. Six commented that they had little contact with the school, and gave various reasons. Most were Muslim (two respondents were not), and one parent commented on how little the staff knew about Islam. Another expressed surprise that despite the large number of Muslim children in the school the school celebrated Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Light, (there were few Hindus at the school), but not Id-ul- Fitr, the Muslim festival which marks the end of Ramadan [5]. Through the promptings of a recently-appointed Muslim governor, the school instituted bi-weekly, separate assemblies, a move welcomed by Muslim respondents. These were later reduced to one per week because, as one teacher put it, the organisation was too 'intrusive'. The school also hosted Urdu and Gujerati lessons during the day, for Asian children. However, no steps were taken to include visiting teachers in the main staff body. They came to take lessons in the parents' room and then left, having little contact with other teachers or children (see also MacDonald et al 1989, ch.22 for similar examples). Another reason given by parents for their lack of contact with the school was their unfamiliarity, and in some cases disapproval of the teaching methods used. Four parents commented that they would have preferred more traditional teaching styles. However, as noted earlier, parents had little information about the school's techniques, and spoke more in confusion than opposition. In common with the African/Caribbean respondents, those Asian parents who had little contact with Hill St remained very interested in their children's education, and continued it outside school. Most said they were teaching their child their mother tongue, and many of Hill St's Muslim children attended the *madrassah* (Koranic classes) after school (see Afshar 1989; Shaikh & Kelly 1989; Smith & Tomlinson 1989 on the high expectations of education held by many ethnic minority parents).

One teacher, Ms Tsongas, helped by the Muslim governor, tried sporadically to develop closer links with two local Islamic community; centres. Both groups were keen to have closer links with the school. However, Hill St staff had no coherent idea of the sort of liaison that could be established. Thus the community groups were used as resource centres, places that could provide translations, information,

and teachers for language lessons. An example of closer involvement occurred during a discussion on how the school should approach the celebrations of religious festivals, when Ms Tsongas offered the community centre organisers a chance to contribute to the school's decision-making process. However, maintaining the level of contact necessary to develop a potentially fruitful link, was the responsibility of one teacher, helped occasionally by a colleague and the Muslim governor. Pressure of work for all those involved ensured that such contact remained limited and infrequent.

The neighbouring Coronation School hosted Saturday English lessons and other activities for Asian women and children. One teacher thought that involving Hill St parents would be advantageous to home-school relationships, because "If they [Asian parents] see something being done to help them, then hopefully they will see the school as a useful place." However, the Asian communities, particularly the local Muslim community, were very well-established, and had their own thriving community groups. They were unlikely to see themselves needing 'help'. Nor is such an initiative likely to affect their interaction as parents with the school, (see p.120-1 above).

Families new to England are particularly likely to perceive institutions as remote and distant, unless the institution actively endeavours to present itself otherwise. One of the most recent groups of arrivals in north-east London were Turkish and Kurdish families. Hill St had a part-time Turkish speaking teacher, Dideem, who was funded by a local community group to work with children from eight or nine families. All the families had been in England for less than two years. Through Dideem, I spoke to five parents. On arrival many had had no information on schools, housing, or jobs, and were almost totally reliant on other community members. They stressed the importance of education for their children, but found the English education system informal and unstructured, compared to Turkey's (see Sonyel 1987). This contributed to their difficulty in gaining information; there was no time-table, no homework, and the children claimed they mostly did maths and drawing [6]. The parents wanted opportunities to talk to teachers, to ask about teaching methods and school routines, and how they could help their children at home. In

previous years, and on her own initiative, Dideem had arranged meetings to try and answer these questions. Two teachers thought further meetings were necessary, but these fell victim to the pressure of time. Instead the teachers used Dideem as a resource, someone to interpret and translate for them. This was important work, but Dideem was able and willing to establish coherent links with Turkish-speaking parents, rather than simply acting as a link between individual teachers and parents. The potential of such posts is further diminished by financial pressures on community group grants and school budgets which are currently affecting Hackney and many other areas.

Black and bi-lingual parents: Low Rd School.
There was a growing population of British Bangladeshi children at Low Road, and fifteen Bangladeshi parents took part in the study. The interviews took place, occasionally in English but mostly through a Sylheti-speaking interpreter, Shajna. The respondents were initially wary about talking to us, although the actual interview sessions soon became very friendy and relaxed. Such caution is not surprising in a community that has experienced the levels of abuse and harrassment that Bangladeshis living in the East End have been subjected to. Shajna herself had recently been rehoused, as she and her family had suffered a campaign of intimidation on her estate, including a regular nightly catalogue of people yelling abuse, and trying to kick the door down. My respondents told of other incidents, less severe perhaps but powerfully intimidating; abusive white adults and children, stones thrown at windows and drink cans thrown at women. Such incidents had shaped their initial suspicions of me.

The Bangladeshi parents shared with many of the Hill St's ethnic minority parents, a sense of alienation from the school. As one woman commented when I thanked them for giving up their time to speak to us, this was the first time they had met in school as a group, and the first time anyone had asked them for their views and opinions about school (several indigenous parents made the same comment). The Bangladeshi parents had two particular concerns. Firstly, that communication with the teachers was so difficult and therefore spasmodic, and secondly, the amount of fighting in the playground.

In common with Hill St's Turkish population, the parents expressed frustration that they did not know what sort of work their children did at school or how they were getting on. During the research period the school had only one Bengali/Sylheti speaking teacher, Ms Ali. As she was a class teacher she was often unavailable to parents, despite her efforts to maintain links with them. Therefore, many parents relied on their children to translate, an ineffective form of communication where younger children are involved, especially when the subject for discussion is the child itself. As informal communication was the most common type of teacher-parent interaction at Low Rd this effectively excluded those Bangladeshi parents who spoke little English. Thus, ten parents specifically commented that they appreciated a particular occasion and invitation to visit. Their information about school life was reduced by the irregularity of translated letters home.

Several parents spoke of nearby schools which had parents' groups where Bangladeshi parents could speak to teachers, through interpreters if necessary. They were keen to see such a group at Low Road. It might, one man suggested, make the school seem less remote (Tomlinson & Hutchison 1991). As far as the parent-respondents were concerned, Low Road had no books in Bengali (it actually had a few and was ordering more), no Bengali classes, only one Bengali-speaker on the staff; and took little account of Islam (the school had not celebrated Id-ul-Fitr during the previous year, although, like Hill St, it did celebrate Diwali). The school's ethos was formed by those who had their origin in a different social class and ethnic group, spoke a different language, and were influenced by a different religion. Bangladeshi respondents saw a parents' group as giving them a potential forum in which to find out about their children's progress, build closer links with the staff, and try and bring their own culture into a monocultural school.

The second issue particularly concerning Bangladeshi parents was one that many parents mentioned – that of fighting and indiscipline. My interpreter endeavoured to find out whether the parents felt their children suffered from racist abuse and harrassment. The responses were mixed, some said yes, the fighting and name-calling were directed

at Bangladeshi children more than at other groups of children. Others said no, there was a generally high level of indiscipline involving children indiscriminantly (of course, children may not always tell their parents about racist incidents, Troyna & Hatcher 1992). Bangladeshi respondents felt that teachers rarely followed up incidents or complaints from children, a criticism shared by many other parents. In fact, the school did have a procedure for dealing with fighting and name-calling; all incidents were meant to be recorded and sent to the head. Parent-respondents were unaware of this system, and this emphasises the need for clear procedures, known to staff, parents and children, for dealing with transgressions. My limited contact with the children meant that I was unable to ascertain how effectively the system worked, but the school's approach was clearly limited to reacting to individual cases. During the school year, another Bengali/Sylhetti speaker was appointed onto the staff. He felt strongly that Bangladeshi culture and Islam should be more prominent in school life, and he had organised a celebration of Id. Other teachers did not oppose such developments, but did not initiate them. Such inaction was, as he commented, an action in itself.

Racial prejudice: parents.

Parent-respondents were not specifically asked about ethnic differences, but people often commented on the heterogeneity of the schools' populations. There were noticeably fewer racist statements from parents at Hill St than from those at Low Rd. However, Asian families, especially women, were vulnerable to stereotyping by some respondents. It was claimed 'they wouldn't mix', spoke no English, and were dominated by their husbands. One parent governer commented condescendingly,

> "They [parents in general] don't want to know. I think a lot of schools have the same problem. I think it depends on the cultural differences as well. If you've got a lot of Asian parents...although our Asian parents seem to be the better ones. Our International Food Evening, they took a very big part," [7].

However, despite some exceptions, relationships between parents, children and teachers of different ethnic groups appeared fairly

harmonious. If parents did hold more strident racist views they were more reticent than some at Low Rd.

The Bangladeshi community were the main target for racism at Low Rd. Eight white parents shared a common theme - that the school favoured the 'pakis', although no-one gave any definite examples of this phenomenon. This was unsurprising given that so little special provision for the Bangladeshi population existed. The prejudice however, appeared strong. One white woman who had agreed to talk to me, changed her mind, apparently after seeing me talking to some Bangladeshi women in the playground.

Chris Husbands (1983) focuses on the East End in his book about National Front support. He suggests that voting patterns for far-right parties are a blunt instrument for measuring racial prejudice, and that it is also important to consider whether relationships between black and white groups are characterised by co-operation, indifference or hostility. At Low Rd, three white women were strongly anti-racist in their sentiments, and spoke out against the harrassment faced by the black population, particularly the Bangladeshis. It would be erroneous to assume that white parents who did not voice an opinion on the school's ethnic profile harboured racist views. However, a sizeable minority of the white population apparently saw Bangladeshi settlement as posing a threat to the 'white' East End.

Husbands characterises the area as having a long history of racial exclusivity. He describes the culture of a section of the white working class population as "pragmatic, apolitical, and territorial" (see also Formisano 1991). In 1990-91, social and economic resources, such as housing, jobs, even school places were in short supply in the locality, and pressure on them growing (Tomlinson 1992). In contrast to other London areas, the population of the East End was rising, largely because of the settling Bangladeshi community (The Guardian 23/7/91). Some effort had been made by the local authority to accommodate the Bangladeshi population. Bengali/Sylheti speaking workers were employed at points of service delivery, some housing estates had bilingual signs and notices, and the authority funded some Bangladeshi community groups (Eade 1988). Thus, there were visible signs of the new population movement which directly threatened the

indigenous community's perception of the area as their own. Fuelling the resulting hostility was the social and economic powerlessness of the white working class and the area's history of economic deprivation.

Racial prejudice - teachers

An incident of perceived discrimination involving a Hill St teacher has already been described. However, I was unable to talk to all those involved, and so a partial view of events is presented. No-one at Hill St mentioned any other incidents. However Low Rd's headteacher described at least two of her staff as holding "negative views of the Bangladeshi population". A third (temporary) teacher, whilst appearing dedicated to helping all the children in her class, employed a crusading approach to Christianity which meant that a multi-ethnic, multi-religious school was not an appropriate setting for her. Ms Cavell conducted daily prayers in the classroom with all her infant children, until the headteacher dissuaded her from doing so. In talking about the differences she found amongst the children, she commented,

> "The white children and the black children will sometimes confront me [whereas] it's very strange but the Indian (sic) children are easier to manage..although they are heathen."

Mr Lawrence was a black teacher on a temporary contract. He had several complaints about his experience at Low Rd, feeling that the other staff were unhelpful and that he and the other African/Caribbean teachers had been 'frozen out' [8]. He also stated in interview that he had had negative experiences of Asian people in the Caribbean, and that his experience of teaching at Low Rd had confirmed his views that "you can't trust these people". One Bangladeshi child in his class stopped coming to school. His mother, Ms Murshid, dictated a letter of complaint to the Bengali-speaking teacher, Ms. Ali.

> "Sometimes the teacher pulls his ear and pinches his cheek. If he can't do his work in class or his homework, the teacher hits the child." (Translated).

Mr Lawrence then publicly accused Ms Ali of 'siding' with the Bangladeshi families. The head stressed to me that this was an internal matter, which she would deal with. This left Ms Murshid to search out my interpreter to find out what was going on; Ms Ali did not want to be further involved, and the school had made no attempt to contact the mother. In the event, as Mr Lawrence was temporary, little action was taken regarding either his complaint over his treatment in the school, or Ms Murshid's complaint over his treatment of her son.

As noted above, the school was reactive rather than proactive in its attitude towards racial incidents (Gillborn 1993). In fact, neither school made marked attempts to encourage a climate which might militate against such behaviour. The situation also illustrates the marginalisation of parents, particularly black parents, within the schools. They appeared largely unaware of these various happenings and had few channels for effective complaint. At Low Rd in particular, Bangladeshi families had to face not only prejudice from some of the white working class parents, but also institutional neglect, by the school, of their needs and concerns.

In conclusion, many black and ethnic minority parents in this study responded with a sense of disaffection to their children's apparently insular, ethnocentric schools. However, this focus on ethnicity should not be taken as suggesting that the different ethnic groups held homogeneous opinions of the schools. Although most parent respondents also shared the same gender and class groups, other factors were pertinent in determining their attitude towards the school. These included views about the education service in general, and knowledge of the English primary education system and language. Therefore the differing reactions and relationships of actors in any educational setting cannot be explained in terms of their ethnicity alone (McCarthy 1990 ch.5).

Parental Reluctance? Parental division: Levels of involvement

Individual involvement: Hill St and Low Rd Schools.

Parents were asked about their level of involvement with the school,

and why they and/or other parents were not more closely involved in school activities. Explanations referred to attitudes as well as to practical problems; from the former one can identify certain loose groupings amongst the parent body. These are *supportive* parents, *detached* parents, and *independent* parents [9]. *Irresponsible* parents are identified as presenting a powerful image, but none of the parents in this study fitted the criteria.

a) Supportive parents

The 'supportive' parents were those most closely fitting the teachers' stereotypical ideal of the 'good' parent. Twelve (out of 45) Hill St parents clearly fitted into this category, and had become incorporated to some extent into the school structures, although only the parent governors were firmly entrenched. These parents could be relied upon to attend school events (whether summoned to do so either by the PA, or the school itself). They took the initiative in forging a relationship with their child's teachers, attending school meetings and talking to the teachers. They felt strongly that parents should not leave *education to the school*, did 'school' work at home with their children, and attempted to monitor their progress.

In common with the teachers, these parents when asked why other parents did not attend school or PA meetings offered reasons which focused on the effects of living in Hackney. Again there was a split between those who saw apathetic parents as a problem, and those who saw people's living conditions as producing such great pressure that sometimes "school matters are more than they can cope with" (mother, Hill St).

As there were no regular arrangements for parent-teacher meetings at Low Rd, an identifiable group of 'supportive' parents had not emerged (although 4 parents clearly fell into this category). There had been little opportunity for parents to gauge each other's responses to the school and there were fewer comments, in comparison to Hill St, suggesting that other people were not interested in following their children's progress. One parent governor did firmly state that,

> "It's up to the individual parent. You're saying about the teachers' evenings and this and that, but to be perfectly honest

with you, there's so many parents who just don't give a damn how their child is doing, or what their child is doing as long as they are not at home," (female governor, Low Rd).

b) 'Irresponsible' parents?

The view of the Low Rd governor was developed by one school-supportive couple at Hill St, speaking at length about the irresponsibility of many Hackney inhabitants, who did not care about their children's progress at school, nor about a host of other social and moral responsibilities. Their remarks, supported by the comments of other parents, appeared rooted in a particular 'folk devil' (Cohen 1980): members of the 'underclass' (Murray 1989). Its elements include the single mother with often changing, often aggressive partners, and undisciplined, unruly children. Such families are portrayed as having frequent, unproductive contact with the police and social services. They do not care about the state of their home and immediate surroundings, nor about their children's education or behaviour; they do not 'hold down' steady jobs, and resist all attempts to regulate their behaviour (Murray 1989; Golding & Middleton 1982 p.59). This portrait receives a further brush stroke with media references to African/Caribbean families, led by single women, unable to control their children, and young black men with predilections for street crime and loud music (Thomas 1986 p.6-7). A distinction is drawn between this portrayal of the 'undeserving' poor (or 'underclass') and the 'deserving', hardworking, honest poor. This division has a long and tenacious history, and is a feature of neo-conservatism (Pearson 1983; Golding & Middleton 1982; p.35 above). Such 'folk devils' are portrayed as active figures, creating the circumstances in which they live.

Yet certain words recurred in the descriptions given by some 'supportive parents' to describe those they felt did not care: 'apathetic', 'lethargic', 'not bothered', 'couldn't care less', they used the school as a 'dumping ground', they 'couldn't wait to get away'. These words suggest not the wilful rebellion of the stereotyped image, but alienated passivity. In his study of Hackney, Harrison (1983) found much fear of the folk devil described above - and indeed some justification for that fear - but more often he found people who

had given up, who could not be politically mobilised, people who felt
defeated by the 'system', whether it be schools and their attendant
welfare services, social security, housing departments, or the police.
Perhaps this is the explanation for the low parental turn-out at Hill
St and Low Rd - that people have given up?

c) Detached parents

Certainly some parents at both schools believed it was not part of
their role to have much interaction with the school. Eight parents
(out of 45) at Hill St and nine (out of 50) at Low Rd fell clearly
into this category. They felt that the acquisition of 'school
knowledge' was the teachers' province. They had little and irregular
contact with the school. They were not uninterested in their
children's progress, but did not see themselves as educators. The
schools' somewhat weak attempts to encourage them otherwise had passed
them by. They had not however abdicated responsibility as parents,
seeing it as their part to aid their children's development in other
ways, such as regulating their behaviour, introducing them to cultural
and religious mores, or preparing them for the adult world. This group
of parents was small, and composed of working-class adults from across
all ethnic groups.

d) Independent parents

A far larger group expressed a desire to get more involved with the
school, but were hindered from doing so by a variety of reasons (see
Independent Parents p.65 above). Twenty five parents at Hill St and
thirty seven at Low Rd fell into this category. These parents were
often labelled 'apathetic' by staff and other parents, because they
were not seen at school very often. They rejected the traditional
roles of PA member and voluntary helper (where available), perceiving
that these made little difference to their children's education. In
their relationships with teachers, parents found that they often had
to take the initiative and this they were not always prepared to do.
Instead, they made alternative arrangements, working with the children
at home, and/or taking them to supplementary classes. However, this
group all claimed they would like closer involvement with the school,

and made sporadic efforts to achieve it.

However, several factors could hamper these attempts. In addition to practical reasons, such as the pressure of work and finding child care, another point deserves attention. Parents were aware of the unequal power relations between themselves and the teachers. They felt that teachers looked down on them or excluded them from events and information. In some cases the response to this was wariness, and sometimes hostility towards the school; in others a simple withdrawal had taken place. Except in cases of crisis (usually as a result of the child's behaviour), many parents saw no appropriate role for them at school. One woman's explanation shows how some parents have so internalised their exclusion that they exhibit considerable uncertainty about approaching teachers.

> "Whenever I've gone to a teacher, she's always said how nice it was to have parents showing an interest. So perhaps some parents don't show any interest and that's the problem. I don't know, maybe it ain't been put to them to show an interest. Alright, they really should go and fend for themselves. The children have only got one education and you have to make sure it's a good one. But maybe some people don't think of that, maybe they think well, the teacher might be busy or they might not like to go in the class and look at the work, they might feel a nuisance," (mother, Low Rd).

Several parents commented that a consequence of parental exclusion by the school was their loss of influence over their child.

> "You have more control [at home]. You can actually choose what your child does, you can choose the books. I choose black books for my kids, but I also have lots of different books. I choose when they eat and when they don't, when they go out to play and when they don't. Here [at school] it's all been taken from you, you don't have the right to say my child doesn't go to school today. If you do, you are in trouble," (Ms Watson, Hill St parent).

> "They take more notice of the teacher, and you take second place...you're not as important as the teacher, and they've got to do things the teacher's way," (mother, Hill St).

Ms Watson developed this theme, arguing that professional control of schools was too tight, denying parents any significant influence, and leaving some children vulnerable to labelling. Arguably, the exclusion

she identifies stems not from a deliberate staff strategy, but rather from their semi-conscious agenda which gave parents a low priority.

Gutmann (1987) argues for a balance between state influence on a child's education and the family's influence. The sentiments expressed by many 'independent' parents illustrate the extent to which they feel that the state, personified by the teachers as state employees, has commanded control over the educative process. However, the situations at Hill St and Low Rd show that maintaining that balance between state and familial control is fraught with difficulties. To redress the balance, parents would need to come together as a interest group; individual actions would have limited effects. The next section explores the issues involved in taking collective action.

Forms of collective action

1. Parents' Groups.

All parent-respondents were asked their views on a parents' discussion group (see Tomlinson 1991). Fifty-one responded positively, especially to the idea of discussing organisational and extra-curricular issues like playground behaviour, and uniform. As noted above, there was more reticence where curricula issues were concerned as most parents wanted information rather than involvement in decision-making. Respondents stressed the potential of a parents' group to improve communication between parents and teacher, and to facilitate joint action, "getting together to sort things out".

> "At the moment it's just what the school says. It [a parents'
> group] would give everyone a chance to have their individual
> say...No, I don't think there would necessarily be a low turn-
> out, parents will want to put their point-of-view to the
> school..even if the school don't take much notice, we'd have a
> chance to air our views," (Low Rd mother).

Several parents (9) commented that speaking in formal meetings made them feel uncomfortable, and stressed the importance of an informal, relaxed environment if people were to speak out. Eighteen parents questioned the attitudes and commitment of others. "Parents of this day and age, their attitudes aren't constructive," said one. Some, especially those who had had some involvement in Hill St.'s PA,

doubted whether it would be possible to attract a high turn-out. Parents at Low Rd were more optimistic, perhaps because they had had fewer experiences of this sort from which to draw.

Teachers also had doubts. Their view of a parents' group differed substantially from the independent, active, organisation pictured by parents. Several parents suggested ways in which such a group could attain independence from staff, whereas the teachers themselves were quite openly concerned that such a group would attract the 'wrong' sort of parents, and would need someone to keep a close check on proceedings.

"I think the whole atmosphere has got to be totally different here for parents to come together as a group. If the parents wanted to do it then I think it would be better if there was a governor or a teacher as reference points within that meeting so they could address things then and there, and the parents could get some feedback," (female teacher, Low Rd).

"I think it's important for parents to have a voice, but if something like that was set-up I feel you'd get one particular group of dominanting parents that would try and take over. *A lot of the best parents are really quiet, those that take care of their children and are nice and responsible,"* [my emphasis] (female teacher, Hill St).

One teacher who favoured increased parental involvement commented,

"In order for the staff not to feel paranoid and attacked, I think it's important for them to start initiating things for groups of parents to join in with. To have the upper-hand I suppose. I suppose I don't want the teachers to lose control either. It's not a wonderful world, someone's got to be in control, and it's not not going to be us! If you have things going on, theatre productions and things, parents would appear," (male teacher, Low Rd).

A few respondents (6 parents and 8 teachers) made a quite different objection, commenting on the perceived tendency of parents to concentrate on the welfare of their own child and overlook the wider interests of all children. The particularistic concerns of some parents ("If it's nothing to do with my child, I don't want to know," mother, Low Rd) may be explained as a rational response to the dominance of professional accountability within a producer-led education system. Central government's recent moves towards consumer

accountability have also emphasised individualistic perspectives (Ranson 1986, see ch.2). However, the number of parents who favour a parents' group suggests a willingness to adopt a broader view.

Support for the idea of parents taking a larger role in school decision-making cannot be assumed to translate unproblematically into practice. For many parents, especially women with heavy domestic responsibilities, finding time to attend meetings is a real problem. In addition, not all teachers would react positively to such a group, especially if it threatened to affect their own actions or conditions. In order to allow a new universalistic mood to develop, it is important to promote public debate on whole school issues (Ranson & Thomas 1989, see ch.10). However, such a debate requires that all groups and all voices be heard and represented, whether dissenting from or supporting the status quo. This will not be achieved through the methods apparently suggested by Hill St and Low Rd's staff - the filtering of parents until only the 'good' parents remain.

However, in theory at least, many parents were willing to favour involvement and participation rather than the consumer's choice - withdrawing their children from the school. In Hirschmann's (1970) terms, they support 'voice' within the institution rather than 'exit' from it. One parent sums up such a choice thus;

> "This is what it is - why parents are taking their kids out of school. My cousin..took her boy out and she's trying to get the girl out too, because all it is is, come to school, then come home, and that's it. Whereas if they [parents generally] took more interest and got more involved, to find out what the teachers get up to and how they teach, it'd be more better," (mother, Low Rd)

2. Ethnic Minority Parents' Groups

Separate parents' groups were suggested by members of various minority groups as a solution to their isolation from the school. It is a controversial notion, fuelling fears that it could have divisive effects. The MacDonald report on Burnage High School highlighted this danger by quoting the following letter from a London headteacher.

> "I would strongly advise that you [the Burnage headteacher] do not set up a separate ethnic system for minority groups. Two or three schools in the London area have tried it and it has been a

fiasco. It is divisive, creates suspicion and can lead to unnecessary squabbles with indigenous white parents who often feel they are being pushed aside..Where there are open discussions with all groups the veil of suspicion is removed," (quoted in Macdonald et al 1989 p.178).

Such a move is likely to cause particular resentment when there are few opportunities for indigenous parents to be in contact with the school. This was the case at Burnage, and would also apply at the two Hackney schools, particularly Low Rd.

An alternative strategy to increase the level of ethnic minority involvement at Hill St and Low Rd would aim to increase the general level of parental involvement. However within this, it is vital that a specific appeal is made to minority communities, given respondents' strong sense of alienation. Preparation for a parents' evening, for example, would include such measures as translating letters into home languages, arranging for interpreters, and inviting people personally. More general contact with community groups, especially those with an educational brief, can expand the insular focus of schools like Hill St and Low Rd. However, for recently-arrived groups, such as Hill St's Turkish-speaking parents, informal separate parents' meetings could serve a useful introductory function.

3. Low Rd and collective action: a case study

Several parents at both schools with experience of initiating and co-ordinating joint action commented on the difficulties of getting people involved. At Hill St the joint action discussed was mostly fund raising events, possibly an additional burden to hard-pressed people. Thomas (1986) comments on the importance of instrumental motivation when working people make decisions about participating in voluntary activities. This would suggest that if the issues were more fundamental to people's lives, support might be easier to garner.

However, at Low Rd the same problems emerged even when this appeared to be the case. One parent, Ms Beale complained to the head about an unpopular temporary teacher who had a very traditional and occasionally punitive style. The head suggested that she put her concerns in writing, and the letter could then be forwarded to the Education Directorate. Several other unhappy parents approached Ms

Beale hearing that she had complained, and she relayed the head's advice about letters of complaint. However,

> "I asked them last week and no-one had written. They just accept it. If we all stood together, we could get her moved, not sacked but moved up to the juniors, where you might need that sort of discipline," (Ms Beale)

Eventually she took the individualist solution and had her son transferred to the parallel class.

It is possible that other parents did not fully share Ms Beale's concern. However, another issue, the teacher shortage, seemed an ideal candidate for joint action. All the parents who took part in the study either had or knew of children affected. During the previous year classes had been badly disrupted, and subject to either a chain of unreliable supply teachers ("They had one called Mr Rush – he only stayed two days!" Mother), or to being sent home. During the research period a class of middle infants had been at home for nearly eight weeks. All parent-respondents were agreed on the adverse effects of the shortage, commenting on the disruption caused to the children's progress, and their enjoyment of school, and the difficulties caused to working parents. In addition, it was recognised that such a high teacher turn-over militated against the development of positive, interactive relationships between either parents or children and their teacher. Despite this consensus, only a few (6) spoke of taking any action, mostly writing letters, or ringing the Education Directorate. Just three parents attended a public meeting organised by the National Union of Teachers. One woman described her efforts to get her son back into school.

> "I had a right go at the education office when he was off school all that time, I was on the phone every five minutes and all that happened was that I was passed from one to another. I never spoke to the same person twice. I went to that [NUT] meeting at the Town Hall. I couldn't get [the councillor] to answer my question...The [audience] kept shouting 'answer this lady's question' and he kept changing the subject. No-one wants to know. When it comes down to it they don't care."

The school had started the academic year five class-teachers short. At the end of the previous summer term, the head had been placed in the invidious position of having to warn all parents concerned that their

children would not be able to return in September unless teachers were found. The sense of frustration was pervasive, and such that only people accustomed to perceiving themselves as powerless could have accepted it. One parent whose 'lucky' child had only had just over a week off at the beginning of term before the appointment of a permanent teacher, described her feelings then. "We were upset, so was she [the head]. It was something we didn't have any control over...I was going out of mind wondering how long it would be." Another woman commented,"It's very frustrating, but you can't do anything. It's not just you, if you're in a class of 30, you're just one of 30 parents going through the same traumas."

Teacher shortage has recently proved a recurrent blight on London's education system. Low Rd's problem was however particularly acute, and I felt it important to explore people's perceptions of the causes. Most parents commented that they did not really know why there was a shortage of teachers, and then offered reasons gleaned from the media (11 could give no reason at all). Twenty two blamed the Government, usually for the low levels of teacher pay, (although two saw teacher shortage as a feature of a wider attack on services for the working class), and nine London's expensive housing. Eleven people blamed the council, often mentioning the payroll fiasco; five thought Hackney would not be attractive to prospective teachers, and two gave the same reason in relation to the school [10]. So why was no joint action taken, given the depth of feeling that existed amongst parents and their awareness of the harm such disruption did to the children's progress and their home lives?

The many people who referred to media explanations for the teacher shortage suggests that paradoxically, publicity designed to heighten general awareness of the problem had lessened the likelihood of action being taken by Low Road parents. As teacher shortage was (accurately) presented as a widespread problem, people felt that it was caused by forces beyond their control. Complaining to a hard-pressed Directorate brought few immediate results, and councillors too appeared ineffectual or uninterested. One parent summed up the feeling of powerlessness.

"[The teacher shortage] is such an acute problem and in Hackney it's worst...Who are the poorest boroughs? Hackney and Tower Hamlets. We don't get a good deal in Hackney. At my son's nursery, they said staff weren't getting paid. I know other mothers whose children aren't at school- no teacher. It makes you very apprehensive...What can you do? You can lobby the [central] government but they are only concerned with curriculum changes. We need grass-roots changes to ensure our education will be safe. You don't feel its safe," (mother, Low Rd).

Parents of children at the special needs class, faced with part-time schooling, did eventually involve the local press. They felt the coverage did hasten the appearance of a teacher. It is significant that this form of action came from this class, as these parents were a more cohesive group than any of the year groups in the mainstream school. In addition, both parents who played a leading part in obtaining the publicity displayed somewhat atypical levels of confidence and articulateness.

Many parents in the main school commented that they did not really know other parents in their children's class. It was thus harder for them to contact each other. This fragmentation meant that the parents who did act, acted not in conjunction with or on behalf of other parents but individually, a few exercising their role as a consumer with choice, and taking their children out of the school. When a teacher was finally found for the middle infants class "a staggering two months" after the children were originally sent home, six pupils had left for other schools, (Hackney Gazette 7.12.90). To organise collective action a catalyst was needed in the form of a person or event. A meeting at the Town Hall seemed distant and remote to the residents of this part of Hackney; a local meeting concentrating on the shortages at Low Rd would have been more likely to attract people. However none of the parent-respondents in the study appeared willing to organise such an event. Their sense of control over their local environment had been decimated by experience of their own powerlessness at the hands of central and local state institutions.

In the last months of the ILEA, many Bangladeshi families in Tower Hamlets were in a even worse situation. Their children had never been to school at all because of a shortage of places. Kumar Murshid

of the Tower Hamlets Education Campaign argued that, "It is unthinkable that the crisis would have arisen or continued so long if the children had been middle class and white" (TES 12.1.90 p.6, Tomlinson 1992). Low Rd children affected by teacher shortage came from many ethnic groups. Their families were overwhelmingly poor working class. It is hard to escape a similar conclusion – that such a situation would never have been allowed to arise in a middle class area of London.

Conclusion: Hill St & Low Rd Case-studies

Hill St and Low Rd's populations both resembled 'nominal communities' (Thomas 1986). Their membership was fragmented by differences in social class, ethnicity, religion, language and occupational culture. As chapter 6 observed, the main division was between professional and lay actors, but these groups were further sub-divided. Teachers were influenced by their varying pedagogical philosophies, and positions in the institutional hierarchy. Differences between them often remained submerged, subordinate to the demands of professional unity. Amongst parents, divisions were more overt. At first glance, most parents could be categorised as working class; but there were divisions within this grouping (for example by 'race' and 'respectablity'), which informed parental opinions of the schools and of each other. This situation prevented their coming together to pursue their common interests as parents; the majority operated as 'independents'.

Such profound fragmentation requires radical solutions if the schools are to move along the continuum towards 'interacting communities' (Thomas 1986). However, the actors themselves – the teachers and parents – saw the solution in reformist terms. The teachers were concerned to increase the few overtly 'supportive' parents. Both headteachers saw closer involvement of parents with their own child's education as an area in need of development, although not necessarily a high priority. Class teachers were more likely to emphasise establishing social contact with individual parents. Both strategies were informed by the same rationale – to

ensure the schools' smooth functioning (see ch.1 above). Parents'
opinions were more likely to reflect their awareness of the unequal
power relations between themselves and teachers. Many parents viewed
this imbalance as a feature of the aloofness and remoteness that they
felt characterised state institutions. However, parents' discontent
with their shared powerlessness and dependency on professionals was
tempered by their perceived lack of 'school knowledge'. This, in turn,
deterred them from feeling qualified to comment on school practice,
especially with regard to curricula issues (Carspecken 1990 p.91).
Thus many parents also saw the solution in individualist terms,
feeling that increased contact with the school would make it easier
for them to state their own particular concerns. However, there were
also signs of parental enthusiasm for a parents' group. Experience of
successful collective participation in the school appears to have the
potential to overcome the sense of powerlessness which, for instance,
caused parents to passively accept the teacher   shortage situation
at Low Rd. However, the teachers were concerned to maintain a clear
hierarchy within their relationships with parents; they cast parents
in the role of supporters and helpers, thereby encouraging individual
rather than collective involvement.

Even if an increase in individual contacts materialises (and
conditions in neither school were ideal), several issues will remain
unaffected. The staff are unlikely to renounce their professional
control, or become more flexible or open to minority group demands.
If they did so, teachers might find themselves having to re-consider
their practice at parents' requests. Given this continued situation,
some parents will become increasingly disillusioned with promises of
closer contact and co-operation which do not extend beyond the role
of 'supportive' parent. Without collective parental representation
Low Rd and Hill St will remain nominal school communities.

The next chapter focuses on an attempt to alter this situation
through the appointment of home-school liaison officers.

Chapter Seven: Footnotes

[1] When parents were teaching without reference to the school, it is unsurprising that they reverted to the traditional methods they remembered from their own school days.

[2] This section concentrates on behaviour as most of the Hill St children with a *reputation* for being disruptive were black boys. However, this includes only a few individuals; the majority of black children proceeded smoothly through their primary school career.

[3] In the detention book at Hill St, most entries were for fighting and swearing. One, however, gave a child a detention for 'walking insolently' and another for 'attitude problems'; see Gillborn 1990 ch.2.

[4] After an incident between two children, the teacher apparently called the boy over to her pretending he was a dog. The teacher told Ms Abrahams that she was joking with the child. Neither the teacher nor head mentioned the incident to me, and I was unable to pursue it as, in common with all my respondents, I had given Ms Abrahams guarantees of anonymity.

[5] The celebration of Diwali, which includes an eventful story, and opportunities for dance, art and craft activities, appears to have become incorporated into the mainstream curriculum of the inner-city primary school as the annual 'multicultural' element.

[6] It was possible that the children were given more maths and art activities than their peers, as these do not require a knowledge of written English.

[7] At a governors' meeting during a discussion about headlice, the same governor related the 'fact' that 'one of the Indian groups' do not wash their hair for religious reasons, and so will not use the shampoo that kills the lice. Her remarks went unchallenged.

[8] The other teachers concerned were non-committal, simply saying they did not visit the staffroom often as they worked through their lunch hour. Tomlinson (1984) discusses some of the employment problems faced by black teachers. .

[9] The three groups can be related to the ideal types defined in ch.3. The 'supportive' parents at Hill St and Low Rd are an example of the 'supporter/learner' category (p.56-63). The 'independent' grouping of ch.3 (p.65-6) has been sub-divided here to include a minority of 'detached' parents. There were no examples of parents employing the attitudes or vocabulary of consumerism (p.63-65). (The situation may be different in these post-Parents' Charter times. However research by Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz (1993, also Bowe, Ball & Gewirtz 1993) suggests that the discourse of consumerism is currently employed by middle class not working class parents). Neither were Hill St nor Low Rd parents offered the opportunity to act as participants as outlined in ch.3 (p.66-68).

[10] Some respondents volunteered more than one reason for the teacher shortage. Two respondents blamed central government but referred to the payroll problems, actually the responsibility of the council. This suggests that their view of 'the state' was as a homogeneous monolith.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MICRO-POLITICS OF HOME-SCHOOL LIAISON.

Introduction.

The following two chapters are concerned with change; specifically, the progress of two innovations planned by the LEA. Both aimed to intervene in home-school relations in order to increase contact and co-operation between parents and teachers. One initiative appointed three part-time workers to develop and co-ordinate different types of home-school liaison. The second concerned a centre established to provide advice and support for parents (see ch.9).

The development of both projects was less straight-forward than envisaged, and this account explains the conflicts and confusions that beset the process of innovation. In order to do this, a micro-political perspective is employed. The moment of change is an especially appropriate one to explore micro-political processes at work within an institution, for it is then that "subterranean conflicts and differences which are otherwise glossed over or obscured in the daily routines of the school," are brought to the surface and made visible (Ball 1987 p.28)

The first section of this chapter explores micro-political perspectives on change through a brief comparison with traditional organisational theories. The second section focuses on the history of home-school co-ordinator (HSC) posts and the background to the Hackney project. A third section analyses events in the three schools. The final section draws together some common themes.

Micro-political Theory

Micro-political perspectives on educational institutions were developed in response to what many commentators saw as shortcomings in traditional organisational theory (Blase 1991; Ball 1987; Hoyle 1986). The latter is criticised for stressing order, consensus, a linear process of goal identification and attainment, formal sources of

power, and the assumption of "rational efficiency and effectiveness in decision-making and problem-solving" (Blase 1991a p.2; see also Anderson 1991). Hoyle (1986) describes the 'maintenance paradigm', which assumes the social world is predictable and rational.

> "[It] is concerned with the effective use of resources, maximising the fit between organisational goals and personal needs..The theory of change is..essentially that of planned change, whereby adaptation to a changing environment is handled by structural changes and the re-training and re-socialization of participants," (Hoyle 1986 p.261).

Industry and commerce are the source of much of this theory (Ball 1987 p.7). However, the structure of educational institutions differs from the formal hierarchies of many other organisations, and instead can be defined as 'loose-coupling' (Tyler 1986). This describes the independence of its different parts, and the autonomy of workers from direct surveillance and control (Ball 1987 p.12). However, Bacharach warns against minimising the structural constraints on individual actors (1986 p.281; also Blase 1991b p.238). Thus Bell suggests the concept of 'anarchic organisations' is a more exact way of describing schools (Bell 1986 p.8). This term highlights the interplay of external influences upon schools (such as decreasing finances, legislation etc) and the potential for intra-organisational conflict and goal diversity.

> "The anarchic organisation is not..a formless or unpredictable collection of individuals. Rather it is an organisation with a structure of its own...partly determined by external pressures and partly a product of the nature of the organisation itself. It is anarchic in the sense that the relationship between the goals, members and technology is not as clearly functional as conventional organisation theory indicates that it will be," (Bell 1986 p.8).

This suggests that formulating and implementing 'planned change' is not as straightforward as traditional organisation theory claims (Ball 1987 p.13). Bell comments,

> "Different members of the school may perceive different goals or attribute different priorities to the same goals..Thus while it is commonly expected that those who work in schools should have some overall purpose, it is likely that the organisational

context of many schools renders this impossible or very difficult," (Bell 1986 p.9).

Ball's definition of micro-politics rests on three inter-related areas; firstly, the interests of actors, secondly, the maintenance of organisational control and thirdly, conflict over policy. Change, or its possiblity, can affect all three areas. He comments,

"I take schools...to be arenas of struggle, to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly-coordinated; to be ideologically diverse," (1987 p.19).

It is with this description in mind that this chapter applies a micro-political analysis to the LEA initiative described below.

The micro-politics of home-school liaison.

The Hackney Home-School Partnership Project

"The home-school liaison teacher has to bargain, cajole, negotiate, trade.." (CEDC 1990 p.16)

This chapter describes the appointment of three home-school co-ordinators (HSCs) in three Hackney primary schools, St Anne's, Ladywood and Westdown. It focuses on their early experiences and activities, and analyses how confusion and conflict over policy, and perceived threats to established interests and the control of the organisation caused the Project to flounder in some settings. The problems that arose stemmed from the different values and priorities held by the parties and individuals involved.

In their study of Scottish community education provision, Nisbitt et al (1980) sought to clarify what people meant by community education. They identified common elements subscribed to by most of their respondents, but found that these were variously defined, depending on the speaker's wider value-system. As the three case studies illustrate, this was a major feature of the early implementation of the HSC Project. The broad agenda - that closer home-school relations would be valuable in supporting the children's progress - was agreed by all parties. The more detailed agenda - the

project booklet produced by LEA officers - had the agreement of headteachers and the co-ordinators. Yet vested interests determined the specific interpretations adopted by different individuals and groups. Earlier chapters have argued that home-school relations, like community education, is particularly vulnerable to this because of the high level of generality and incidence of condensation symbols present in discussions of the issues (see p.53 above).

Ball identifies three types of teachers' interests: *vested* interests, *ideological* interests and *self* interests (1987 p.17). (This is roughly mirrored by Hoyles' professional, political and personal interests, 1986 p.257). Vested interests refer to teachers' individual and collective working conditions; ideological interests refer to the values and beliefs informing their views on the educational process; self-interest refers to teachers' self-image and self-esteem as professionals. This chapter argues that in some school settings, the home-school liaison project threatened all three types of interest. Thus the likelihood of it failing to attract teachers' support was high, and it was, in one case, rejected totally.

The History of HSC Posts

Several LEAs have established HSC posts (Bastiani & Bailey 1992). Local Management of Schools, however, raises a question-mark over their future. By April 1993 (1995 for inner London), LEAs were required to limit to 15% the proportion of the Potential Schools Budget they held centrally, thereby forcing the funding of HSC posts to compete with other educational priorities.

Whilst their future is therefore uncertain, the history of these posts is clearer. Current schemes vary in their emphasis and organisation [1] but they also share considerable similarities, derived from their common origin. As earlier chapters show, the issue of parent-teacher relationships, and their corresponding effects upon the experience of school students, came to prominence during the 1960s compensatory programmes (CEDC 1990; see chs.1,2 & 3 above). The LEAs that currently have HSCs serve mainly inner city areas (Bastiani & Bailey 1992). Some local authorities in areas with a mixed social class population direct HSCs at those schools with predominantly poor

working class and/or ethnic minority populations (Cleveland LEA is an example, see Bastiani & Bailey 1992). Middle class parents, by contrast, are not thought to be in particular need of either lessons in childcare, nor anyone to 'interpret' the education system. However, sustained criticism (Tizard et al 1981; David 1980; ACER 1986) of the compensatory approach has led to a corresponding shift in the language of policy goals and aims for HSCs. While a focus on the family and child remains important in most projects, some HSCs also work with teachers to alter their practice and attitudes (CEDC 1990).

Influences: The Westminster Parent Organiser Scheme.

The Hackney Project derived from a visit made in 1989 by David Sandford, a local headteacher, to the Parent Organiser at Westminster City School. An appraisal of the Westminster scheme sheds light onto the model of parent-teacher relationships which influenced the Hackney proposals [2].

Westminster City is a Church of England secondary boys school. It has a well-established Parents' Association which promoted parental involvement to support the progress of their own children, as well as the school as a whole (Mayall 1990 ch.2). In 1988 with funding from the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Parents' Association appointed a Parent Organiser. Her brief was to recruit parents to work in school either as helpers, or occasionally as 'experts', giving talks to the pupils. Despite the headteachers' suggestions that such involvement could have broader benefits for parents in terms of their increased knowledge of the school and curriculum, it is difficult to see how parents, recruited individually, and particularly those whose tasks involved helping teachers with their paperwork, increased their understanding of the curriculum. Rather it would appear that the project offered parents a role as supporters; the 'learning' aspect was secondary, and carefully controlled. As Mayall comments,

> "An important goal of the project was to set up and develop a system which would encourage parents to learn about the curriculum, but would control and channel their access to the school through carefully discussed and gradually developed methods which the staff would find acceptable," (1990 p.20).

Teacher attitudes towards the scheme were mixed which meant that the Parent Organiser proceeded cautiously, working only with enthusiastic teachers (ibid p.61). The parents themselves, mostly women, were quite positive about the project, professing themselves pleased to be in the school in a legitimate capacity and helping the staff.

Thus, the project's immediate goals were specific and clearly defined; the wider implications of increasing parental presence in the school were discussed in vaguer, more general terms. However, within its narrow goals, the Project was carefully implemented by the Parent Organiser and deemed a success.

The Hackney Proposal - substance and reaction [3].

Impressed by what he saw, Mr Sandford, the Hackney headteacher, considered how to plan a similar project for his own small church school. He immediately and deliberately widened the objectives, incorporating a more active parental role, and presenting the school as willing to accommodate parental opinions.

> "This particular secondary school was saying [to parents] 'This is what we want provided', and I felt that was important. But the other part was to say, 'Well, what do you want from us?' I had the idea that you needed to get a general agreement on what the school provided and what the parents want..so we listen to what the parents want and act on it," (David Sandford).

He approached the Gulbenkian Trust for funding; it suggested that a project covering several schools would be more effective in developing and disseminating 'good practice'. As the ILEA was then being abolished, Hackney Education officers drew up a proposal.

The initial document appeared to disassociate itself from the traditional compensatory role for HSCs, by stressing that the Project seeks to include all parents.

> "The central aim..is to explore ways in which parents from all racial, cultural and social backgrounds can be encouraged to play a greater role in their child's early learning and educational achievement. To do this, it is proposed to establish parent co-ordinators in three primary schools, each with a different intake in racial, cultural and social terms," (Hackney LEA 1989d p.3).

The document claimed that pupil achievement would benefit from the "[mutual] understanding..and co-operative activity" of parents and

teachers (Hackney LEA 1989d p.4). The emphasis on joint objectives suggests that change and adaptation by the school is not precluded as a possiblity. The LEA's Education Development Plan talks of exploring ways in which the contribution of "parents, schools and pupils in the education process might be more clearly defined so that shared objectives can be pursued in a spirit of partnership and understanding," (Hackney LEA 1989b p.57) [4].

The co-ordinator's precise activities were purposively left vague, as "she or he will work with the headteacher and staff to review the current pattern of parental involvement and will gather information from parents and teachers on the views and expectations of both," (officer's letter to Trusts, 4/12/89). In interview, senior officers stressed the encouragement of increased parental involvement in their individual child's learning.

> "A greater awareness on the part of all parents of their roles as educators would empower more to help their children to learn and reach higher levels of achievement," (Hackney LEA 1991 p.3).

> "The starting point...is that the child's education begins at home, and that a substantial part of it takes place outside school, so that unless parent and teacher are working in a partnership, and recognising that both are educators, they're not going to make a lot of progress...For the majority of parents I think..the thing that counts..is the development of an understanding and confidential relationship with individuals in the school," (officer).

The scheme's concern was with encouraging joint parent-teacher action to raise standards. For the initiators [the LEA officers] the most appropriate mechanism was increased parental involvement in the curriculum. They did not reject the possibility that this might lead to debate, discussion and even modification of school policies and practices, although this was not emphasised. Thus the scheme fits the supporter/learner category identified in chapter 3 (pp.55-63 above), although it is not conceived as being wholly teacher-directed, in contrast to many such initiatives. This last point was not, however, an aspect of the scheme that was appreciated by some of the teachers involved.

Officers' opinions about the HSCs' role differed slightly. The Director saw the posts as having a wider community-orientated brief,

whilst other officers, although accepting the 'community' as an arena for action, focused on the co-ordinators' close links with the school and its teachers.

> "I see the home-school liaison people as working in relation to both the home and the school...also working very closely with community groups in generating a greater degree of interest and involvement on the part of the wider community in issues of schooling in the locality," (Director).

> "The job of the [HSCs] will be determined by the school in which they work...they will be working daily and directly with teachers..they have got to earn credibility directly with individual teachers in establishments," (officer).

However, these differences of emphasis remained submerged, as the Project quickly became embroiled by conflict between the co-ordinators and teaching staff in two schools.

Initial resistance to the scheme came from the HTA. In terms which foreshadowed the views of some of the teachers involved with the Project, one union official strongly objected to the possibility of non-teachers becoming HSCs.

> "I'm not in favour of [HSCs] really. It would be much better to enhance the staffing of all primary schools...If there was an increase in staffing, there would be an increase in non-contact time and it would be down to the classteacher to make contacts with parents. That would be better as they are the teachers of the child. I think there is little [an HSC] can do to improve the learning relationship. They will not be teachers and we argued that they should be...This is a political move to try and undercut the liaison between the ordinary classroom teacher and parents. As such I think it's profoundly reactionary, and..nothing but harm will come of it," (union activist).

Developments and delays

The Hackney proposal eventually won £100,000 in joint funding from three Trusts, Gulbenkian, Baring, and City Parochial. This sum was sufficient to fund three half-time HSCs for two years. The original date of appointment was to have been April 1990. However, the Trusts had their own timetables to consider and this date proved impractical. Attempts were made in April and May 1990 to encourage schools to nominate themselves for the Project. Officers thought it crucial that HSCs should not waste their efforts in schools where teachers were

unresponsive. Self-selection by schools was seen as an indication of positive staff attitudes, even if the institution could not demonstrate any particular progress in developing parental involvement to date.

Headteachers were informed about the Project at a general meeting at the time of transfer and this was followed up with a letter. However, this period was marked by administrative upheaval, which undoubtedly contributed to the low response rate. Selecting the schools and commencing the appointments procedure were both severely delayed due to officer workload. The prevailing tone of Hackney's first year as an LEA was one of 'crisis management' (see ch.5). However the proposed Project was not in crisis, and so it was superceded in officers' priorities by other issues. By spring 1991, officers had chosen the three schools. Their populations represented a rough spread of the social class and ethnic groups present in the borough (see below for details). The headteachers were involved in the interviews, and the co-ordinators were finally appointed in June 1991. The delay meant firstly, the schools that had originally expressed interest had done so over a year before the actual arrival of a co-ordinator, and secondly, when the time came for consulting with schools and making the appointments, events proceeded quickly. The effect of these factors is considered below.

Events, reactions and interpretations:
St. Anne's CE school

St Anne's was a small, popular school, situated close to one of Hackney's more dilapidated housing estates. However as a church school it drew its population from beyond its immediate surroundings, admitting children from religious, but not necessarily Christian, backgrounds. In 1990, the percentage of parents with non-manual jobs was 39%; the next largest groups were the skilled manual workers (23%), and the no-wage earners (22%). Nearly 15% had semi/unskilled manual positions. Thus the families whose children attended St Anne's were more equally distributed between socio-economic groups than the populations of the other two schools. The majority of children were African/Caribbean (53% in 1990), the second largest group comprised

indigenous children (34%). The school population was fairly stable; indeed the 1990 figure for pupil mobility at St Anne's was just over half that of the other two schools. Forty three percent of families were eligible for free school meals (below the 1990 borough average of 50%); only 14% of children were deemed to have English as a second language (the 1990 borough average was 24%) [5].

David Sandford had been at the school for eleven years, and had been headteacher for five years. Staff turnover was low, allowing teachers and parents "to get to know each other over a number of years," (Mr Sandford). Most teaching and support staff were white, which did not reflect the school's ethnic mix. The school had a Parents' Association which organised many well-attended social and fundraising events. In many respects therefore, St Anne's resembled Westminster City School, whose Parent Organiser scheme had inspired the headteacher. Both were relatively small schools, both attracted a slightly more homogeneous group of families than would be common for inner London; both had stable staffing and headteachers supportive of the idea of parental involvement. Also both schools had a well-established parents' group, which organised fund raising events, independently of the teaching staff.

The St Anne's HSC, Lydia, shared several characteristics with the other two co-ordinators. She was white, in her 30s, had children, and did not have a teaching background. However, unlike the others, Lydia had been involved in a voluntary capacity at St Anne's for some eleven years, helping in the classrooms, serving on the PA Committee, and, as a parent governor assuming considerable responsibility for admissions. This past relationship with the school and many parents, radically altered the nature of her job in comparison to that of the other co-ordinators.

Her relationship with the head was very positive. He had clear goals for the development of parental involvement at St Anne's, and saw Lydia's post as crucial to their success. This contrasts with the apparent attitudes of the other headteachers involved. Such a long connection with the school also influenced Lydia's view of it as an institution, and her position within it. In describing parental involvement in the school, she commented,

"We operate the PLR (Primary Learning Record) here....Parents are invited in to help with the work - perhaps that could be improved upon, I'm hoping to do some work on that...Parents help with swimming, library visits and trips. I don't think there's so much help with the work, a little with cooking and reading, I used to do that...We've had language evenings and cheese & wine."

Lydia was the only co-ordinator to refer to staff as 'we' rather than 'they'. She saw herself as part of the school - although not part of the teaching staff - an important point discussed further below - and was perceived as such by parents and teachers [6]. Her position as parent governor had also served to give her more status than experience as an ancillary helper alone would have done. She had, as one officer remarked, "credibility [with the teachers] before she moved a muscle". This gave her position as HSC a source of validity that the other co-ordinators found it hard to attain. To take one example, the Steering Group [7], a source of controversy in Westdown and to a lesser extent at Ladywood, was established quickly at St Anne's. Its members were enthusiastic about the Project and supportive of Lydia.

Lydia's quick and complete incorporation into the school establishment affected the attitude of the St Anne teachers' towards the scheme. She was not an 'outsider' to the staff. Both the teachers and Lydia herself perceived her primary link as being with the school, not the Education Offices. She preferred to concentrate on practical, school-based developments, rather than attend meetings with officers. Thus there was less LEA involvement at St Anne's than at the two other schools where the HSCs turned to officers for support.

The Project's development at St Anne's was controlled by the headteacher with input from the co-ordinator herself. Lydia had read Mayall's (1990) account of the Westminster project and used it as her model. During the first few months, many new initiatives were tried. With a teacher, the co-ordinator conducted some home-visits to parents of prospective nursery school children; a letter was sent to all parents asking them to help in the school; a drop-in room was established; class meetings were planned; parents were surveyed in an attempt to discover their main areas of concern regarding the school;

efforts were made to increase attendance at the Annual Parents' Meeting; the written format for home-school communication was revised; and Lydia was involved in planning socials and fundraising events. These innovations were not all pursued concurrently. The two main initiatives were organising parents to work in school on a regular basis, and the survey of parental opinion of the school. This last was a preliminary step to planning a home-school contract, an issue David Sandford was particularly interested in.

Most of these events offered parents a school-supporter role, although there had been attempts before the HSC Project to make the school more open to parents' views, including a poll on the re-introduction of uniform. The headteacher saw contracts as a way to develop this openness. He was aware that they have attracted criticism for presenting as a partnership what is really a school-dominated model of parental involvement (see pp.60-63 above). Thus he emphasised that a contract should be formed through consultation. He hoped to use it to involve parents in the school's governance, and thus widen the number of roles on offer to them, not as learners, but towards a status more analagous to that of participant.

> "Instead of saying [to parents], 'What do you want from the
> school?' and leaving it vague, [we'll] give [them] a list from
> which they can prioritise some areas and we can look at them in
> depth, so we've already got a mandate from parents about what we
> should be doing...Lydia has now got... parents..to come in and
> [help]. I think that's brilliant. But that's only one side of it.
> I want to know what parents expect from St Anne's School - you
> can't have a one-way partnership. What I hope we'll have
> eventually is an agreement between teachers, parents and children
> as to what we're about. This will then be presented as a
> discussion document for anyone who comes to school, but instead
> of something presented by one person it will be agreed....This is
> an equally important function of the organiser, it's great to
> have people come in and do things, but this is their school,
> [parents] have got to have a clear voice in it," (David Sandford)

This is not to over-state the significance of the developments at St Anne's. The contract was at an early stage of planning; many potential problems had not yet appeared. The notion of consultation itself is problematic (see chs.1 & 10), and the task of ensuring that a representative body of parents were involved in formulating a home-

school contract would be a difficult one. David Sandford realised the possible pitfalls of inviting parents to express their views.

"Teachers may well find it threatening to be asked certain questions about the level of work that they're offering the children or the quality of results from the child, matters of discipline..Once it's open, you have to have enough courage and confidence to talk it through..The openness will depend on how much people can...be responsive to it."

However, one potential obstacle had already been circumvented by the HSC. The parental survey had highlighted school discipline as a main concern. Lydia's position in the school allowed her to hand such data to the head, without attracting any adverse reaction to her part in gathering what would have been considered potentially explosive information at Westdown or Ladywood.

The work on the home-school contract undertaken by the headteacher and the co-ordinator did not immediately affect the teachers' autonomy in the classroom. David Sandford's style of headship also lessened the likelihood of staff feeling under attack (see *Issues Arising* below). He advocated 'leading by example', so that Lydia worked only with teachers already enthusiastic about increased parental involvement. These teachers also had considerable freedom to expand that parental involvement as they chose. Lydia herself respected teachers' rights to organise their professional environment as they wished, and thus presented no direct or immediate threat to their sense of autonomy within their own classrooms.

"Teacher attitudes are a slight barrier in some cases. No reflection on the teachers. The best teacher my son had didn't like parents in at all, the door was shut very firmly. It's just how some prefer to teach..I'm hoping to get over to teachers that we can get parents in to help [them]," (HSC).

In summary, the Project progressed fairly smoothly at St. Anne's. The agenda was written by the headteacher, and implemented by the co-ordinator, with enthusiastic support from some teachers, and relatively passive acceptance from others. The type of parental involvement developed here is transitional. Some aspects - parents as helpers, modelled on the Westminster scheme, and parents as active fund-raisers - consign parents to the more traditional reaches of the

supporter/learner category (see pp.55-63 above). However, there are signs that the headteacher wishes to develop more opportunities for parents to act as participants. His moves in this direction contain the potential for altering the teacher-parent power balance, but are also vulnerable to the pitfalls described above. However, the Project at St Anne's was specifically defined, and within those boundaries, and from its progress to date, participants judged it successful.

Ladywood School

Ladywood was a large school situated in a residential part of Hackney. The surrounding streets consisted of private owner occupier and rented accommodation, and small council estates. In 1990 the percentage of parents with non-manual jobs rose to just over 40%, a fairly high figure for Hackney, although the percentage of those families with no wage earner also rose to 34%. This suggests a trend towards the polarisation of socio-economic status amongst families at the school. Just under half of the families were eligible for free school meals (46%), which is slightly below the Hackney average. 35% of the children came from indigenous families and 27% from African/Caribbean families. There was also a significant number of Turkish/Kurdish children, many of whom were recent arrivals in England. However, 25% of children were recorded as having English as a second language, which was in line with the borough average [5].

The headteacher, Eleanor Keatley, had been in post for two years. When she arrived at the school, she found little parental involvement, and felt the HSC could help teachers remedy this.

> "It just seemed as if there wouldn't be an opportunity to introduce this [parental involvement] as an initiative. The staff were already creaking under the weight of everything else, so my appreciation of the scheme was that it would give us someone who would help us do it," (Ms Keatley).

This hints at the key issue which caused the Project to flounder at Ladywood. The head and the co-ordinator operated with different interpretations of parental involvement and the Project's aims. The differences remained submerged, however, and were not articulated by

either party in discussion with the other. The existing school ethos emphasised traditional, teacher-directed forms of parental involvement (including socials and parental helpers). This is illustrated by the head's response to a question about home-school policies.

"Oh, we have got one [a policy], but I don't quite see...it's just the usual things of why we want parental involvement, and that we try and encourage it. Parental involvement in the classoom and on outings, special occasions, and to a lesser extent, discipline," (Eleanor Keatley).

Ladywood joined the Project belatedly when another school dropped out. This resulted in the headteacher having only a short period of active involvement in the Project prior to the HSCs' appointments. Had she been involved at an earlier stage, it is possible that her views on the Project's development would have been clear to officers, and indeed to the HSC concerned, thus allowing overt debate.

"The job description I saw [for the HSC posts] was very general...I think a pitfall is not having a JD specific to the school..I don't think I realised when I put the bid in, that a year later we'd be negotiating what she was to do. Had I been in at the beginning..I would have insisted on that," (Eleanor Keatley).

The co-ordinator appointed to Ladywood was called Claire. She had a background in voluntary work, community groups, and bringing up her own children who had special educational needs. She found her initial half term at the school a difficult experience. Her early plans included working in the reception class, to build links between the school and the children's parents at the start of the children's school life. She also initiated a Parents' Group in the school's special needs class. The other main area of activity was developing links with the Turkish/Kurdish community. The HSC made some progress in these areas, but felt strongly that she did not receive much support from the headteacher. In addition, while some of the other teachers displayed an interest in the Project, this was not widespread or sustained. She felt increasingly marginalised, having little contact with the headteacher, and not being involved in planning a school social. This position was symbolised by her lack of space within the school. The head originally insisted that there was nowhere

Claire could use as a base and as a meeting place for parents. The LEA eventually intervened to ensure that she was given a room.

Despite the head's reference to 'negotiation', an agreed method of working for the HSC failed to emerge. This was partly because the head occasionally delegated responsibility for the project to her deputy, which added scope for misunderstanding and confusion. However, more fundamental reasons evolve from the different perspectives and positions of the headteacher and the HSC.

The headteacher's perception was that the HSC's job was to help staff with initiatives *they* had planned by relieving them of much of the 'leg-work'.

> "Given that we've made these tentative steps [in parental involvement], and it has to be said that all these things have involved masses of teacher time. The booklet, the socials, the newsletter, all that type of thing the teachers could initiate, but there's an awful lot of legwork the co-ordinator could do..[I want her to encourage parental involvement] in the curriculum really. We were thinking of PACT and Maths PACT, that takes an awful lot of time to get together - the parents could help make the games. They're much more likely to play them at home if they had a hand in making them. So although the co-ordinator's role might appear a bit..[pause] servant-ish, it wouldn't be at all really. It's just doing things we don't have time to do," (Ms Keatley).

Claire however had a broader view of her role, believing that teacher attitudes towards parents needed to change. She felt that the Ladywood teachers had little interest in communicating with parents beyond a few narrow areas where the teachers wanted parental support or information, and that they would feel their autonomy threatened by further parental incursions. An officer also suggested that the staff's professional status led them to devalue alternative definitions of parental involvement.

> "That school does have parents involved, not necessarily how we'd like but...Claire comes in and they have to show her what the maths scheme is, so she can show it to parents, what the language curriculum is, anything really..it might come back to the same thing that was mentioned at Greensea School; 'What's the point of us showing them what to do? If they were teachers they would already know what we want done.'...They do get parents who are experts in certain areas to do things, they do fundraise, they do have socials, but they don't want to start anything too

drastic..it's the general thing - 'we want parents involved but how we want them involved, and if you want it different, we're not going to jump up and help you,'" (officer).

The importance of Claire's non-teaching background cannot be underestimated. She sympathised readily with parents who felt bemused or excluded by the school; indeed this was often her own experience. Thus her approach was more parent-centred than that of the staff, as the following examples show. She suggested that a new computer club should be open to all parents, so that some could learn alongside their children. However, the teacher involved wanted to recruit solely those parents who already had computer skills and could share them with the children (see p.126 above). Claire's plans for making contact with parents by visiting them in their homes received a luke-warm reception from the headteacher; home-visits were seen as appropriate only if the HSC was visiting children identified by staff as giving cause for concern.

Another source of contention was the HSC's relationship with the LEA. Officers had suggested that the HSCs conduct interviews with teachers and parents to establish perceptions about existing relationships in the school, and to use this as a base line from which to work. Claire and Eleanor Keatley both saw this as problematic, but for different reasons. In the first few weeks following her appointment, Claire was aware that conducting the interviews was not matching the expectations placed upon her within the school.

"I can't start anything until I find out what's already happening...We're [the HSCs] trying to get as much information as we can..Problem is you're not being seen to do anything...people now expect me to do things,"(HSC).

The head considered this research of little importance compared with the 'real' work carried on in the school [8]. This contributed to her wider dissatisfaction with the Project, and stemmed from her failure to integrate Claire into professional norms of behaviour (see also Epstein 1993 p.61).

"There was quite a lot of talking in the staffroom on the day she was here..If you want to get into a school, you have to work with the kids, there's no way round that.....I thought I was very specific about what we wanted [from the Project], it was the way

it was going to be accomplished that I didn't insist on enough probably..It had to be in the classroom with the kids and then moving out from there, and that if there were talks and meetings and so on, it had to be out of class hours," (Ms Keatley).

The head is describing a constituent element of the canon of accepted professional values; that what is important in school is the teacher-child interaction. Obviously this is a central concern of any educational institution. Claire however, was not a teacher, and she was concerned with a set of relationships other than those between student and teacher. The HSC's role was premised on the assumption that the quality of the home-school relationship affects teacher and student interaction. By privileging the latter, the headteacher was denying the potential of the former, and in turn denying the rationale for the HSC posts. In this way, the position of the teacher as trained professional is judged pre-eminent. Claire's first public role in the school was to have been that of ancillary helper, rather than as a worker concerned with broader educational issues than those contained within the immediate classroom.

The headteacher's perception that the HSC was insufficiently open to professional norms was further aggravated by her belief that Claire was in school for very little time, and spent too long at the Education Offices.

"I think the [LEA] needs to examine what it's doing, whatever it's doing up there..It doesn't matter how much time they spend there, or what beautiful documents come out, or whatever it is. It won't work unless it's happening here," (Ms Keatley).

Her general point is corroborated by research literature which identifies the gap between policy and practice as a major reason for the failure of innovations, particularly those imposed from outside the school (Fullan 1992; Troyna & Williams 1986). The headteacher's attitude also contains hints of a traditional teacher-administrator hostility (Tyler 1986; Blase 1991b). Since administrators are not in the position where they are judged by their ability to work with children, but can exert some influence over teachers' working conditions, they are often regarded with suspicion in schools. To the headteacher, the HSC appeared to identify with administrators rather

than teachers. On arriving at Ladywood, Claire was faced by what one officer described as a 'sink-or-swim' attitude. While the staff awaited action, Claire felt unable to plan any developments before she was familiar with the school's ethos and culture. She became marginalised as teachers perceived 'nothing' was happening. The headteacher outwardly lost interest, as the Project did not develop as she wished. Finding the situation increasingly hard to manage, the HSC turned to LEA officers for advice and support. This unfortunately served to confirm the head's impression that this was not the active school-based project she wanted, and the spiral of disenchantment grew.

Ironically it was the apparently unwelcome reception that Claire received from school staff that made her more critical of teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement. In the Project's early stages, she would have agreed to any positive suggestions for initiatives from the teachers, even those informed by strong self-interest. However, as she comments here, she soon felt she lacked interest, support and structure.

> "[The head] made the point that she could give me no more support than a classteacher...but it's totally different. I think she sees support in terms of bolstering someone up all the time. It's not that at all. Support is knowing what information she wants, when she wants it, the way she wants me to operate. Knowing that," (HSC).

Thus, although her parent-centred approach may have developed subsequently, it was the teachers' apparent apathy that provoked her criticisms at an early stage. Indeed, at one point, this resulted in her working exclusively with parents, setting up meetings unconnected with the school. As she explained, "I'm trying the other tack now [working with parents rather than teachers]. Bringing parents into [the Parents' Room]...I just carry on on my own," (HSC).

In summary, a clash of perspectives between the headteacher and the HSC over the purposes of the Project impeded its development at Ladywood, and caused a split to open up between staff and the HSC. Although this was sometimes bridged (for instance the HSC collaborated with teachers on a booklet for parents about reading), joint activity was uncommon. The situation is analogous to the separation of the

'community' and the 'school' sides of a community school, causing both to operate independently (see p.21 above). The HSC and the teachers both interact with parents, but in different ways, and with different purposes. Thus, to date, the Project has been unable to encourage whole-school development in this area.

Westdown School

Housing in the streets immediately surrounding Westdown was mixed in type and quality. This stratification was reflected in the school's population. Data on parents' occupations for 1990 show that since 1988, the proportion of parents holding skilled manual jobs has declined to 1%, whilst the non-manual (11.5%), no wage earner (40%), and semi/unskilled manual (47%) categories have all increased, suggesting a trend towards a more sharply polarised population in class terms. Approximately half the children were eligible for free school meals in 1990 (in line with the borough average). In ethnic terms the population was mixed containing significant proportions of children of African/Caribbean, South Asian, Turkish and indigenous origin. In 1990, 53% of the children had English as a second language [5]. The school was small, having a single-form entry. The headteacher, Lorna Blake, had come to the school as deputy, and was appointed to the headship two years later. All the teachers including the head, were members of the HTA, a salient fact given the Directorate's relationship with the union (see ch.5).

Although there had been a few initiatives in parental involvement (including the publication of a book written by parents and children), they did not form a coherent programme. Like Ladywood's headteacher, Lorna Blake had originally viewed the Project as support for activities already going on in the school. The staff were initially enthusiastic, although their interest rapidly diminished when a Westdown parent applied for the post and was unsuccessful. Indeed some staff argued that the school should withdraw from the Project altogether. However, after visiting the school, officers thought that staff were recovering their positive attitudes.

The successful candidate, Jenny was, like the other two HSCs, a parent in her 30s. Recently moved to London, she had a background in

voluntary work, and had worked with excluded pupils. She was already an LEA employee when appointed, as she worked in the Parents' Centre. During the first term, Jenny attempted to launch several initiatives. She worked separately from the staff for the most part, although one or two teachers did begin to show interest in the Project. Several parents suggested a Parents' Group and Jenny was consulting others on the form such a group should take. She also established a drop-in session in the Parents' Room, and planned sessions focusing on particular topics. However, the use of the Parents' Room was not unproblematic for teachers as groups of children were occasionally based there. Also, the school had had problems with intruders in the past, and nursery staff were concerned that if parents had unimpeded access to the room, things would go missing from the adjoining nursery. Space is again employed to denote status; the marginal position of both parents and the HSC herself is reinforced by the school's insistence on the absolute control of its territory (this contrasts with St Anne's where despite the smallness of the premises the HSC had an office).

Several teachers remained hostile to the Project, and their position within the school appeared to be such that no-one openly opposed their views, although Ms Blake remained personally positive and supportive towards the HSC. Teachers' suspicion was encapsulated in an incident at a Steering Group meeting when the teacher members handed out copies of guidelines which aimed to regulate parental involvement in the classroom. These were drawn up at a meeting to which the HSC was not invited [9].

By Christmas 1991, the Project had withdrawn from Westdown. The immediate cause was a discussion between headteachers, officers, and the HSCs which proposed that the reception children at all three schools should be assessed at the begining and end of the year, "with the contribution of home-school co-operation estimated - if only subjectively by teacher and parent," (minutes 27/9/91) [10]. The Westdown teachers interpreted the minutes as proposing formal testing of Reception children, a prospect they found disturbing. Looking back at this time, a senior teacher explained,

"People felt either rightly or wrongly, that maybe it was going to be used as a pilot for SATs or the testing of 5 year olds. The Government have proposed that...it was explained to us that it would have been looking at the assessment their teacher had already done [rather than a formal test], but I think people - it wasn't that they were specifically mistrustful of the Project, but..aren't very trusting of the educational climate..It might start out as a fairly innocent thing, but can soon turn into a more formal test, as we saw a year ago with the SATs."

The headteacher agreed that the idea of external assessment was staff's major concern in the current climate of "SATs, league tables, and teacher appraisal". However, the HSC maintained that the teachers' real concern was a more fundamental doubt about the Project itself. She attended a final staff meeting,

"I made it clear to the staff what it [the assessment] was all about..asking parents' opinions about how they felt their child was doing, asking teachers' opinions..I said it was no-way imposed...No-one said they didn't agree with that. They didn't have a reason, it was just an excuse."

Consequently, when the HSC forced the issue with the teachers, they refused to give the Project their clear support, and instead requested a meeting with officers. This did not occur as the HSC felt her position to be untenable. After consultation with Lorna Blake, senior officers withdrew the Project. A flurry of meetings with governors and parents followed as both the LEA and the staff offered their explanations of events. The governors finally supported the teachers. A meeting with parents put the teachers' case: that they had understood that the HSC's post was to have concentrated on "practical initiatives", rather than "research", and that their concerns had not been recognised by the LEA who had withdrawn the Project "without consultation with the staff" (headteacher's statement, 12/91). A few parents criticised the staff's actions, but most, unaware of the complicated background to the withdrawal, remained silent. The meeting also discussed the continuation of plans for a parents' group and a system of class representatives.

The HSC Project at Westdown - Analysis
Both teachers and LEA officers (including the HSC), identified several

similar elements to explain the Project's downfall. Unsurprisingly, however, their interpretations differed.

The first issue was that of power relations. Officers believed that several likeminded teachers were so influential amongst the staff that the head felt compelled to support them [11]. They argued that Lorna Blake had been in favour of the Project, but had avoided open discussion about it, thereby allowing tensions to escalate beyond her control. Officers also suspected that the staff group was not as united as it appeared. However, those staff members that were interviewed insisted that the teaching and support staff all shared the same unease about the Project. The head described her staff as feeling "angry and misled", believing that the Project's emphasis had changed from a "practical" one, with the HSC contributing to developments initiated by staff, to a research and assessment programme.

Conceptions about power relations also influenced the method in which the staff had learnt about the projected work with the Reception class, and their response to it. Generally, officers consulted with the headteachers, leaving it to them to feed back to their staff. This approach presupposed a traditional hierarchical relationship within the school, or more exactly, it gives the headteacher the freedom to decide how much consultation will take place with teachers. However, Westdown did not operate on this model; what the LEA saw as a weak headteacher, and a strong staff group, was presented by a senior teacher as a democratic arrangement (see also Gretton & Jackson 1976, and Ellis et al 1976 on the Tyndale Affair).

"I think we are a very democratically structured school - the school does not work conventionally as most schools do, through the head downwards. Lorna has gone along with ways of working that were there before she came, that most issues where possible are generally discussed...I don't think there's many other schools where the education workers and teaching staff are so well integrated..People are unafraid of speaking up, they are used to doing that," (senior teacher).

A further aspect relating to the issue of power relations in school, was that the HSC post was not granted a high status. As at Ladywood, the job suffered from the perception that it consisted of 'chatting'

to parents, which was not 'real' work like teaching. "The underlying current," suggested the co-ordinator, "was that it was a cushy job" (see also Tomlinson 1984).

The second issue was the differing definitions of parental involvement held by the co-ordinator and the staff. The co-ordinator and the officers felt that staff were willing to allow parental involvement only on their own terms.

> "Almost anything would have brought it to a head, just the fact of operating above a certain level of visibility....Things were actually happening that weren't directly in the control of the teachers, so this came up," (HSC).

Jenny, like Claire at Ladywood, saw parental involvement as wider than having parents help in class, hence her interest in developing a parents' group. However the teachers had expected the Project to increase the number of parents coming into school to work under their direction, following a model similar to that of Parent Organiser at Westminster School. Accordingly, there was the same emphasis, as at Ladywood, on 'doing something'. As the senior teacher explained,

> "This is the kind of place you have to roll your sleeves up, people don't like you to sit and take notes first, they like you to do something. I think there was always a feeling that if a parent from the school had got the job, they could have got started straight away on something practical, because they would have already known parents who could have helped."

However, what this teacher does not acknowledge was that a 'school-supportive' parent, would be more likely to become co-opted into the school's ethos, and therefore find it harder to develop a critical view of the institution, or to challenge the staff. Jenny commented,

> "[The staff] thought, 'we'll get our candidate in and carry on what we are doing now.'...[A teacher] said in a meeting..'we already have parents working with us. They work with us in the way we want them to work with us..I immediately picked up on it mentally".

For some of the (largely white, middle class) staff, the HSC was seeking to involve the 'wrong' parents, and thereby fostering public parental discontent with the school.

> "The irony was that the few, very few - handful - of parents she

did seem to contact...were somewhat dissenting about the school;
white, middle-class parents who maybe feel they don't have enough
control here...it's not all the white, middle class parents,
there are some lovely ones who are very involved, very
supportive, not hostile to the teaching staff, [but] that group
of dissenting parents are used to power and control in their jobs
and their situations, and consciously or unconsciously feel they
should be [used to it] here too..it was an unhappy alliance,"
(senior teacher).

These views illustrate the power of the professional ethos that brings
the teachers together to form a defined 'interest set' (Hoyle 1986),
that supercedes even shared social class interests.

A third issue was the negative relationships between the LEA and
the HTA. Officers, already scathing of the union's values and
perceived intransigence, simply transferred this distrust to the
Westdown teachers, although not all staff were active members. The
presence of a union activist as a parent governor at the school
heightened the officers' conviction that the teachers were influenced
by their union membership.

Similarly, the teachers displayed few signs of trust in the LEA.
At the parents' meeting, teachers were asked why the LEA's proposals
to assess Reception children made them so uneasy. They responded that
information about the school would be taken out of their control, and
they referred to the events at Culloden School to illustrate the uses
to which such information can be put [12]. It is a sign of their lack
of trust in the LEA that they can envisage their solidly Labour
Education authority behaving like right-wing tabloid newspapers. The
senior teacher later moved away from this position, focusing her
criticisms on the officers' style of implementation, rather than the
substance of their intentions per se (Fullan 1992).

"If the LEA really do want to work with and negotiate with
schools, I think they have to spell things out very clearly. I
think it should have been clearly stated that it would be looking
at existing assessment that the Reception class teacher had
chosen to do herself, and then that would have laid down a
trusting situation...Our opinions had not been asked, and we did
feel it was coming from the top down," (senior teacher).

The teachers' 'interest set' was undoubtedly soldified by their shared
union membership (Hoyle 1986 p.256). This coalition may have made them

more ready to confront the LEA over the HSC's role, rather than simply 'overlook' her (as happened at Ladywood).

In short, a key explanation for the events at Westdown School was that the teachers were defending their autonomy and independence from what they perceived as actual or potential incursions by parents or the LEA. The presence of the home-school co-ordinator seemed likely to induce such developments, so the teachers denied her an effective role, and as she persisted, they succeeded in having the position removed altogether.

Issues Arising

This section highlights several general themes arising from the preceeding discussion. The primary issue is the problematic nature of implementing change. From this, three subsidiary issues specific to this case study are explored: firstly, the critical role of the headteachers; secondly, the LEA's part in organising the Project; thirdly the teachers' reactions. The Project as a whole is seen as an instance of a flawed understanding of the process of implementing change (Fullan 1992). As suggested earlier, conventional administrative theory views change as a linear process towards clearly defined goals, susceptible to 'rational' planning. Micro-political theory suggests that this is an oversimplification, overlooking the interests of actors in manipulating developments to secure their own positions. In this particular case, the administrators were unaware of the teachers' embattled perception of their status, and were therefore unable to respond effectively when this issue obstructed the Project's planned development.

Innovation - the spread of 'good practice'?

Curricula development in schools commonly proceeds by establishing and publicising a series of activities and attitudes which taken together are labelled 'good practice' (Brown 1992). Often initiators are 'elevated practitioners' (Partington & Wragg 1989), such as advisers, or lecturers in higher education. Those learning about and implementing 'good practice' are classroom teachers or students. This

immediately points to an imbalance in power between those who innovate and those who initiate, and between theory and practice.

The 'ordinary' teacher, though, has one particular source of power, rooted in her autonomy within the classroom, which allows her to resist or reject imposed strategies and approaches, (Corbett 1991). Brown, writing about influences and approaches to primary maths, identifies another reason why particular approaches do not automatically flourish when transposed from one school to another - the fundamental flaw in the concept of spreading 'good practice'.

> "A particular relationship between those agents that generate the rhetoric of primary mathematics education and the teacher is presumed. The former are seen to provide the aims, tools and resources for the latter: the teacher thus comes to be seen as a technician, employing a range of available techniques towards already defined ends. Not only this but a high degree of control of the circumstances in which teachers work is also presumed..Such a view..is untenable, as there are contingencies that...make the circumstances in one school or classroom, possibly very different from another within the same administrative, policy and resourcing framework," (Brown 1992 p.46)

The argument also applies to home-school relations. An official document, the Plowden Report (CACE 1967), set out a minimum programme for parental involvement, thereby establishing positive home-school relations as 'good practice'; an ideal, however, that many teachers simply paid lip-service to. The Hackney Home-School Partnership Project comprised an innovation developed by those external to the school (LEA officers) who believed that increased contact and communication with parents was 'good practice'. The HSC's role was firstly to develop ways in which this increase could take place, thereby necessarily altering teachers' present practice, and then to publicise successes to other schools. As this chapter has illustrated, the teachers at Ladywood and Westdown resisted, successfully blocking major changes to working conditions, and preserving their classroom autonomy. Events at the two schools illustrate Common's argument that, "the real power in schools is the power of teacher consent" (cited in Corbett 1991 p.76). Corbett also argues that "failure to account for such powers has rendered predominant models of school change

ineffective for affecting practice" (1991 p.76). Thus, individual school cultures can negate a successful innovation 'borrowed' from another school setting (Ball & Bowe 1991; Blase 1991b; Fullan 1992). If, as suggested above, one teacher can successfully resist the initiative, group resistance can be even more effective.

Headteacher style

Research notes that the headteacher is a key figure in the process of innovation in a school, and usually has a position as a 'critical reality definer' (Riseborough 1981), although particular constraints are provided by individual school settings (Ball 1987; Pollard 1987; Burgess 1983). This section again draws on the models of headship presented by Ball (1987), but its focus is different. It concentrates specifically on the headteacher's approach to the Project and to the particular HSC appointed to the school, and not the head's relationship with the staff group. It is arguable that characteristics of the headteacher's style in relation to the co-ordinator also shape his/her dealings with staff and parents (see pp.135-8 above). However, there is insufficent data on this theme to allow the drawing of any firm conclusions.

The head of St Anne's, David Sandford had an *interpersonal* approach to the HSC and to the Project. He was informal in his manner, relying on constant face-to-face communication in his dealings with the HSC. Interview data suggests this was his preferred style with all members of the school population. He laid considerable emphasis on the need to build up personal relationships with parents, and was at the school gate every day, talking to the adults who came to deliver their children. This also gave him an opportunity to persuade or cajole as necessary.

> "I'm going to get a sandwich board [to publicise school events]
> and hand out leaflets. I'm usually out there in the mornings..so
> I get to know people. I know all the children who are late, and I
> talk to the parents about the effect of children being late on
> the class, so it's useful," (David Sandford).

Interpersonal heads operate by building up a sense of loyalty and obligation amongst individual members of the school community thus avoiding outright confrontation (Ball 1987 p.89).

> "Lead by example that's the only way, but not spending hours trying to convert someone. You have to select carefully who's going to work with the co-ordinator...It's clear in my mind where we're going, but not in everyone else's. I have to do some work on that," (Mr Sandford).

Personal contact, persuasion, few direct challenges to an individual's autonomy, but retaining executive decision-making powers - these are the hallmarks of an interpersonal style. There was no doubt that, at St Anne's, it was Mr Sandford who targeted home-school relations as an area for development, and identified possible strategies. The home-school contract took shape under his direction, and although he consulted with the HSC frequently, he was very much the initiator.

Lorna Blake, Westdown's headteacher was in a much less secure position. Throughout the HSC's time at the school, she maintained a low-profile. Some of her difficulties stemmed from her position, as she had only been appointed to permanent headship during 1991. Her previous position as deputy meant that she had existing relationships and allegiances with the staff. This, combined with their shared political beliefs (at least about education) may also have contributed to her reluctance to challenge some of the assertive members of her staff. It appears, from the (limited) evidence of the Project, that she was unable to attain a position as 'critical reality definer' within the school. There are indications that the Project became contentious at a speed and to a degree that took her unawares, and left her with little room to manoeuvre. However, publically Lorna Blake appeared willing to be identified with her staff's position, and let the Project fail, (despite the risk to her own reputation and that of the school), rather than tackle the dominance of some teachers.

In her response to the Project, Ladywood's headteacher, Eleanor Keatley was *authoritarian* in manner. Ball comments that this type of head reacts negatively to opposition, and that it is "avoided, disabled or simply ignored" (Ball 1987 p.109). This describes Eleanor Keatley's approach on several occasions. When the HSC acted in a way

the head considered unsuitable, she stated her objections firmly, apparently unwilling to accept alternative viewpoints. The remainder of the time she had very little interaction with the co-ordinator, commenting that "the Project is not at the top of my mind". When contacted by an LEA officer wishing to arrange a meeting to discuss the obvious difficulties besetting the Project, she delayed the date, and was apparently unwilling to spare the time. It seems likely that the staff group were influenced to some extent by their headteacher's attitude and took their cue from her. The data does not cover Eleanor Keatley's relationships with her staff, and it cannot be assumed that these were necesssarily authoritarian. Having decided that the Project would not be as beneficial as she originally supposed, she may have been trying to minimise the staff's workload by encouraging them to concentrate on their classroom responsibilities, rather than dissipating their energy on the Project.

The role of the LEA

The Project's implementation was constrained by the officers' working conditions. The dominance of 'crisis management' and staff cut-backs meant that the HSC project did not receive undivided officer attention. Thus a clearly defined view of the type of parental involvement the Project was seeking to encourage was not forthcoming. Leaving individual schools to define the Project's exact aims backfired on the officers to some extent, as it relied on the headteachers, and preferably the staff, being enthusiastic enough to do so. This happened only at St Anne's. Although officers ensured that schools nominated themselves for the Project, they over-estimated the amount of commitment this implied; whereas a consideration of schools' current practice may have given them more information. The Project's goals and their manner of attainment were (deliberately) presented in vague terms in order to encourage consensus (Troyna & Williams 1986). However this allowed staff to make their own assumptions about the HSC's role. At all three schools the Project's practical side was valued above the research aspects by teachers, hence the emphasis on 'doing something'. There were few signs of teachers feeling 'ownership' of the Project; it was seen as an LEA

initiative, and at Westdown especially, a threatening imposition from above.

Teachers' Reactions

Some of the teachers' concerns regarding the Project were illustrated by the views of a group at Greensea School. The school had been an original contender for the Project, but withdrew before the appointment of the HSC. Some of teachers' reasons for this are particular to the school, but others are more general [13]. Firstly the Project itself, and to some extent parental involvement in general, was seen as being an extra pressure upon teachers trying to implement the National Curriculum. Second, and more fundamental was the question of teacher autonomy. The staff felt their professional credibility under attack from all levels - the Government, the press, and now parents. Closer involvement of "unqualified" people in the education process, through parental choice of school and the new responsibilities of parent governors was seen as a "dangerous encroachment upon teacher autonomy," (Greensea teacher).

> "What qualifications do these people have? What are their credentials?"
> "What happens if parents are at odds with teachers over educational methods? Who has the final say?"
> "If parental involvement is so important for achievement, where does that leave the teacher?" (Greensea staff).

The preferred form of parental involvement for the Greensea teachers, echoing those at Ladywood and Westdown, was to initiate parents into the school's own practices and values. This way, as one said, they could retain their own status as professionals and boost parents' self-worth and confidence: 'Parents are welcome' - within limits.

However, this should not be taken to imply that the teachers were unthinkingly reactionary. An alternative explanation is that their behaviour is a logical response to the weakness of their structural position (Ozga & Lawn 1981). Although the Greensea teachers focus their criticism on recent changes in education, Blase comments that the position of an 'ordinary' teacher has always been subject to insecurity.

"Teachers are extremely vulnerable to school administrators, students, parents and others. As a result, their political behaviour tends to be reactive, protectionist and covert," (Blase 1991b p.247)

This describes the situation at Ladywood, where "apathy or lack of interest were very effective delaying tactics, and as a result discussions would get nowhere, action would not be taken," (Ball 1987 p.51). At Westdown, the teachers' actions were more proactive than reactive, and more overt than covert. However, their aim matched that of their Ladywood counterparts - the protection of their interests. At St Anne's, the innovation was carefully directed and controlled by the headteacher, and implemented by a known person, maintaining a 'responsive' role towards staff (Mayall 1990 p.60-1). Thus the Project was not perceived as an external imposition, nor did it appear to threaten the teachers' independence.

Conclusion

This chapter has described and analysed developments in the three HSC schools throughout the early stages of the Project. It identifies a compensatory rationale in many similar liaison projects, but this seemed to be absent from the rhetoric of the Hackney scheme. However, it is difficult to say whether a compensatory approach would have reappeared in the attitudes and practices of the HSCs and the teachers. This is partly because the data only covers the Project's early period, and partly because in Westdown and Ladywood, differing conceptions of the Project's aims and the protection of vested interests limited the range of activities open to the HSCs. This chapter concludes that the process of encouraging increased parental involvement through siting an HSC in a school emerges as a far more complex process than was expected. After the Project's first few months, the LEA officers acknowledged this, although they identified teacher intransigence as the main problem.

"We went into the Project looking at how to involve different social and ethnic groups of parents, but we've found ourselves looking at the problems of involving schools and teachers," (officer)

It seems that such schemes are more likely to progress smoothly if kept within certain boundaries. As professionals have a vested interest in retaining the current imbalance in parent-teacher power, the teacher's view is likely to be a conservative one. Experiences at St Anne's and Westminster School suggest that if HSCs are placed in a school where they are supported by the powerful actors in that particular institution, and if the change-agent proceeds cautiously, planning events which do not diverge too much from the teacher's own view of parental involvement, then developments are possible. More radical change would attack the heart of teachers' claims to professional status, by giving power and influence to lay people, and could not be attempted without much overt debate and discussion. Certainly, the task placed too high a demand upon three individuals in three different schools in one local authority.

The next chapter looks at an additional and concurrent attempt by the LEA to improve parent-teacher relationships, this time by siting the mediator *outside* the school.

Chapter Eight: Footnotes

[1] Two examples give some idea of the varied HSC schemes around the country. In Humberside LEA, the HSCs have a half-time teaching load at their school, whereas in the Airdrie Scheme in Strathclyde the HSCs do not necessarily have a teaching background, and are based outside 'their' schools.

[2] The information on Westminster's Parent Organiser Scheme comes largely from an evaluation written by Berry Mayall (1990).

[3] The data presented here derives from the period leading up to the HSC appointments, and the first term and a half of the Project (June to December 1991). I attended Project meetings and conducted at least two interviews with each of the HSCs, other officers involved, and the headteachers (see p.84 above for more details). I also discussed with Greensea teachers the reason for their withdrawal from the Project. At Westdown School, teachers were reluctant to be interviewed directly after the Project's collapse, although they gave me copies of documents they had prepared, and a senior teacher agreed to an interview the following term.

[4] This section is quoted in the proposal to the Trusts (LBH 1989d), but interestingly the word *shared* [objectives] has become *school*, thus considerably altering the tone of the paragraph.

[5] All statistics are for 1990-91, and were supplied by LB Hackney's Research and Statistics section.

[6] My limited contact with parents meant that I was unable to explore what effect the apparently close links between Lydia and the staff had on parental perceptions of the Project.

[7] Steering groups were intended to direct and monitor the HSC's work. They were school-based and composed of members of the school community, including parents.

[8] The HSC at St Anne's shared this emphasis on the practical.

[9] A senior teacher explained why these guidelines were written,

> "We found that we'd had a mixture of positive and negative
> experiences [of parents]..We'd had the positive experience
> of the [published] book..and parents involved in a pilot on
> child abuse. But..two teachers had parents come in without
> making an appointment, and sat and observed. One even took
> notes..That's probably part of the climate where parents are
> getting notions about what rights they have, but they are
> not being negotiated and discussed."

However, by presenting these guidelines as fixed, teachers clearly
signalled their unwillingness to 'negotiate and discuss' with parents
or even the HSC.

[10] At the meeting an officer described pupil achievement as "the
ultimate aim of the Project". But by Christmas 1991, officers felt
that trying to demonstrate a link between parental involvement and a
child's level of achievement was too 'ambitious' for the Project.

[11] In interview, the headteacher presented a united front with her
staff.

[12] Culloden School in East London was the subject of a TV
documentary in 1991. Its alleged standards in reading became the
subject of sustained criticism from The Mail on Sunday and other
tabloids.

[13] Of course, the views of the Greensea teachers cannot be
automatically extrapolated to other Hackney teachers, but their
concerns do echo those expressed by other teachers in the case study
schools.

CHAPTER NINE

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HACKNEY'S PARENTS' CENTRE.

Introduction.

This chapter focuses on the establishment of Hackney Parents' Centre – a local authority initiative designed to encourage parental participation in the local education system, primarily by providing help and support for parents in their dealings with schools or the LEA. This chapter also includes brief references to the LEA's attempt to broaden access to educational decision-making processes by establishing a community consultative group. Both are seen as local state initiatives informed by a social democratic approach to participation, which aims to facilitate citizen access to and involvement in state institutions.

A micro-political perspective is adopted to examine the events and values that contributed to the Centre's establishment. Although much of the micro-political theory referred to in the previous chapter deals with change and innovation in *schools*, this chapter argues that many of the concepts apply equally to other educational institutions, such as the Parents' Centre. For example, Ball (1987) identifies three themes that constitute the processes and contents of micro-politics – the interests of actors, the maintenance of organisational control, and conflict over policy (see p. 184 above). All of these are also applicable to the establishment of Hackney's Parents' Centre.

Firstly, this chapter reviews some relevant aspects of participation theory. Secondly, it describes the establishment of the Centre, identifying its four main aims, and the differing definitions and priorities ascribed to those aims by the actors involved. Thirdly, it examines parental participation in the Centre's management, and identifies constraints on the extent of that participation.

A note on lay participation

In Chapter 1, reference is made to Pennock's four reasons for introducing participatory democracy: namely, to make the organisation concerned seem responsive to its clients or electorate, to legitimise its actions, to aid the personal development of individuals 'reached' by the new participatory ethos, or to overcome the alienation of those groups supposedly served by the organisation (Pennock 1979, also Beattie 1985 p.5; p.9 above). The first two reasons are conservative in character, as their prime aim is to ensure the smooth-running of the organisation. The third and fourth aims are capable of a more radical interpretation as they are concerned with minimising the powerlessness felt by those formerly excluded from the system (Beattie 1985).

In its critique of social democratic initiatives in participation, chapter 1 also suggests that apparent attempts to increase participation often prove illusory in substance (pp.8-9 above). Furthermore, moves to introduce participatory processes are often motivated by a wish to legitimate the more general action of the institution concerned (p.9 above). In drawing attention to such phenomena, Lukes highlights what he calls the "sheer weight of institutions" (1974 p.38) which allows them to maintain their grip on power. The process of exercising power transcends "individual and intentional" acts (ibid p.39); indeed Lukes stresses the effectiveness of institutional inactivity and structures which work against devolving power beyond the institutional elite. Therefore, fundamental change is necessary if the traditional sites of domination and holders of power are to be altered (Clune 1990). As the analysis in chapter 1 demonstrates, such a development is rare, but not impossible (pp.3-5 above). As Ball comments,

> "Clearly, micro-political processes in the organization operate to maintain the status quo. Yet attention to micro-political processes also highlights the degree of 'tenuousness, dysfunction, interruption and possibility' (Whitty 1985 p.45) that is inherent in the educational context," (Ball 1987 p. 279).

However, the influence of the New Right on this "degree of...interruption and possibility" cannot be forgotten. This ideology

shuns the social democratic rhetoric of collective citizen
participation, which underpins the Parents' Centre's establishment,
and prefers instead an emphasis upon the role of the individual
consumer (see pp.9-10 above).

Hackney Parents' Centre

Beginnings [1]

The Centre was officially opened in March 1991, but before this date
it had been operative to some extent for about six months. It was
located in a ground floor room of a secondary school. The premises
were temporary, but the Centre was likely to remain there for several
years [2]. It was staffed by three workers, sharing two full-time
posts. All three were female and from different ethnic backgrounds. It
took the Centre several months to establish itself, and for parents to
start to use it. In this early period the workers helped to establish
parents' groups in special schools, and formed contacts with a number
of community groups and other departments within the LEA. However, by
the autumn term of 1991, the workers were spending quite a large
proportion of their time dealing with parental problems and enquiries
[3].

The original idea for the Parents' Centre came from a small group
of parent governors during an LEA consultation exercise. The
governors' original request suggests an alternative conception of the
Centre's premises to the 'office-like' surroundings that evolved.

> "We made it quite clear that what we were looking for was a shop-
> front, somewhere we could sell educational materials and have
> parents drop-in, like a sort of Early Learning Centre, a
> community centre..but that would have cost too much money, so
> when we were offered the room in the school..the project came off
> the ground," (parent governor).

LEA officers greeted the proposal with enthusiasm, and there appeared
to be an immediate consensus over the Centre's suggested aims and
functions. The Centre's publicity employs the language of
participation and partnership. It describes itself as "something more

than a centre for advice", which will "make a reality of the concept of a partnership between the education service and parents," (invitation to opening ceremony). The Director commented that it was "not just somewhere parents can go for advice and information [but a place that would encourage them to adopt] a proactive role in home-school partnership." Such vague descriptions suggest that the terms are functioning as condensation symbols (see p.12 above), offering symbolic reassurance, a gloss of community participation. Thus the generalities of the rhetoric attracted an apparent consensus from the different groups and individuals concerned with the Centre's establishment, whilst at the same time acting to conceal considerable differences over priorities and interpretations. Different interpretations are influenced by the actor's particular relationship to the micro-political process.

Four groups played a key role in the Centre's formation: officers from the LEA; the Director of Education, who was not involved with day-to-day developments but kept quite closely in touch with the Centre's progress; the Centre's workers; and the group of parent governors from whom the idea originated (referred to here as parent volunteers). From interviews with these four groups and examination of the Centre's literature, it is possible to outline four aims for the Centre that all were superficially agreed upon. They were:

- to provide information
- to provide a channel of communication between the LEA and parents
- to provide advice and support to parents on an individual basis
- to help schools and parents develop closer relationships.

This chapter continues by outlining the positions taken by the various groups on these four aims, in order to clarify and illustrate the nature of the diversity of views.

Interpretations.
Chapter 8 identified a divergence of opinion between the Director and senior officers on the role of the HSCs. The former viewed the posts as having a community-orientated brief, whilst officers perceived the HSCs as essentially school-based and orientated. A similar division

applies concerning the Parents' Centre.

The **Director of Education** saw the Centre as an example of the LEA's willingness to encourage closer parental involvement in Hackney's education service, and as offering opportunities for parental participation at a higher level (or 'rung', to use the terminology of Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of participation') than had hitherto been possible. He commented,

"The local authority has a responsibility to empower parents by providing them with information that gives them power or access to power, *and* to create an environment whereby *groups* of parents have opportunities to begin to detect that there is space in the system for them to play a role," (my emphasis).

While the Director acknowledged that work with schools and individual parents was important, he saw the key to the change and improvement of the state education system as lying in another direction - the establishment of independent parents' and students' groups.

"It is absolutely important that, in addition, to individual parents' involvement with class teachers, head of year, headteachers, whatever, on a one-to-one basis...there has to be effective action on the part of parents in pursuit of their own interests as parents in the whole education ball-game."

He felt that organisation within the local community was of particular importance in encouraging excluded groups of parents - black parents or white working class parents - to find an effective voice with which to influence the education system.

"It's always been my intention that the Parents' Centre should be a catalyst for the development of [parent] groups, so that parents themselves are having discussions about their experiences, [and] articulating their needs and demands...The first strategy, I think, is ensuring that those [community] groups who are already organised have the capacity to work in partnership with and influence service delivery in education."

The Director saw the Parents' Centre as a bridge between schools, the LEA and local communities. By contrast, **senior policy officers** stressed the function of the Centre as a channel for communication, allowing the LEA to keep an 'ear to the ground', and enabling it to respond with advice and information to any issues causing particular concern. However, the authority appeared to wish to limit closer

citizen participation to issues which it saw as relatively non-contentious, and accordingly, restricted the available agenda (Lukes 1974). Thus different issues received different treatment. The Centre organised a workshop for parents on secondary transfer, for example, whilst the introduction of national testing for seven year olds was ignored, despite the existence of a local parent-led campaign to withdraw children from the tests. The Centre workers had planned to hold a parents' meeting on SATs, but were advised against this by officers in other sections of the LEA, who warned that such meetings might be 'hi-jacked' by the HTA who also supported a boycott.

Senior officers were keen for Parents' Centre workers to work in schools. They took the view that to get "locked into" case-work and advocacy with individual parents would prove too time-consuming for the workers, and would not be cost-effective. Instead the workers should act as 'arrows' to other departments within the LEA, and deal with most queries by simply referring them to other parts of the organisation. In schools it was felt that the Centre workers could act as an extra resource for hard-pressed teachers who *wanted* to extend their relationships with parents but did not have the time. In this model the workers' role is as an aid to the school, encouraging parents to be more closely involved on the school's terms.

Whilst the Director and his senior officers subscribed to all four of the aims outlined earlier, there is a discernible contrast in their priorities. The Director stressed the importance of parents having an influence in the local education system apart from and quite separate to their relationship with their child's teachers. This would require some degree of power shifting from the authority and schools to parents, both individually and as a group. Officers preferred a model in which the authority was more accessible to parents, but not necessarily more susceptible. Thus they stressed the improvement of individual relationships between teachers and parents, rather than parental independence and solidarity.

The attitudes of the Parents' Centre workers themselves contained elements of both these philosophies. They felt that the Parents' Centre could and should function as a channel of communication between

parents and the LEA, but that effective structures did not exist to relay around the authority the information and issues they reported. Furthermore, the workers felt that the LEA was reluctant to share any of the information it held with parents.

> "I still feel that the [authority] like any body that has power, wants to keep information away from parents. The least they can give parents the better. If we have a parent who wants to see the figures for exclusions.....management are like [*gives a shocked gasp*], 'What do they want that for, how can we put them off?' There's not enough sympathy or understanding of the rights of parents," (Parent Centre worker).

With regard to the third function - that of giving advice and support to individual parents - the workers felt case-work was extremely important but time-consuming. As the project was new, they felt under a certain amount of pressure to show results. Advocacy often involved long, complicated cases to which there was no simple solution, and which were, they perceived, harder to justify in terms of the administrative norms of the LEA environment.

> "It's the whole values thing really. At [section] meetings..everyone says what reports they've written, what meetings they've been to, and when it gets to me, I've done case-work. It looks as if I've done nothing - talked to parents....It's like it's not real work," (Centre worker).

They felt that outreach work to schools was important if teachers were not to view them solely as 'trouble-shooters', or even worse as trouble-makers. They were aware that although their interaction with particular schools had gone well, teachers were generally suspicious of them, at least initially. The workers felt they had to justify their role to staff, as they had no established professional standing unlike say, educational psychologists or welfare officers [4]. Although the workers were critical of what they saw as teachers' often deficit attitudes towards parents, particularly working class parents, they themselves displayed a tendency to view their 'cases' as individual families with particular problems, often at home, that spilled over to affect the children's school life. Thus, in theory the workers acknowledged that working class parents were in a structurally powerless position when facing the school. Yet in practice their

answer was pragmatic and reformist as they concentrated on trying to resolve individual concerns. In essence, they were engaged in 'teaching' parents how to fit in to the state system and operate it to gain what they wanted with the minimum disturbance.

> "We're always saying, 'How can you get the best out of it, bearing in mind that the school has all the power? At the end of the day, you've got to work in a certain way to benefit your child and yourself'. It does seem unfair, you can sympathise with them [parents] when they think it's unfair. It's explaining the system," (Centre worker).

In their case-work the workers were reactive, responding to situations as they were brought to them. In their proposed work with schools, they were more pro-active, for instance setting up parents' groups within special schools, but in common with senior officers, they saw their role as working closely with teachers, and within any already-existing school structures.

The **parent volunteers**, as the only group who were not employed by Hackney LEA, wanted the Centre to have much more independence, and disliked what they saw as LEA dominance. One example they identified was that the LEA wanted to have little contact with the parent and teacher pressure group, SHES, and did not wish the Parents' Centre to maintain any links either. Thus SHES was not allowed to use the Parents' Centre resources, although they were theoretically available for parents' groups. The LEA's attitude stemmed from their tense relationship with the HTA, and SHES' close links with the trade union branch (see ch.5 above). However, the parent volunteers felt that the Centre should work with any group of parents who were concerned about education locally, and that taking up issues such as SATs, where there were already signs of parental interest and concern, was vital if links with parents were to spread. They were less concerned about outreach to schools, preferring instead that the Centre should establish itself as a community-based organisation, offering parents a range of educational and non-educational activities and services. They were also of the opinion that case-work was integral to the Centre's existence, and very much wanted to be part of that. However, this was an area from which they were largely excluded, due to the officers' belief that it was not a suitable task for volunteers to perform. This

attitude was resented by the parent volunteers, a point to which I shall return later.

Thus it is possible to see that confusion concerning the Centre revolved around three key issues, matching those identified by Ball (1987; p.217 above): the status of the workers, who was in control, and the exact function of the Centre. Firstly, the status of the workers: were they community outreach workers, or officers liaising between one level of the local state (the education offices) and another (the schools)? Secondly, the control of the Centre: was it an 'outpost of the LEA' as described by a senior officer, or should it be evolving into an independent centre? Thirdly, the exact function of the Centre: was it to direct its energies into harmonising relationships between parents, the local authority and schools, or encouraging parents to organise independently?

This lack of a clearly articulated conception of the role and status of the Centre and its workers was one of the biggest obstacles to its successful establishment. With many potential areas for action, workers and volunteers frequently expressed feelings of confusion and a lack of support in defining their roles. This was heightened by the situation within the LEA itself. As other chapters have illustrated (chs.5 & 8), Hackney was subject to a number of severe organisational and financial problems, which had greatly increased the workload of senior officers. As the Parents' Centre had not itself presented such problems, it had, to some extent been left to develop at its own (slow) pace by managers [5].

Parental Participation: The Parents' Centre.

This section explores the devolution of power to parents, both with regard to the daily running of the Centre, and through the Centre, in the local education service generally. The Director saw Hackney's Centre as a pilot project, and the ideal as a series of local centres helping to promote an approach to education that emphasised community involvement.

"It is a matter of having one of these things [a Parents' Centre] operating cheek by jowl with every school just about. In other words, there is a centre for education in this locality, it's called a school...where you do not have the concept of an expert, but ordinary people sharing skills, experiences and frustrations and finding ways of negotiating through all that a particular perspective on education, belief in themselves, belief in their capacity to influence things," (Director).

The parent volunteers had envisaged an independent community centre run by paid workers and parents for parents. Their Centre would also have had links with, offer support to, and provide resources for a number of other community education groups, or school-based parents' associations. Thus, it could also provide opportunities for parents to participate at a number of levels in the delivery of Hackney's education service.

Given that at least two groups involved with the Centre saw this as important, why did Hackney's Parents' Centre became an organisation under close council control rather than developing into a community based organisation funded by the LEA? Several explanations can be identified: the status of the parent volunteers; the management structure of the Centre and the constraints upon the workers; the LEA's perception of activist parents, and the pressure upon the operation of the LEA itself.

1) The Parent Volunteers

The parent volunteers were a small group of working and middle class women who were closely involved in the early stages of establishing the Centre. Their continued contribution might have given it a distinctive ethos, distingushing it from a wholly Council-run project. However, they soon became disillusioned. Having originally expected to have to battle hard to get the Council to fund their nascent Centre, they had been surprised by the LEA's enthusiasm, and then started to feel co-opted and absorbed by the authority. Worse still, they believed that council control and bureaucracy was responsible for the inertia that periodically affected the Centre. The women wanted to carry out case work and be involved in the management of the Centre. Paradoxically, in seeming to welcome and acquiesce to their ideas, the LEA's involvement had effectively marginalised them.

Majority opinion amongst the Centre workers was that routine jobs (eg filing and mailing) were the most appropriate for parent volunteers, unless parents had specialist skills like wordprocessing or translating. There is an obvious parallel here with many teachers' views on the role of parents within a school (see ch.3,6,7 & 8 above; also Mayall 1990). Both groups are concerned that close parental involvement might encroach upon their professional expertise. It has already been mentioned that the workers felt it was important for them to establish their jobs as high-status ones. In doing so, they were responding to what they perceived as the demands of teachers and administrators to fit into two structured and relatively hierarchical environments. This placed constraints upon them, causing them to view all parents who visited the Centre, including the parent volunteers, as *clients* rather than *participants*. Sharing their workload with the parent volunteers would have meant risking an interpretation of their work as something needing no particular expertise, and thereby putting their own positions in jeopardy. A junior officer remarked on this phenomenon.

> "I've been there [Parents' Centre] when it's 'Oh, we don't want them [parents] to see that!' There are jokes now, 'Oh God, a parent!' The sort of things you get teachers saying! When you hear jokes, people take them for fun, but there's a hidden element of truth in them often. They [Parents' Centre workers] need parents obviously, but in the same way schools need parents to want to send their kids there. Once it becomes an institution, it's like you [as an outsider] can come so far and you can know so much, then that's it."

This resulted in the parent-volunteers being expected to play a role rather akin to that of supporter/learner (ch.3), which for the most part, they were unwilling to do.

ii) Management structures and worker constraints.
Thus the workers concern with professionalism was one factor which stopped the Centre devolving management power to parent-volunteers. Professionalism also helps to explain why the Centre workers concentrated on case work dealing with individual problems. The workers were using their expertise to ease 'problem' families smoothly

back into their existing school situations. Again, this strategy was imposed on them, to a certain extent, by the constraints under which they worked. During their case-work they were often in the position of being LEA employees, supporting parents in their grievances against other LEA employees. The Director commented on this.

> "Headteachers then begin to feel that 'if this [the Centre] is a provision the LEA makes, and we are [also] an LEA provider, how can that body of people [Centre workers] be acting in an advocacy capacity, vis a vis parents, against us, who are meeting the LEA's responsibilities by delivering education to kids?' I personally see no conflict in that whatsoever..I think conflict only exists because of the power relations that happen within institutions."

In any case, there was very little two or three workers could do to alter any negative teacher attitudes towards parents. In the same way, their proposed outreach to schools was likely to consist, in a large part, of supporting schools in planning initiatives that were already part of the institution's repertoire such as curriculum evenings. The workers may be able to influence the way in which these are planned, so that the events more closely match up with parents' interests and concerns, but their role remains reformist. The workers were aware of these limitations, commenting that parental participation was not seen as integral to the operation either of schools or the education offices, but rather as something separate, an experiment, and an extra. One of the workers drew a parallel with the introduction of equal opportunities initiatives.

> "A lot of people saw the race relations' unit and the womens' unit as the people who 'did' equal opps., when it should be everybody. Now it's better, it's not perfect, but it's more of a norm. That's how parental involvement should be."

Therefore, despite the apparent support from the Director for such a move, encouraging groups of parents to organise themselves so that they could approach the school from a position of collective power, was not a tactic the Centre workers could easily adopt. It would put them into conflict with the very groups of professionals at the LEA and in schools with whom they were trying to establish themselves.

However, the workers did have a commitment to community

involvement within the Centre. They were keen to establish a steering group, comprising interested parents and representatives from local educational community groups. In theory, this group would discuss with the workers the general direction of the Centre, but the process of implementation would be left to the workers themselves. Whether such a steering group would provide a means for closer involvement in the Centre by community group representatives and parents was difficult to ascertain as the group had not been convened by the end of the research period. Potentially, it could be either a token gesture in the direction of community participation or a vocal forum involving itself closely in the management of the Centre. If the latter, the workers were aware that they might well find themselves caught in confrontation between the local authority and the steering group.

iii) The position of the LEA.

Another pertinent and related factor restraining the development of a community-managed and run Centre was the LEA's suspicion of 'activist parents'. This was defined by the workers as follows,

Worker 1:   "I think definitely with our line management there is a phobia about anyone who ever says anything negative about the Council. It's never true!"

Worker 2:   "There's this thing about who's a 'genuine' parent. If a parent becomes politicised enough or angry enough to campaign, like stand outside the Town Hall..they're no longer a 'genuine' parent...Or again, there is this fear that they have been dominated or taken over by the NUT or SHES."

Worker 1:   "It's very patronising. [It's as if] parents don't have enough brain to get that far on their own!

As SHES had a somewhat fluctuating membership, it was assumed that most 'activist parents' were in some way connected to the pressure group.

However, the LEA was engaged in an alternative attempt to allow parental and community voices access into the formal decision-making process. At the instigation of the chair of the Education Committee, the authority planned to create a forum in which local educational issues could be debated by representatives from different groups.

Again, this forum (to be known as Hackney Education Partnership, HEP) had not been convened by the end of the research period, and it was unclear exactly what its role would be. It was proposed that the agenda for HEP meetings would not be fixed by the LEA, but remain open to ensure that any issues could be discussed. On paper HEP seems similar to Ranson's (1992) proposals for local groups (also Ranson & Thomas 1989, see pp.236, 241 below). However, in practice, officers suggested that the representatives would be confined to a consultative role (see references on pp.8-9 above on levels of participation) [6].

Another factor in ensuring that the LEA maintained control of decision-making within the Centre, and was likely to limit HEP to an advisory role, is that any transfer of power would be experimental and therefore of high risk to the LEA. As chapter 5 argues, Hackney is a small Labour authority providing services for an area of social and economic deprivation. The hostility of central government to Labour local government, manifest over the last decade, has barely dimmed (Ball & Troyna 1989), and the financial climate continues to be inhospitable. The LEA's priority was to establish itself as the provider of an efficient and effective service. Therefore it was disinclined to listen to any parties which might make demands that would hinder progress towards this goal. By keeping the Centre in particular, and decision-making generally, under its own control the LEA could minimise this possibility.

Conclusion.

This chapter has demonstrated that the *rhetoric* of Hackney Parents' Centre does encapsulate Pennock's (1979) two more radical aims for citizen participation, (aiding the personal development of individuals and overcoming group alienation). However, various constraints served to minimise the visibility of these, whilst highlighting Pennock's first two reasons – legitimising the LEA's work and making it more responsive to its clients. The changes required to fulfill these two aims can be more easily incorporated into the LEA's current structure as they demand little or no transfer of power from the local state to lay actors. The constraints that rendered the more radical aims

peripheral operate at a variety of levels, both general and more specific to this case. Lukes (1974) was cited earlier, referring to the immutability of institutional structures, which works against devolving power beyond the institutional elite. As an example of this, I have identified the ideology of professionalism, as one way in which Hackney Education Authority retained sole exercise of power. Professionalism ensured that decision-making power was open to only a small band of people who had a *vested interest* in ensuring that this situation remained constant (Ball 1987 p.17; Levin 1987). The power of the existing hierarchy was such that the workers would have encountered great difficulty in opposing or radically departing from, accepted ways of working in schools and the LEA offices.

Furthermore, the chances of such radical change being implemented is lessened still further by factors specific to the time and place of the case study. The most crucial is the domination of New Right ideology during the previous decade. The ideological emphasis upon the individual's role as consumer is antithetical to the aims of collective participation. This creates the situation in which Hackney LEA, an institution of the weakened local state, attempted to implement intiatives in collective citizen participation in a climate in which such ideals are eschewed by the central state. The Centre was not immune from the power of the image of parent-as-consumer. Thus it concentrated on helping individual families fit in to the existing school system, and take up their rightful responsibilities with regard to the education of their own children. The power-relations between the authority and parents remain unchanged. Nor are parents encouraged to join together in defence of their shared interests as parents. One officer suggested that the Centre may evolve to become a 'complaints point' - a wholly different conception to one which emphasises the Centre as a focus for collective parental participation. Furthermore, central government's ideological dislike of the local state, especially when manifested in financial constraints, creates the highly pressurised environment in which the LEA operates. This increases the likelihood of a hesitant approach to innovation, especially that informed by an 'oppositional' logic. Therefore, although Hackney's attempts at citizen participation

(namely the Parents' Centre and HEP), appear to date, to be little more than symbolic reassurance, it is perhaps unfair to castigate the authority for not encouraging a model of government that has not yet been fully attempted by other areas of the central or local state (Harlow & Rawlings 1984).

The factors, outlined above, are both general and specific to the context in which Hackney's Parents' Centre was established, and they combine to work against the possibility of power being devolved to parents. The Parents' Centre provides an apparent forum for authority accountability and the resolution of individual problems - in this way the LEA seeks to legitimise its policies and be responsive to the electorate. It does not however on current evidence, provide a forum for wider participation in the management and delivery of those education policies.

Chapter Nine: Footnotes

[1] The data presented here span two years (1990-1992), covering the period leading up to the Centre's establishment, and including its first year. Most of the interviews were carried out during 1991. As well as semi-structured interviews, data were also collected through observation, (at Education Committee meetings, Parents Centre meetings etc), and document analysis (see also ch.4 above).

[2] The Parents' Centre was included in Hackney's City Challenge bid, which was approved for government funding in July 1992. The Centre should eventually be re-located to new shopfront premises in a central part of the borough.

[3] In May 1992, the workers divided parental enquiries into the following categories (precise figures were unavailable): special educational needs assessment and provision; admissions and appeals; bullying; disputes with schools focusing on behaviour; information on awards and provision. The workers commented that a sizeable proportion of the complaints that fell under these headings could be re-categorised as instances of black parents' dissatisfaction with the education service.

[4] Tomlinson (1984) also remarks on the difficulties home-school workers face in establishing themselves. In addition a strong survival aspect informed the workers' concern to maintain positive relationships with schools, as under LMS, it was possible that schools would be able to choose whether or not to buy the Parents' Centre services.

[5] The Centre was also affected by unstable staffing, due to the personal circumstances of the workers.

[6] When asked whether the forum would have decision-making powers, one officer responded succinctly, 'God, no!'

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION: PARENTAL PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

This thesis has argued that a fundamental imbalance in power defines relationships between educational professionals and parents. This sustains a situation in which 'parental participation' is largely limited to the involvement of individual parents. As chapter 1 illustrates, power shifts between dominant and subordinate groups are theoretically possible, although less common in practice, as the forces that structure the education system, and thereby participants' responses to it, are resistant to fundamental change. Earlier chapters suggest that the ideology of social democracy was informed by a discourse of benevolent paternalism (CCCS 1981), which paid lip-service to increased lay participation in state institutions but did little to create the necessary climate for change (see chs. 1 & 2 above). Thus, the New Right's rhetoric of individual self-determination and consumer power struck a chord amongst many groups within the electorate (see ch.2). However, the Conservative Party has emphasised consumerism rather than citizenship. As a result, some parents are able to exercise a greater degree of control over which school their children attend. However, once a school is found, involvement for the majority of parents revolves around a supporter/learner model, carrying out specific curricular or extra-curricular tasks under the guidance of a teacher (ch.3). A minority of parents becomes involved in the management of the school through the governing body. However, although elected by other parents, parent governors are not encouraged to see themselves as parent representatives, but rather to consider their individual duty to the governing body as a whole.

Some parents are more able than others to adopt and exploit this role. As schools are informed by middle class values, the dominant ethos disadvantages those groups whose beliefs and practices differ. These groups are also the most vulnerable to attempts by education

professionals to change parenting, and particularly 'mothering' practices, to make them fit accepted norms (see ch.3). This is illustrated by the case studies of Hill St and Low Rd schools which highlight the established professional ideal of a 'good parent'. These two case-studies also analyse the school 'communities' to show that they consist of diverse interest groups, fragmented by differences in social class, ethnicity, professional status, and philosophy. However, the primary division is between professionals and lay parents. Pedagogical differences between teachers are submerged in favour of professional unity, resulting in teacher discourse that attempts to place parents (of whatever background) in a subordinate position in relation to the professionals. In a context in which the 'norm' for parental involvement is for parents to act individually as supporter/learners, it is harder to overcome differences between them (of ethnicity, religion, class etc.) which may hinder collective action. Chapter 8, which examines the home-school co-ordinator scheme, reinforces the argument that the ethos of the teaching profession is strong enough to defeat any joint interests that may arise from parent and teacher sharing gender and/or social class positions. This tendency towards defensiveness and insularity is seen as a result of the positional insecurity of the teaching profession, unsure of its exact status or the extent of its responsibilities.

As chapter 1 commented, the empirical data in this thesis seeks to explore "private troubles" and their articulation with "public issues" (Wright-Mills 1959 p.144). Having examined parent-teacher relationships within schools, and concluded that even with a mediator (the HSCs) the professionals remain largely in control of the parent-teacher relationship, chapter 9 looks at the Parents' Centre. It examines the potential of such an organisation, devoted to supporting parents and independent of any one particular school. However, the Parents' Centre is seen as an example of both the limitations of social democratic approaches to citizen participation and the continuing influence of professionalism in incorporating people into existing ways of working. Therefore this concluding chapter continues by examining several further sites that apparently retain the

potential for some degree of re-distribution of power within the state
education system.

Arenas for change

i) A new role for local government?

Some commentators, most notably Stewart Ranson (1986, 1990, 1992, &
with Thomas 1989), have argued that local government should have a key
role in introducing and supporting more participative structures for
parents and other citizens. He suggests that recent legislative
changes have forced LEAs to move away from didactic modes of operation
towards alternatives based on consultation and 'partnership' (Ranson
1992). These new principles can be realised through such mechanisms as
local community fora. The latter would,

> "enfranchise citizens within the community to influence and take
> responsibility for their own learning environment. They can
> negotiate with the providers to use educational resources so as
> to meet the learning needs of the community as a whole," (Ranson
> 1992 p.184-5; see also Ranson & Thomas 1989).

However, even if there have been beneficial effects resulting from
central government legislation, as Ranson suggests, the current
constraints upon LEAs are inescapable. Cuts to local authority budgets
for central administration, support services, and schools,
significantly restrain and confine any possible LEA initiatives.
Moreover, the future for local education authorities looks bleak as
the government continues to centralise control of education
(Education, 5/3/93 p.162).

ii) Community action groups - a potential solution?

Moving the focus onto the voluntary sector, there would be several
advantages to developing community groups as independent centres which
would support parents in their relationships with schools. Firstly,
such a move could circumvent the limitations imposed on LEAs by the
Education Reform Act, and subsequent policies. Secondly, it would by-
pass the need to implement change from within a large institution, and

the compromises which that entails (Yeatman 1990). Thirdly, community groups could negotiate to 'give' parents and other adults a stronger and more independent voice within schools. Finally, such groups, concerned with a range of local issues including education, could lessen the existing demarcations between different state institutions, which currently present people with a fragmented perception of their environment (Catterall 1990b).

However, there are a number of possible obstacles to successfully implementating such a strategy. Firstly, there is the obvious difficulty of defining "community" (see ch.1). Secondly, the small scale of many community projects places them at an immediate disadvantage, with funding as a constant concern. This limits their impact on wider political processes. Although many on the left (Troyna & Williams 1986; Troyna & Carrington 1990; Hatcher 1989; John 1990) have been advocating increased links between community groups which would draw together constituencies such as women, tenants, ethnic minorities and trade unionists, highlight their shared potential and collective powerfulness and actual weakness, and encourage a search for shared priorities, this rarely happens in practice. Community groups also lack political support. Although the new urban left councils of the early and mid 1980s were, in principle, highly supportive of community action groups, there were often clashes of interest, and the Labour Party nationally is noticeably uninterested in such movements (Eade 1989).

Thirdly, evolving a consultation process satisfactory to all parties is fraught with problems. Zeichner (1990) points out that simply involving representatives from all parties in decision-making does not mean that all have an equal voice. Indeed he suggests that that scenario may result in "community participation without influence" (1990 p.11), with parents often being unwilling to challenge what is perceived as professional expertise. His claim is reinforced by the work done on the concept of illusory participation referred to above (pp.8-9).

Finally, there is the possibility of reactionary opinions from parents and other community members. It was suggested earlier that exclusion from sites of decision-making was a contributory factor to

such reactions (ch.7 p.146-7; also Formisano 1991). This is not a complete explanation in all cases. For instance, the attitudes of parents at Dewsbury and Cleveland (who protested about their children attending a multi-ethnic school) were necessarily influenced by several cultural and political discourses (eg 'new racism', Vincent 1992). However, although parental exclusion by schools is not a sufficient explanation for all instances of reactionary parental opinion, attempting to remedy the imbalance of power between home and school may be the best available option for those seeking to defend progressive initiatives. Thus, there is a need for teachers to leave the confines of their professional groups and enter the public arena, prepared to be pro-active in the explanation and defence of their policies and practices (Vincent 1992).

iii) Democratic schools?

In the light of the limitations on the range of action open to community groups, the focus now returns to additional forms of school-based change, which may achieve a new balance of power between schools and parents.

Amy Gutmann (1987), argues that decision-making in the education system needs to find an alternative to both the *'family state'* where all decisions are taken by the state, and the *'state of families'* where education is exclusively in the hands of parents. Gutmann asserts that neither party has the right to exclusive authority over children's education. Parents have rights and responsibilities to educate their children to become members of their family and immediate community, but the state has a responsibility to all children to educate children for life in the world outside their family, and to make them aware of ways of living different to their own (Jonathan 1989). This approach aims to disentangle a child's rights from imposed adult cultural values. Gutmann therefore suggests a broadly-based decision-making procedure. All parties, parents, teachers and the state would have an input, and discussion and debate would be crucial in determining some type of consensus. However, certain qualities, for example, mutual respect, non-repression and non-discrimination (eg ensuring open access to educational provision and a full curriculum)

are, she argues, essential to a democratic state. Therefore their achievement allows the state to encroach upon parents' absolute freedom in respect of their children's education (Gutmann 1987 p.32). The Macdonald Report, commenting on the wishes of some parents for monocultural education, reaches similar conclusions. It defends children's rights not to have "a nostagically remembered version" of their parents' education imposed on them. Schools should not simply "bend to parents' prejudices," (Macdonald et al 1989 p.337).

.However, if the position of education as a social good means that parents' rights to determine their child's education must be amenable to qualification by the state, then it is also arguable that it would be neither desirable nor feasible to return to the days of exclusive control of the education system by state employees. Therefore procedures to strengthen parental participation within the school are vital (Vincent 1992). Tomlinson (1991) argues that legislation is necessary to combat the inertia that dominates the school approach to home-school relations (see also Sallis 1987). She suggests statutory Home-School Associations (HSAs) in each school (see p.67 above). They would be open to all parents, teachers, older pupils and governors. Their function would be to,

> "discuss matters relating to children's learning, progress and development... HSAs would be statutorily consulted at local levels...when important decisions are being made on education and their representatives would be consulted at national levels," (Tomlinson 1991 p.16).

A note of caution has to be sounded here, however. Previous experiments with parent advisory bodies in the USA concluded that their advice and opinions were often ignored and that their work was confined to consideration of the more mundane matters involved in school governance (Moore 1990; Malen, Ogawa & Kranz 1990).

Another possible way forward may be to seek ways of developing communities outside the school, and at the same time increase their influence inside school. Astin (1986) suggests broadening the role of community workers in community schools. This would extend beyond their traditional role of enabling individuals, to encompass support for collective action (Astin 1986 p.15). This would involve community

workers trying to make links between different groups in a locality, and ascertaining what their needs and interests were with regard to the school. A community worker could provide parents with the encouragement and space to organise independently of educational professionals. The 1988 Education Act and subsequent policy encourages parents to exercise their influence as consumers. A focus on community action and school-based change could redefine and redirect that principle of consumer sovereignity away from a consumer model towards a model of democratic participation (Locke 1974; Ranson 1986).

Developing citizenship

The developments suggested above oppose the policy priorities of present and previous Government legislation, as well as the recommendations of commentators such as Chubb & Moe (1990). The ideology underscoring these arguments encourages an atomised education system, which abjures 'politics', and recognizes only the mantra of 'effectiveness', judged apparently by formal qualifications alone. Such priorities also suggest a particular definition of the role of 'the parent', and by extension, 'the citizen'.

As detailed in chapters 2 and 3, the 'responsible' parent of Conservative legislation, is concerned with making choices which benefit his or her own circumstances. Likewise, the New Right model of citizenship is "essentially directed to promoting the individual personna and private autonomy of the individual, rather than citizenship in the sense of the relationship between the individual and the state or the community" (Oliver 1991 p.160).

Chapter 3 argues that the Parents' Charter encourages parents, once they have chosen a school, to be supportive of the professionals (see also Chubb & Moe 1990). If they have great cause for dissatisfaction, parents can 'exit', but opportunities for exercising 'voice' remain dependent on individual circumstances. Statutory bodies or fora in which all parents have a right to voice their opinions have not received central government backing. Thus, Carr (1991) comments that the 'market' model of democracy encourages an "individualistic society", and a "politically passive citizenry" (1991 p.379).

The market model of social welfare contains a notion of 'rights' that extends only as far as 'consumer rights', and is thus incomplete. It does not address structural inequalities that limit the ability of a citizen, perhaps in her role as parent, to compete in the market place (see ch.2). If a broader definition of rights is adopted, such as Marshall's (1950) concept of social entitlements, the Conservative Party's model is exposed as limited to responsibilities rather than entitlement. Citizenship then becomes "a burden, a set of obligations which a citizen owes," (Oliver 1991 p.164). Many teaching professionals, and some Conservative politicians see parental involvement largely in terms of parental obligations. They may differ in the definition of those obligations, but both groups ignore the possibility of a broader, more participative role for parents.

The development of such a role requires an acknowledgement that "education is a public good as well as a private benefit," (Ranson 1992 p.183), requiring collective as well as individual involvement. It is through participation in public dialogues that citizens can recognize the commonality of many of their areas of concern, and thus build a grass-roots movement to support and improve state education (Troyna & Carrington 1990). As Ranson & Thomas comment,

"It requires the opportunity for citizens to express their view, for their voice to be heard, so that the inescapably diverse constituencies of education are enabled to present, discuss and negotiate their account," (Ranson & Thomas 1989 p.74).

This mention of diversity is important. Similarly Oliver's writing refers to "multiple citizenship" (1991 p.162). This is defined as a sense of belonging to more than one community. It can be understood as acknowledging that every individual has links with several social communities; links which result from the interaction of ethnicity, gender and class variables. This appreciation may go some way towards overriding expectations of easy consensus, based on simplistic notions of the homogeneity of spatial communities (see ch.1 above).

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that parent-teacher relationships are shaped by the unequal power relations between the two groups. It explores and illustrates this situation with reference to theory (chs. 1, 2, & 3) and empirical data (chs. 6, 7,8 & 9). It outlines various attempts at reconstitution, including national developments such as community education (ch.1) and parental involvement in curricular areas (ch.3), as well as local initiatives, such as the HSC scheme (ch.8) and the Parents' Centre (ch.9). It concludes that such innovations have a marked tendency to be reformist in their aims and outcomes (if not their rhetoric). However, despite these constraints, it is not suggested that change is impossible within the current structures. At each site, that of school or LEA, policies are likely to be the focus for conflict and competition. This may often mean that oppositional policies calling for changes to the current balance of power have relatively small chance of finding their way onto the political agenda. This is especially so at national level, where the rise of the New Right has strengthened central government powers and reconstructed the political agenda to focus on individual rather than collective strategies. However, the erosion of relative autonomy for educational professionals is not complete, and it is possible that some parents may use their consumer 'powers' to participate in, rather than police, the life of the school (Vincent 1992).

Therefore, although progress in increasing opportunities for parental participation is likely to be fragmented and erratic, this thesis maintains that future developments ought to be in the direction of increasing democratic control of the schools, rather than stewardship by the market. The process has the potential to affect relationships not just between individual teachers and parents, but also between citizens and agencies of the state. For as Ranson comments, "participation in education can...help foster not only effective schooling, but also the conditions for a more vital accountability for citizenship," (1986 p.96).

Interview details

Total number of interviews: 158.

In terms of ethnicity and gender, the breakdown is as follows:

	African / Caribbean	ESWI*	South Asian	Other groups	Total
Women	28	67	18	7	120
Men	4	21	10	3	38
Total	32	88	28	10	Grand total 158

* ESWI = English, Scots, Welsh and Irish.

In order to preserve the anonymity of individual respondents, a further breakdown is given only for the first two case study schools, Hill St and Low Rd.

At Hill St I interviewed 45 parents in total, and all the full-time teachers (16 including the head).

At Low Rd I interviewed 50 parents, and 15 of the 20 full-time teachers (including the head). This breaks down as follows:

Hill St parents: 10 African/Caribbean women

                      8 South Asian parents (3 men, 5 women)

                      3 Cypriot women (2 Greek Cypriot, 1 Turkish)

                      5 Turkish parents (2 men, 3 women)

                   19 ESWI (5 men, 14 women).

Hill St teachers: 1 South Asian woman

                     3 African/Caribbean teachers (2 women, 1 man)

                    11 ESWI (7 women, 1 man)

                     1 Greek woman

Low Rd parents: 11 African/Caribbean parents (1 man, 10 women)

                    15 Bangladeshi parents (7 men, 8 women)

                     1 Morrocan woman

                    23 ESWI (2 men, 21 women)

Low Rd teachers: 2 South Asian women

                     3 African/Caribbean teachers (2 women, 1 man)

                     9 ESWI (7 women, 2 men)

                     1 Dutch man.

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