

**Partnership in Education, through Whole School  
Development with Parent and Community Involvement:  
A Study of a National Initiative  
to Combat Educational Disadvantage -  
the Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme (2 Vols.)**

**Concepta Conaty**

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*This Dissertation is dedicated  
to my niece Martina Conaty,  
with appreciation of her  
warmth and clarity*

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ADM</b>	Area Development Management
<b>APT</b>	Area for Priority Treatment
<b>BSG</b>	Business Support Group
<b>BvLF</b>	Bernard van Leer Foundation
<b>CDP</b>	Community Development Project
<b>CEP</b>	Community Education Project
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Funding
<b>ESLI</b>	Early School Leavers' Initiative
<b>ESRI</b>	Economic and Social Research Institute
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FLAG</b>	Ferguslie League of Action Groups
<b>HSCL</b>	Home School Community Liaison
<b>HSEP</b>	Home School Employment Partnership
<b>ICD</b>	In-Career Development
<b>NPC-P</b>	National Parents Council-Primary
<b>NSC</b>	National Steering Committee
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PCGC</b>	Parents' Consultative Group on the Curriculum
<b>PERB</b>	Primary Education Review Body
<b>PI</b>	Primary One
<b>PTA</b>	Parent-Teacher Association
<b>SI</b>	Secondary One
<b>TVEI</b>	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
<b>WSE</b>	Whole School Evaluation

## ABSTRACT

### **Partnership in Education, through Whole School Development with Parent and Community Involvement: A Study of a National Initiative to Combat Educational Disadvantage - the Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme (2 Vols.)**

Partnership is now central to education internationally. The Home, School, Community Scheme, established in Ireland in 1990, is an example of introducing partnership in a radical way to designated disadvantaged primary and post-primary schools. This Scheme is the subject of the dissertation.

There is an extensive review of literature on the rights and role of parents, on home-, school-, community-based learning, on the partnership process and on practice in various countries. The history, rationale, structures and current practice of the Irish Scheme are detailed.

The thesis hypotheses are geared to ascertaining the attitudes of principals, coordinators, and teachers and to considering the coordinator's role as both innovative and key.

Quantitative research data was obtained from questionnaires to principals and coordinators in 182 schools and teachers in sixteen schools. Qualitative data emerged through in-depth study of sixteen schools, including intensive interviewing of principals, coordinators plus involved parents and questionnaires to chairpersons and other parents. The research design also involves action research. This is to be found in critique, response, and constant evaluation on the part of the author and key participants in the Scheme. The evaluation element of the research is both formative and summative.

The fourth chapter examines issues impinging on education, which are significant for the Scheme, such as valuing parents/pupils and communication inside/outside the school. The fifth and sixth chapters investigate structures, development, attitudes, values, belief systems, communication, teamwork and inter-relations, all of which point to the coordinator as an essential catalyst in the Scheme. Special attention is paid to partnership and to some shortcomings.

Research carried out in Ferguslie Park, an area in Scotland undergoing educational and social regeneration, provided some interesting parallels and differences.

In drawing the strands together we point to achievements, future challenges and areas needing further development.

***PART ONE***

***THE TRIPLE FOCUS:***

***HOME, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY***

## INTRODUCTION

The correlation between the influence of home background on school attainment is long recognised. The issue of discontinuity between the home and school life of the child has been widely written about for the past twenty years. This discontinuity, as we shall see, can lead to school failure and eventual dropout.

Aware of this, the Irish Government Department of Education, (in recent years re-named the Department of Education and Science), has undertaken various initiatives to help meet the needs of marginalised pupils. Marginalised pupils may be described as those presenting in school with often complex social, emotional, health and developmental needs that are barriers to learning.

In addition, the marginalised pupils are most likely to be children and teenagers who come from homes where poverty exists to such a degree as to preoccupy the family and to effect its ability to enhance life chances. They are generally young people from the families of the unskilled and the unemployed working - class, with a history of educational failure. As a result these young people have fewer choices in life, have limited access to further education and so have less opportunity to realise their potential.

There is often a reduced ability to cope within the home and the community, in marginalised areas, thus creating oppression and perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage and educational failure. In such situations equality of opportunity is lacking, social exclusion is prolonged and there is a serious loss of talent to society. This inability often finds expression in apathy, vandalism, substance misuse, joy riding, demotivation, low self-image and alienation.

In short we can say that: under achievement in school, unsatisfactory retention rates, and a poor accessing of higher education led the Department of Education in 1984 to initiate a scheme of special funding for schools in designated areas of disadvantage. This scheme was reviewed in 1985-1986 and again in 1987-1988 and no changes in behaviour or/and educational attainment were perceived.

Solutions to the needs of marginalised pupils require a range of services and supports that cut across the boundary of the school, agency services, and government departments. Solutions also include the involvement of parents and the development of communities to provide stable, safe and supportive environments for young people. This comprehensive range of provision and the ensuing good practice would seem to be the way forward in addressing the needs of those at risk. When home, school and community, together with voluntary and statutory services, are treated in isolation there is a limited chance of success. A partnership, a multi-agency approach, as we shall note throughout this dissertation, may be the path to follow.

In 1990 the Home, School, Community Liaison scheme (HSCL) was launched with thirty teachers appointed as liaison coordinators in fifty-five primary schools. The following year the scheme extended to the post-primary sector. It was, and is, the view of the Department of Education that not only would the scheme be unified and integrated at both levels, expressing a partnership approach, but that the scheme itself would be built on the theory and practice of partnership. It was held that the partners, (parents, teachers and community agents), should acknowledge the shared sense of purpose in meeting pupil needs with respect to learning and development. The belief was that the practice of partnership requires putting information, resources and power in the hands of those closest to the child,

namely parents. It calls for changing policies and practice through a process approach involving all the key players. It encourages local ownership of problems and of the possibilities to address them. These aspects of partnership and many more are dealt with in this dissertation.

From its inception the HSCL scheme was viewed by the Department of Education as a targeted and focused resource intended to serve the most marginalised pupils in designated disadvantaged schools. Central to the HSCL scheme is the fact that it is a preventative measure and that it zones in on the significant adults in the young person's life, namely, parents and teachers. In short, it can be said that the aim of the HSCL scheme is twofold:

- to develop the parent as prime educator;
- to develop teacher attitudes and behaviours so that the school becomes a place where all young people can reach their potential.

The hope of the Department of Education is to achieve its aim through a partnership approach.

The coordinator, a teacher appointed from the school staff, works with parents and teachers. Coordinators also network with voluntary and statutory bodies in the local community in order to foster an integrated and local approach. This aids both family and community life, so that the young person can grow up in an environmentally rich atmosphere. So the coordinator, it can be said, is the centre of a complex network. At times the different expectations, demands, fears, enthusiasm, perceptions, and agenda can conflict. As a link agent the coordinator needs to identify and balance these interests taking into account different influences at work. In addition the role of the coordinator is to lead individuals and groups towards collective advancement.



This dissertation is an evaluation of the HSCL programme. In the light of nearly ten years of planning and operation it has become clear that the scheme is extremely complex in its multiple relationships. At the same time it has become obvious that there are several key elements, and that a failure in any one of them will have a serious and detrimental effect on a particular school or area. These include:

- ease of relationship between principal and coordinator;
- support from the principal for the work of the coordinator;
- support and involvement of the Board of Management in HSCL scheme activities;
- in-career development for principals and teachers to encourage the change process and to ensure their involvement with parents;
- effective networking with community personnel both voluntary and statutory;
- never losing sight of the pupil who is the reason for all the activity.

The hypotheses for this dissertation are based on the premise that there will be no difference in the attitudes of the three major groups, with regard to key elements in the HSCL scheme and that school principals, coordinators and leader-parents, with their support systems, are essential link agents in the development of change and the fostering of partnership in the broadest sense. The purpose of the research is to explore these key issues and to note if the success of partnership depends on the interrelatedness of these link agents among themselves and with the coordinator, as the key link agent. In short the hypothesis of this thesis is that a key to having the above relate and interact is partnership.

The thesis centres on this fact of partnership and traces it in the attitudes, activities and perceptions of the various key personnel involved in the scheme. A further hypothesis of the thesis is that the role of the coordinator is the vital one.

While for some effectiveness, the school needs at least a positive attitude on the part of the principal and parents, much more is demanded of the coordinator who emerges as the lynch-pin of the whole scheme.

The National Coordinator, appointed to the HSCL scheme before its inception in 1990, is also the writer of this dissertation (2.3.2). She has been involved as the scheme developed through activities, trial and error, planning, implementing, and evaluating within the Department of Education over the nine year period. This exposition has the strengths and weaknesses of an insiders view but also the value of close affinity with experiential practice. The most obvious weakness that one might fear would be prejudice, unbalanced evaluation arising from being too close physically and emotionally through the evolution of the scheme. The alert reader will be aware of this weakness and the risks involved. A most important protection against this kind of bias has been the development of rigorous methodological procedures which include the framing of open-ended questions and a series of strategies during interviews, which would make it easy for people to voice any dissatisfaction. As will be noted through Chapters Two, Four and Five both formative and summative evaluation methods were used.

In Chapter Three we note the precautions taken to maintain objectivity. A positive value lies precisely in it being an insider's view. The reader can glean the vision, philosophy, values, management theories and strategies of the Department of Education from 1990 when it launched the scheme through to present day practices.

**Chapter One** reviews the literature relating to the involvement of the home, the community, and the school in children's learning. The chapter starts with an acknowledgement of the rights of parents and works through home-based learning,

community-based learning and school-based learning culminating in a summary of children's learning. While home, community and school are treated separately the function of each overlaps and the three are inherently integrated. The issue of partnership is introduced in 1.7 and is dealt with more fully in Chapter Five. Some of the education structures in the European Union (EU) are outlined and key practices in liaison work detailed with the rationale.

**Chapter Two** elaborates on the historical background and the philosophy and evolution of the HSCL scheme in Ireland. The organisational and operational structures of the HSCL scheme are given at some length. Personnel and structures that provided support for the development and maintenance of HSCL are described. The advisory role of the National Steering Committee is recorded and the agencies named. The work of the National and Assistant National Coordinators is detailed comprehensively, as is the role of the local coordinators. In-career development for coordinators is also outlined. Two areas of the HSCL scheme where action research was carried out, the preparation and delivery of workshops by coordinators (2.3.4.4 and 2.3.4.5) and policy making processes (2.4.1), is given in some depth.

**Chapter Three** takes the reader through the research methodology. This chapter includes the definition of the research problem, the preliminary knowledge base, the formulation of the hypotheses, the selection of samples in Ireland and Scotland, the methods and tools of research and the analysis procedures. In Chapter Three we note the six themes underlying the questionnaire. They are as follows: valuing people, communication, structures, development, partnership and outcomes. Chapter Three also includes an explanatory outline regarding the relationship of Chapters Four and Five with Chapter Six.

**Chapter Four** examines the "Field of the Coordinator" through the themes "Valuing People" (4.1) and "Communication" (4.2) using quantitative data. These are the first two themes underlying the questionnaire. There is an emphasis on "developing good relationships" and the "pastoral care system" and on "listening to" and "improving communication" with pupils. The importance attached to the "learning environment" is examined. The degree to which the parent as "prime educator" is valued by respondents is assessed. The concept of whether parents are involved in a practical sense is explored. The level of communication with parents "individually" and "collectively" is detailed.

**Chapter Five** portrays the "Coordinator in Action". This is achieved through a detailed analysis, using quantitative data relating to "Structures" (5.1), "Development" (5.2), "Partnership" (5.3), and "Outcomes" (5.4).

The need for structures for such areas as: evaluation, consultation, feedback, involvement, support and delegation are detailed through theory and quantitative data. The on-going development of teachers, parents, pupils and the coordinator is detailed. Attitudes towards tasks performed and enriching/unproductive experiences of partnership are given. Perceptions on developing partnership among staff members and parents are outlined. Finally "important changes" since the HSCL scheme started are listed from the data given by principals, coordinators, and teachers. Outcomes from the Local Committee, linking school and community issues, are named.

**Chapter Six** deals with qualitative methodology. This refers, in the broadest sense, to research that produces descriptive data and so findings are primarily communicated in words rather than numbers. This chapter details the interviews in a sample of sixteen schools selected from the scheme. The in-depth interviews

focused more immediately on the coordinator and raised also other areas when the interviewee wished to expand. The interviews are confirmatory of other elements of the research.

**Chapter Seven** is the result of two visits to the then Strathclyde region of Scotland and focuses on the Ferguslie Park area. These comparative observations serve to provide a wider background to the Irish scheme and to confirm in another context some of the main findings of the thesis.

**Chapter Eight** brings the strands of the dissertation together, making comparisons and drawing conclusions in relation to the findings and at times their absence. Chapter Eight also embodies recommendations for the future.

# CHAPTER 1

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The last twenty years, and in particular the last decade, have been an exciting and demanding time in education. One aspect of the change which has occurred has been the gradual move from the separation of home and school to an increasing acceptance of the central role of the parent as prime educator. In recent times there has also been much emphasis on the role of the community as a central one in learning.

It will be the contention of this study that in Ireland there have been important developments in the three areas of home, school, and community and above all in their interrelationships. It would be foolhardy to try to give a single cause for this new interest in the interrelatedness of home, school, and community but one generalisation can perhaps be risked. A significant motor has been the perception that education was failing especially in the more disadvantaged socio-economic areas. This perception had available much theoretical work which was now given increased relevance and urgency in the last two decades. Some of the theoretical work which dates from the late 1950s viewed low-income people as "culturally deprived" and requiring "compensatory education". A patronising tone prevailed among educators who approached the learning of working-class people with insensitivity and with middle class prejudices. Movements in the mid 1980s have placed more emphasis on home-school relationships and the 1990s have seen the inclusion of community as part of the focus. We shall examine this phenomenon within the literature review. The interdependent and integrated nature of learning

from a home, community, and school perspective will be highlighted. The situation in some of the other EU countries will be outlined. Parallels will also be drawn and lessons will be learned from the wider world vantage point. Attitudes of schools and other professionals towards parents will be assessed.

## **1.1 THE LITERATURE**

The phenomenon of new interest in the triple direction of home, school, and community is difficult to survey in a literature review. On the one hand there are many studies on each of the elements; on the other hand the interdependence of all three is not nearly so well investigated, although there are many studies on any two of the three.

When we look at the literature we find four different kinds of significant contribution to this debate. There are foundational, political, and social principles in national and transnational bodies. Secondly, there are theoretical and practical studies by educationalists. Thirdly, there are initiatives taken by governments and educational authorities of a practical and sometimes a theoretical nature. Finally, there are studies of individual initiatives here and abroad. For the purposes of this study a thematic approach has been chosen and the four different approaches are presented under seven headings:

- 1.2 The rights of parents;
- 1.3 Home-based learning and social class;
- 1.4 Community-based learning;
- 1.5 School-based learning;
- 1.6 Children's learning;
- 1.7 The issue of partnership;
- 1.8 Parents and education in selected European Union and non-EU countries

Firstly we examine the rights of parents.

## 1.2 THE RIGHTS OF PARENTS

The renewed emphasis on the rights of parents can be seen in the context of an insistence in the 20th century on human rights in world organisations, in constitutional law and generally in politics, philosophy and ethics. The rights and the role of parents are often underrated by teachers and indeed by parents themselves. "The status and role of parents is ignored by society until...official attention by virtue of perceived and apparent problems with the child-rearing process (emerge)" (Wolfendale, 1983: 155).

*Bunreacht na h-Éireann* (The Irish Constitution), has a clear expression of the rights and responsibilities of parents. "The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children" (Article 42).

The European Convention on Human Rights ensures the right to education and assures parents that such education will be "in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions" (The European Convention on Human Rights Strasbourg, 1984: 28).

The education section of the Maastricht Treaty, Article 126, states that:

The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity (Maastricht Treaty, 1992: 126 (12)).



The Treaty wishes the Community to pursue "co-operation between educational establishments". Macbeth and Ravn suggest that the two basic educational establishments for any child are home and school and that "co-operation between the two could be adopted as a major Community interest" (Macbeth and Ravn, 1994: 12). Such cooperation was envisaged and intended to be implemented with the setting up of primary school Boards of Management in Ireland in 1975.

Boards of Management were established to allow a wider participation by trustees, parents and teachers in the shared management of schools.

The fundamental question is whether appropriate adjustments and adaptations can be made to bring the governance of schools into line with the very changed economic, social, and political circumstances...winning the allegiance of the relevant partners...[with] increasing demands for more democratic participation of parents and teachers in the governance of our schools (Coolahan, 1994: 23).

The shared management of schools, in the real sense, has been slow. An earlier criticism of the management of national schools being "little more than a minor maintenance committee" has been warranted (Department of Education, Primary Education Review Body (PERB), 1990: 36). It emerges from talking to school personnel and to parents that Boards of Management do not deal with curriculum planning, implementation and review nor with the critical issue of the non-performing teacher. A government policy statement intended for discussion (in these islands called a "Green Paper") advocated that "much more authority and responsibility be devolved to local level" (Department of Education, 1992: 140-141). The National Parents Council - Primary (NPC-P) has, in a publication for parents, made many recommendations to enhance the effective participation of parents on boards (NPC-P, 1993: 7-8). Despite structures for their inclusion, parents have been reluctant to exercise their rights and avail of opportunities. It would appear, from speaking to parents and indeed to school personnel, and from

some of the research findings from this dissertation (4.2.1.1 and 5.3.2) that the participation of parents is often consigned to their having merely a peripheral role.

A former Minister for Education admits that "lack of knowledge by parents may inhibit them from going forward to serve on boards, deprive them of the experience of partnership...and the children of the school of the benefit of their participation" (NPC-P, 1993: Foreward). In the White Paper (indicating proposed legislation)

The Government is committed to promoting the active participation of parents at every level of the education process. It also supports the right of parents to be consulted, as part of a collaborative process for educational decision making and policy making at school, regional and national level...This formal recognition will be given statutory confirmation (Department of Education, 1995: 140).

In every school in receipt of Exchequer funding "a statutory duty will be placed on boards of management to promote the setting up by parents of a parents' association" (Ibid.). Reiterating the stance taken by the Minister for Education in 1991 in her circular "Parents as Partners in Education" (Department of Education, circular 24/91 National Schools, and circular M27/91 Post-Primary Schools) the White Paper states that "each board of management will be required to develop a formal home-school links policy...stating the actions which will be taken to foster such links" (Department of Education 1995: 141). The Education Act (1998) enshrined the foregoing in law (Irish Government, 1998: Article 26).

It is evident that successive ministers worked to include the parent voice both at board level and through parent associations. A further effort at inclusion was through the intended Education Boards. When the establishment of Education Boards was proposed, which would have operated as an intermediate tier between the Department of Education and school boards, the Minister intended "that the autonomy of schools would be enhanced" (Department of Education, 1994: 13).

The Education Boards might have given the Department of Education currently "over-stretched administering the system", the opportunity "to advise systematically on policy" (OECD, 1991: 31). The new Education Boards could "foster a dynamic partnership between schools, parents and the communities they serve" (Department of Education, 1995: 142). It is obvious that the intention was clear, but as the Education Boards were never realised another mechanism may need to be considered. Regarding regional planning and coordination, the contribution of parents would be insured through "statutory representation on each board and through consultation with parents in each region" (Department of Education, 1995: 142, see also Education Act, 1998). Wolfendale calls for greater participation of parents so "that the proper exercising of citizens' rights would extend to parents having a greater share in educational decision-making on behalf not only of their children, but in true community spirit on behalf of all adult citizens of tomorrow" (Wolfendale, 1983: 14).

From the foregoing views of the Irish Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Maastricht Treaty and the Irish Government Department of Education it is clear that the role given to parents is of paramount importance. Boards of Management give parents an opportunity for wider participation. The National Parents' Council encourages participation. The White Paper advocates the "active participation of parents at every level". The 1998 Education Act concretises the role of the parent in education. It would appear that much work needs to be done to provide a climate of support for parents and teachers so that parents may assume their rights.

### 1.3 HOME-BASED LEARNING AND SOCIAL CLASS

There is a long recognised correlation between home background and in-school attainment. Much of the recent debate has centred on the adequacy or otherwise of working-class families and can be seen against a wider sociological and economic awareness of the inequality that persists despite many improvements in prosperity, in welfare, and in education. Various indices of the status and the structure of families were found to be related to indices of children's school learning, but "the relationships are not strong" (Kellaghan et al. 1993: 48). In his work *Early Childhood Education and Care*, Barker cautioned that unless there is "equal valuing and learning of skills and concepts drawn from the culture of the disadvantaged, the disadvantaged child's self-esteem is damaged and its potential for development...seriously inhibited" (Barker, 1987: 5).

Some decades ago, relating to the development of language, Bernstein postulated two polar codes, the "elaborated" and the "restricted" based on middle and working-class homes, with the latter being "deficit" in language. Widlake refutes this notion and highlights the "conceptual crudity and confusion" of such thought when he speaks of "the patronising tone that prevailed among educators...[their] insensitivity...the reinforcement of teachers' middle class prejudices; the denigration of the language and mores of disadvantaged people" (Widlake, 1986: 12). Drudy and Lynch "emphatically reject any explanation that rests on a deficit model of the children of the poor, as deficit theory is based on untenable assumptions about the superiority of one set of cultural values vis-à-vis others" (Drudy and Lynch, 1993: 151).

Tizard and Hughes contend that the main difference in language use occurs not between middle and working-class children, but between home and school,

and hence conclude "that children who are said to enter school hardly able to talk are almost always children who can talk perfectly well at home, but are initially too ill at ease to display the full range of their verbal skills when they enter school" (Tizard and Hughes, 1984: 160). Tizard and Hughes report that relatively little research has been done on home learning because "the researcher must actually go into a child's home and observe what is happening there" (Ibid., 16). Their second reason is of a very different nature and it being "the belief in some quarters that there is not much to be gained from attempting to do so. In other words, their reluctance has been due to the general belief that mothers, have very little to offer...this attitude may be partly due to the lowly non-professional status which parenting is frequently given" (Ibid., 16-17).

The research findings of Tizard and Hughes suggest that the reverse is true, "it was clear from our observations that the home provides a very powerful learning environment" (Ibid., 249). In their book *Young Children Learning* they cite five reasons why the home is an especially effective learning environment. First, the range of activities is more extensive in the home than in the school. Second, the shared life in the home enables the mother to encourage the child "to make sense of her present experiences by relating them to past experiences, as well as to her existing framework of knowledge" (Ibid.). A third significant point is that a small number of children share the adults' time and attention in the home. A further characteristic is that learning "is often embedded in contexts of great meaning to the child" (Ibid.). Finally the relationship between mother and child is so close that "she will almost certainly have definite educational expectations which she is likely to pursue...it is this parental concern that converts the potential advantages of the home into actual advantages" (Ibid., 251-252). Bronfenbrenner expresses

the same sentiments and advocates home intervention in the early years and focuses not on the child but on the mother-child relationship "the two person system which sustains and fosters the child's development" (Bronfenbrenner, 1974: 27). The findings of Tizard and Hughes apply to working-class and middle class homes. The emphasis and content were sometimes different in the two sectors, yet "all the basic language usages were observed in all the homes; the social class difference was in the frequency of the usages" (Tizard and Hughes, 1984: 252).

While it would seem wrong to conclude that different forms of language reflect inferior or superior modes of cognition or of thinking, Kellaghan et al. "assume that differences in values, beliefs, language and knowledge may be due...to differences in the basic conditions of life at different levels of the social order" (Kellaghan et al., 1993: 41). In addition, experience teaches that families within any socio-economic group vary considerably. The performance of children at school also varies. The explanatory value of such variables, as parent education or occupation, is limited since they tell us little about life in the home that might enhance the development of the child in school. However, research carried out from 1975 to 1979 in a disadvantaged area of London, designed to assess the effects of parental involvement in teaching reading, showed that "children who receive parental help are significantly better in reading attainment than comparable children who do not...[and that] small-group instruction in reading, given by a highly competent specialist teacher, did not produce improvements in attainment comparable in magnitude with those obtained from the collaboration with parents" (Tizard, Schofield and Hewison, 1982:14).

In another study the absence of "problem behaviour in the home" had a substantial positive relationship with attention, the latter having moderate effects on arithmetic achievement and reading comprehension" (de Jong, 1993: 201-213).

Processes in the home that are considered to play an important part in child development include "how time and space are organised and used, how parents and children interact and spend their time and the values that govern parents' and children's choice of activities" (Ibid., 51). Wells, speaking of the acquisition of language, points out that conversations at home "arise spontaneously from the activity in hand, and are free from any pressure to teach and learn particular facts and skills" (cited in Goode, 1987: 112). Conversations of this nature are natural interactions with a family member. Goode analyses the nature of learning at home and offers a typology of "Parents as educators" within a three fold framework: "confirmatory", "complementary" and "compensatory" (Ibid., 118). Macbeth sees home-based learning as a corollary to school-based learning, "a mutual information exchange" (Macbeth, 1989: 69). He claims that the terms "home background" and "socio-economic" are broad and vague but that "parental attitudes emerged as important variables correlating with achievement...Social class itself is not the cause of inequalities of school performance but attitudes which may themselves correlate with socio-economic status could be having impact and it is in relation to these that action would be directed" (Macbeth, 1984: 184).

When trapped in poverty and in close contact with language development among low income people, Freire remarked that "Their syntax was as beautiful as mine...they could never say what critical analysts know about language and social class" and he referred to the beauty of their language and wisdom and their special testimony (Freire, and Shor, 1987: 29-30). Widlake is highly critical of how diffi-

cult children and tough neighbourhoods were first thought of as deficient, and then later as diffident (see also South and Crowder, 1977). Widlake works from "compensatory education" through the "communications model" to the "participatory model" where "parents are viewed...as people exercising some control over their own lives...and education of their children...The very thought of these people being verbally destitute is enough to reduce one to helpless laughter" (Widlake, 1986: 16). When teaching pupils "in poverty" in an Australian primary school we note that "teachers, in the main, adopt derogatory, deficit views of their students and their families...they are said to come from 'bad families' which are poor and characterised as unstable and unsupportive of the school" (Halton, Munns and Dent, 1996: 42, see also O'Sullivan, 1980: 138-142).

Drudy and Lynch hold that there may be "cultural discontinuities" between the home, community or school for working-class children but "in no sense has it been proved that there is any deficit in the linguistic skills of these children" (Drudy and Lynch, 1993: 154). They go on to point out that "recent research" suggests that such children have "verbal skills well in excess of their performance levels" and that "schools themselves are the inhibiting force" (Ibid.) Their suggested recommendation is "to develop the language skills of children from culturally diverse backgrounds" (Ibid.).

According to Pallas, Natriello and Mc Dill minority racial/ethnic group status is perhaps the best known factor associated with being educationally disadvantaged. They claimed that "members of certain minority groups have performed more poorly in schools than white children" (Pallas, Natriello and Mc Dill, 1989: 16). They also held that results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that "the reading and writing skills of black and Hispanic chil-



dren were substantially below those of white children" (Ibid.). Crediting his parents for providing him with the "social skills" and "confidence" to take advantage of educational opportunities Comer, a black, believed that teachers did not realise how "afraid" and "uncomfortable" black parents were around "white people in general" (Comer, 1988a: 24-25). In addition, teachers "assume that all children come from mainstream backgrounds and arrive at school equally well prepared to perform as the school expects them to" (Ibid.). Parent involvement in "low-income communities...can help eliminate harmful stereotypes that staff members may harbour about the communities served by their school" (Comer, 1986: 446). The discontinuity between the home and school life of children (voiced by The Open University in 1977: 12) has to be addressed at school level because "continuity...reduces conflict for children, reinforces learning and eases the transition between the two environments" (McAllister Swap, 1990a: 9). In Ireland, the Conference of Major Religious Superiors, (CMRS) now called the Conference of Religious of Ireland, (CORI) have taken up the "discontinuity" issue and that of "deficit and difference" (CMRS, 1992: 8-9).

The discontinuity theory is based on the premise that an environment fosters the development of competencies that have adaptive value for individuals living in it (Clark, 1992). Success in adapting to a new environment will depend on the ability of the individual to transfer learning. Homes and schools differ in their training and expectations so children will experience some difficulty in transfer from home to school and from primary school to the post-primary sector (Youngman, 1978). Discontinuity can be eased by an overlap in home and school experiences. This can take place in the home by providing the child with school-related experiences and in school by teachers "taking account, in their teaching of the categories

of meaning that children bring with them of school" (Kellaghan et al., 1993: 27, see also Evans, 1998). Wolfendale believed that a partnership which reduces the gap "between institutions and their provision" would be beneficial (Wolfendale, 1983: 19 and Proctor, 1984). Taylor cautions that the pursuance of home-school links can only be "within the context of a complex set of traditions, value assumptions and attitudes regarding the roles and relationships of family and society, individual and State" (Taylor, 1980: 17). For Seeley this way of working constitutes a partnership that is "conducive to successful learning" where those involved share "common effort toward common goals" and "none is ever a client because their relationship is mutual" (Seeley, 1981: 65).

In this section we have examined the debate relating to home-based learning and social class. We have highlighted many authors who have refuted the "deficit" model of language development relating to the working-class home. The "discontinuity" between the home life of the child and that at school was discussed. Various authors were used to show how an overlap in home and school experiences can ease the discontinuity.

#### **1.4 COMMUNITY - BASED LEARNING**

"Community" is a word which we find constantly in sociological and educational literature. It is not without ambiguity. For the purpose of clarification we can take up the two types of community identified by Tönnies and Cooley about the turn of the century and known as the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* models. The former is the close-knit community with much face to face interaction where people are known, not just by name, but in their circumstances and their relationships. The notion of *Gemeinschaft* in the classification of Tönnies was further developed by Cooley in a description of "primary groups". The chief characteristics of a

primary group are "face to face association, the unspecialised character of that association, relative permanence, the small number of persons involved and the relative intimacy among the participants" (cited in Dulles, 1987: 47). The family, the old fashioned neighbourhood, the rural townland would be examples of such community. The *Gesellschaft* is the model of community that one finds in institutions where people may be known by name and by their function. An example of *Gesellschaft* is a human association characterised by formal organisational structures and office such as the secular state, the school, the hospital and the hotel. The organisation is maintained by competent authority which is normally institutionalised in the form of an office. Such societies are governed by explicit rules, often written (Ibid). It would seem likely that contemporary educational theory would not be happy to see a school merely as an institutionalised society, *Gesellschaft*, whilst recognising at the same time that community in the sense of *Gemeinschaft* is liable to raise unrealistic expectations (see discussion in Dulles, 1987: 47-50).

Midwinter claims that those involved in education must push out the frontiers of the educative dimension to include "universalisms" i.e. television, the pop culture, sports and advertising. He continues "that whether teachers like it or not, the community at large 'educates'...'community' in this sense is definable as the child's common wealth of experiences" (Midwinter, 1980: 206). The same idea is promoted by Bronfenbrenner who had as his central thesis the importance of contextual child development and the need to confront the total life situation of the child. He moved from a child-centred approach to a family-centred one. He recommends that we "utilise as agents of socialisation the child's own parents, other family members, adults and other children from the neighbourhood in which he

lives, school personnel, and other persons who are part of the child's enduring environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1974: 49 and Galloway, Rogers, Armstrong and Leo, 1998). In this type of setting "the nation's children can develop into constructive, contributing members of culture and society" (Roland-Martin, 1995: 359). There is little doubt regarding the place of the home and community in the life of the child. The Bernard van Leer Foundation (BvLF) strongly holds that

The bond between parent and child should be the central pivot of educational activities...the community has to perceive a commitment to educational change, not for the benefit of the outsiders, but for itself and its children...Teachers for their part must know the cultural access-point in the local community. If they do not, they run the grave risk of failing the child and the community they pretend to address (BvLF, 1984: 22).

In a significant study *School Power* we learn how a university, a public school, and parents worked together to move problem inner city schools in New Haven to an acceptable level of social and academic achievement. The author, Comer, sought to build a "happy stable home environment" and "cohesive supportive communities" (Elder, 1990: 50-54). Comer's belief is that this is fundamental to the development of the individual child and hence to family and to community life (see also Rutherford and Billig, 1995: 64-68). It can be expected that improved quality life across many families leads to an enriched community. MacBeath advises that "it is the nature of the movement between the communities of school and home that shapes the present and sets out the pathway to individual futures" (MacBeath, 1999: 14). Welling expresses the same sentiment: "if we are really going to make an impact on the well-being of children growing up in deprived communities it is the totality of their environment which has to be addressed. The message is empowerment... We have to address not only the immediate provision for children but the disabling environment itself" (Welling, 1988: 13). McLaughlin and Irby speak about the difficulty young people experience

"when school doors shut behind them in the early afternoon" (McLaughlin and Irby, 1994: 301). These pupils are "claimed by the streets" where "ill-equipped parks become urban battlegrounds" (Ibid., see also Donthwaite, 1992).

Paz believes that "communities are untapped reservoirs of human potential" (Paz, 1990: 19) and for early childhood programmes to succeed they must be "rooted in the community" (Ibid., 3). This presumes an understanding of the community in which they are rooted. Summarising what she learned in programmes that were successful in breaking the cycle of disadvantage, Schorr states "Successful programs see the child in the context of family and the family in the context of its surroundings" (Schorr, 1988: 257). Welling holds that just as children need healthy and strong bodies they equally need healthy and strong supporting communities and concludes "we are in the business of community development just as much as we are in the business of child development" (Welling, 1988: 12-13, see also Macleod 1989). The value of an integrated approach is further highlighted: "the importance of family supports, school responsiveness to students, and student involvement in school and community activities stand out as predictors of recovery of low performance" (Catterall, 1998: 302 and Barber, 1993).

The task of education is to provide meaningful and relevant learning opportunities for children, parents and the wider community. This enhances the quality of life, thereby allowing children to grow up in an enriched environment partaking of educational opportunity in ever increasing quality, depth and duration. In such a setting the child is being supported in educational endeavour. The child, the main target of intervention, occupies a central part of programmes with "parents and the community in concentric circles of belonging and support, reinforcing and gaining

sustenance from each other" (Paz, 1990: 17 and Nimnicht, Arango and Hearn, 1987). In this way Widlake sees education as a process that is "lifelong" where participants are "actively and influentially" involved and where needs identification "determines the nature and timing of the provision" (Widlake, 1986: 47). Above all, the process is about "working with, not for", is participatory, and builds on the existing strengths of the individual and of the community (Freire, 1972: 25, see also Cropley, 1981: 57-69). Commonly accepted values would seem to be an irreversible acquisition in educational theory. However, the practical translation of theory to practice will always remain a challenge. As noted above, we need to take some care that we do not raise unrealisable expectations in the way in which we speak about community and the importance of the individual. It remains a challenge and over enthusiastic language can lead to frustration, anger, or disillusionment.

Perhaps the successful schools of the future will be defined "as those in which children, students, parents and teachers have learned how to learn together within a coherent theory of community education" (Watt, 1989: 196). MacBeath leaves those who may not be convinced of the interrelatedness of school and community with a disturbing question: "what is the difference between 'success' for a school and 'success' for the individual who passes through it on the way to a lifetime in the community?" (MacBeath, 1996: 144).

## **1.5 SCHOOL-BASED LEARNING**

In many parts of the world the school and education are almost correlative terms. The automatic assumption of former times that education is primarily a school matter and that school is primarily the educator is now being tested and expanded and at times challenged. The challenge to previously held orthodoxy arises partly

from educationalists and social commentators like Freire, who begin not with theories, but from the experience of disappointing results from school-based learning and from the assumptions that the school is not only a primary locus of education but almost an exclusive one. Another awareness is that the school is more than the class-room: the social skills learned in the playground are a primary element in the educational process, one which continues beyond the school walls.

Macbeth tells us that less than fifteen per cent of a child's waking life from birth to sixteen years is spent in school, where learning is "planned, structured, professionally provided and delivered at times of the day when children are alert and receptive" (Macbeth, 1989: 3). Two aspects of Freirean theory are relevant here. Firstly, the "banking model", where ideas and information are "put into" people's heads, rather like depositing money in a bank. Secondly, the "problem-posing one" where the learner is actively and influentially involved. The Primary School Curriculum of 1971 promoted the "problem-posing" model that Freire spoke about. The psychology underpinning the 1971 Curriculum is as valid today as it was in 1971 (Department of Education, 1971: 12-17). Indeed it could be said that the lack of flexibility on the part of individual teachers and schools in adopting and adapting the 1971 curriculum to meet children's needs could have contributed to some of the school failure and "drop-out" prevalent throughout the last three decades (see Halliday, 1996). McAllister Swap has this in view "failing to find a piece of themselves in school, failing to see how past experiences of learning are reflected in school...children may reject or ignore the new information they are receiving and continue to exclusively use their 'old' processing schemes" (McAllister Swap, 1990a: 11). However, in *Managing Change and Development*

*in Schools*, we are reminded of two fundamental polarities in curriculum. They are:

- the balance or imbalance between individual freedom and social control;
- the degree of emphasis on the child as a unique individual as distinct from an emphasis on the body of knowledge to be passed on (Elliot-Kemp and Elliot-Kemp, 1992: 66).

These polarities need to be off-set one against the other.

Roberts holds that "Rather than tinkering with the children's presenting culture, maybe we need to devote more effort to making teachers and curricula more responsive to working-class interests" (Roberts, 1980: 50). He holds that the majority of working-class parents have positive attitudes towards schooling and education and that "if teachers find these attitudes an obstacle rather than a base from which to build, these are grounds for inviting teachers to re-examine their ideas about what constitutes concern, interest, ambition and encouragement" (Ibid., see also Gray and Wilcox, 1995). Resnik tells us that "modifying schooling to better enable it to promote skills for learning outside school may simultaneously renew its academic value" (Resnik, 1987: 18). While flexibility and adaptation were key thoughts underpinning the 1971 Curriculum in Ireland these views were rarely defined.

It can be said that schools are expected to offer a broad curriculum suitable for the development of a range of intelligence, developing a strong self-image in their pupils and the capacity to work individually and as members of a team. According to Widlake "schools urgently need to consider ways and means of shedding their image as being inimical to styles and contents of learning other than the 'academic' or the purely functional (i.e. training youngsters to be 'followers' as opposed to 'leaders')" (Widlake, 1986: 119). Ericson and Elleth speak of the leadership role of the "student" as one of "responsibility" for their own learning but add



that this "does not eliminate the very real responsibilities shared by parents, educators, the state, and society at large" (Ericson and Elleth, 1990: 9).

This broad approach calls for a radical change on the part of:

- the school as a unit (see Lumby, 1999: 71-83, see also Preedy, Glatter and Levačić, 1997);
- the individual teacher and the individual child "since the face and voice of the teacher can confirm their domination or can reflect enabling possibilities" (Freire and Shor, 1987: 24, see also Pedersen, Faucher and Eaton, 1978: 29);
- the individual teacher and the individual parent "we are organised to share with each other what we know about our children's education and we need your help and that of the teachers to talk about educational issues" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991: 37, see also Topping and Wolfendale, 1985);
- the school as a unit and the families as a group (see Epstein, 1987: 6-9; Davies, 1991: 376-382 and Dowling and Osborne, 1994);
- the school and other agencies with an educational role in the community (see Avalos, 1992: 433);
- representatives of parents and teachers and local community involved in the decision making process: "The effect of what has come to be called the 'educative community' - that totality of experiences which the child assembles from home, environment, and peer-group - so forcefully dictates how or whether a child will respond to educational stimuli that teachers ignore it at their peril" (Midwinter, 1980: 204, see also Philip and Chetley, 1988).

Schools are called on to develop attitudes and behaviours that will lead to individual and team growth "where the staff is optimally secure, energised, motivated and able to meet their psychological, social and intellectual needs," (Comer, 1980: 69) and are "cohesive enough to be willing to buy some shared set of goals" (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991: 81, see also Caldwell and Spinks, 1988). Bryk and Driscoll in their study found that shared beliefs and values, collegiality of teachers, their taking on an extended role can actively help at-risk students to overcome impediments "to school membership and academic engagement" (Wehlage et al., 1989: 149-150). Studies have found that when teachers had a strong wish to de-

velop "schools as communities of support for students and teachers" their perceptions of classroom disorder were significantly lower, as was teacher absenteeism (Ibid.). A Californian study noted that pupils found school "neither discouraging nor motivating, or satisfying...Most struggled reluctantly...in a school system that has been accused of being discouraged with itself and of projecting low expectations from most of its students" (Wehlage et al., 1989: 12, see also Troyer and Younts, 1997). In similar observations in Boston, a researcher stated that she "encountered no consistent expectation among teachers...that all children could be successful in school" (McAllisterSwap, 1990b: 33, see also Short 1985). Testerman holds that "improving students' perceptions of the degree of concern that teachers feel for them would positively affect students' attitudes about school and increase the likelihood of their staying on to graduate" (Testerman, 1996: 364).

There have been demands for in-career development for teachers so that they may use their "expertise as managers of learning and arrangers of learning opportunities" (Widlake, 1986: 121). To learn about professional practice and "to develop as professional educators requires that we engage in the making of new forms, new relations and connections and by continually transforming what we know" (Beattie, 1995: 66 and Covey 1992). Success for all children it is argued, depends on attitudes and, in particular, on the possibilities within education. It calls for a "new professionalism among all those whose work takes them into the field" (Nisbet and Watt, 1984: 63). Similar sentiments are postulated by Widlake when he defines a professional as one with "capacity for systematic change...capacity to adapt and redefine their own expertise...an ability to convince others that their expertise is genuine, useful and relevant" (Widlake, 1986: 121 and Woodward and Beckman-Woodward, 1994). We can say that "teacher,

student and parent motivation is one of the single most important questions we face...a multi-faceted issue touching many dimensions of education" (Cross, 1990: 22).

For too long the role of education rested with schools. Parents have been traditionally viewed and dealt with as clients, "dependent on experts' opinions...passive in the receipt of services...apparently in need of redirection...peripheral to decision making...perceived as 'inadequate' and 'deficient'" (Wolfendale, 1983: 15). In addition the child and/or the family was seen as the object of education. An alternative position is that education is only valid when one works "with" and not "for", when individuals reach the "conviction as Subjects not as objects" (Freire, 1972: 43). Hence the advice of Wolfendale that "Education, in its formal sense, or learning, to use its widest sense, becomes, therefore, too important and vital a commodity to be left to schools" (Wolfendale, 1983: 14).

## **1.6 CHILDREN'S LEARNING**

Research has clearly revealed that parental involvement in their children's learning enhances their educational opportunities. The home has been identified as a primary learning environment which is facilitated through the attachment process. When children enter school they bring with them their "cultural mapping" and when family culture and/or social class differs from that of the school we have seen that "conflicts may arise for the children in their academic and social adjustment" (Delgado-Gaitan, and Allexsacht-Snyder, 1992: 79-80).

Clark studied ten black high school students and their families. His views are as follows:

Families that incorporated frequent dialogue between parents and children and were warm and supportive towards their children, yet set clear and consistent

limits, had students who were high achievers. The fact that these families were also single-parent families, of low socio-economic or educational levels, was not significant. The parents of successful students held common attitudes towards the importance of education (cited in Delgado-Gaitan, and Alexsacht-Snyder, 1992: 81).

However, working-class children can face obstacles en route to success as "few working-class children have parents and relatives capable of offering advice and information that middle class homes can furnish on how to manipulate the educational system" (Roberts, 1980: 48). The advantages for children, whose parents have had lengthy exposure to second and third-level education, are outlined by Lynch and are "conditional on 'knowing the system' better than others and maximising advantages accordingly...the wise in the pursuit of self-interest, (which is defined as natural in our society) try to maximise the benefits of their own knowledge. They are aware of the need to out perform others in a competitive situation" (Lynch, 1989: 33).

Working-class parents are just as likely as the middle classes to see education as a means of advancement and to value it for this reason but "the longer-term life-chances of working-class pupils have not improved commensurately because levels of attainment among the middle classes have also risen, keeping them as far ahead as ever" (Roberts, 1980: 52). There is little reason for parents' councils, dominated by the middle classes to upset patterns being reproduced in schools as their children are "the prime beneficiaries of the system" (Lynch, 1989: 134).

The way ahead would seem to lie in enhancing the ability of working-class communities, especially working-class homes, to support children educationally. The success of the middle class school lies in the fact that the language, the values and the aspirations in the catchment area are more appropriate for schooling, as presently defined, than in the working-class school. Schooling is presently domi-

nated by middle class values and controlled by middle and upper class decision-makers. "A solution would entail alterations on both sides in making schooling more apposite for the sub culture in question and in drawing parents more readily into the actual educational process" (Midwinter, 1980: 204). "Close communication between schools and their communities establishes shared goals and thus builds public support for and commitment to the schools and their educational objectives" (Cattermole and Robinson, 1985: 48).

Creative teaching and student motivation are two basic elements of the learning process. They are not independent factors which students and teachers bring to the educational process. As Seeley would claim they are "the products of a relationship - a productive learning relationship between students and teachers and between home and school" (Seeley, 1981: 11). He claims that the voice of those in education must be heard "in classrooms and schools, in parent-teacher conferences and in one-on-one discussion between teachers and students" (Ibid., 76). A different point of view is postulated by middle class mothers in the *Journal of Curriculum Studies*: "school experience should be academic and can't deal with social problems...teachers are wasting their time asking children what they think about things rather than giving them information" (Brantlinger and Majd-Jabbari, 1998: 442-443). Block advocates a partnership which is willing "to give more choice to the people we choose to serve. Not total control just something more equal" (Block, 1993: 32).

Atkin, Bastiani, and Goode express anxiety at the unproved claims made by teachers of parental attitudes "uninterested parents" those who "want to take over" and the view that "you never see the parents that you really want to see" (Atkin et al., 1988: 14). A further cause for concern was the fact that parents as a valuable

resource were "seldom even recognised by schools and teachers, let alone productively tapped" (Ibid., 15). With the foregoing in mind it is no wonder that Wolfendale's view of schools is that they "are an insufficient provider of what only the community in toto should be offering towards the fullest development and educational opportunity of every child...and cannot contribute maximally...without recourse to children's caretakers and without the incorporation of the wider community network" (Wolfendale, 1983: 69).

Wolfendale encapsulates much modern thought in this quotation. The physical, mental, moral, social, cultural and religious development of the young person cannot be achieved in isolation. The interrelatedness of home, community, and school is vital to the all round development of the young person. In addition neither parents, teachers, nor community agents can achieve with the young person alone. The literature refers to this as "contextual" child development. Wolfendale's quotation serves as a summary statement on home-community-school based learning and as a lead-in to partnership.

### **1.7 THE ISSUE OF PARTNERSHIP**

An important issue in the contemporary world which is central to this study is partnership. As it is an emerging concept the language is not yet fixed. In particular the notion of equality varies in authors. Thus we can speak of the need of equality of opportunity for pupils (Drudy and Lynch, 1993: 31-35). There is also, of course, inequality that may arise from sociological and psychological opportunities leading to unequal achievement (Ibid., 147-157). It may not always be valuable to speak about equality in the context of the contribution of the various parties to the educational enterprise. It is another matter to try and use equality around the different contributions of individuals and groups. Equality does not

imply that people come from a position of equal resource or power rather "it implies that a relationship has been formed on a basis that recognises that each has an equally important contribution to make to the whole, contributions which will vary in nature, are compatible and each of which is unique" (Healy, 1992: 13). One might find wider agreement when partnership is described in terms of a definition of roles together with an understanding of the inherent rights and responsibilities that accompany those roles.

The salient characteristics of partnership are vision, "goal orientation, solidarity, communication, empowerment and transformation" (Anglin-Lawlor, 1994). These elements working in sequence or in tandem can initiate change and growth leading to an empowerment of groups and communities. This in turn facilitates transformation which is the central tenet of partnership. Partnership incorporates the concept of vision. Vision can be compared to the guiding star of a scheme for the school community, the wider community or of an organisation. Vision is essential to keep a group on target. A vision is as real as the commitment of the group is to actualising it. The greater the vision the more inevitable it is that it will never be attained. This leads to defining steps within a time frame where members are involved in the debate, exploring possibilities together, agreeing the ground rules and planning together, where it is obvious that there is "common effort towards common goals. Partners may help one another in general or specific ways, but none is ever a client, because the relationship is mutual. Partners share an enterprise...[partners] may be strikingly different, each contributing to the common enterprise particular talents, experiences, and perspectives" (Seeley, 1981: 65).

We now examine the concepts of partnership, power, authority and patriarchy, and empowerment. Many writers turn to Weber when considering the areas of power and authority. For Weber, *power* lay in the ability to get things done by enforced sanctions. *Authority* was actually getting things done because one's orders were viewed by others as justified or legitimate. Weber claimed that there were three types of authority:

- traditional authority based on the premise that the ruler had an inbuilt right to rule;
- charismatic authority which emanated from the belief that the ruler had innate and unique gifts;
- legal-rational authority based on formal written rules and enforced by law.

Weber held that bureaucracy corresponded to the legal-rational type of authority which focused on hierarchy, rules and rigid procedures (Weber, 1947).

For Bentley there are three types of power, namely, real power, role power and reflected power (Bentley, 1996: 87-88). When acting out of real power "employees will be using their power in ways that can materially influence organizational success" (Johnson and Redmond, 1998: 23). According to Block partnership means "to be connected to another in a way that the power between us is roughly balanced" (Block, 1993: 28). He prefers the concept of "stewardship" which is the "willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service, rather than in control" (Ibid., xx). In the 1990s, as we shall see in 4.1 and 5.2, the emphasis is on developing potential and using the innovative resources of all members within the organisation and indeed within the family.

Whitehead and Eaton-Whitehead, believed that genuine authority expands life and makes power more abundant. They saw parents as "our first authority figures.



Good parents encourage their children's first steps and support their later leaps. They learn to correct without stunting...inviting the child into adulthood" (Whitehead and Eaton-Whitehead, 1991: 27). Partnership does not do away with hierarchy because "People at higher levels do have specialized responsibility, but it is not so much for control as it is for clarity...of requirements...of value-added ways of attending to a specific market" (Block, 1993: 32).

Partnership is brought about by a consistent commitment to the demanding and painful work of human relating. Partnership invites people to share power and to welcome mutual vulnerability.

It implies the willingness to listen without judging: the ability to say clearly and honestly what one thinks, feels and believes; the capacity to experience compassion; and a finely tuned awareness of one's behavioral style and inner motivation. It requires the courage to name conflicts and tensions before they become divisions, and a desire to maintain interpersonal bonds that surpasses the desire to maintain control (Ferder and Heagle, 1989: 166).

A long-term approach is required if this level of understanding and participation is to be achieved. Not only is time required to achieve participation but genuine implementation also takes time.

Patriarchy is a belief system that people in leadership make decisions about policy, strategy and implementation, while people at the middle and the bottom exist to execute and implement. Often we operate this way because we are unsure of alternatives (Block, 1993: 23-32). Partnership offers an option. Partnership condemns patriarchy and its practices. It is held that patriarchy "is a belief system first and foremost, shared to some extent by us all" (Block, 1993: 23). Furthermore, Block holds that the "fundamental belief" of patriarchy is to give attention to "maintaining control, consistency, and predictability" within organisations (Ibid.). This process, he holds, "may appear to be a common sense and logical

approach to governance" but from another angle the demands of patriarchy for control, consistency, and predictability "become its own obstacle" (Ibid., 25).

It is important to be aware of the possible significance, conscious and unconscious of gender differentiation (Wrigley, 1992). One of the primary tasks of early childhood is the development of gender identity. The personal meaning of gender identity evolves long past early childhood. Gradually children make use of society's messages about being male and female and come to a sense of ownership of his or her gender. Jung believed that women and men were designed to complement one another. He held that feminine "traits" revolved around a woman's instinct to seek belonging and relating while the masculine ones described man's innate drive towards autonomy (Hall and Lindzey, 1957 and Jung, 1959). Contemporary psychology has brought this theory of Jung under increasing scrutiny.

Drudy and Uí Chatháin claim that "Feminist research sees gender as a basic organising principle that profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives" (Drudy and Uí Chatháin, 1999: 3). A theory "may be defined as feminist if it can be used to challenge, counteract or change a status quo that disadvantages or devalues women" (Ibid.). O'Donnell cites "a number of factors usually found in feminist thinking as: women's experience of patriarchy; lack of equality; discrimination" (O'Donnell, 1996: 173). He holds that there is a division about the tactics to be employed for securing the aims of feminism and poses the question "should I pursue human rights by insisting on the same humanity that women and men share together, or should it emphasise the difference arising from gender and thus focus on women's rights?" (Ibid.).

Within the HSCL scheme 20.0 per cent of the coordinators at primary level are male with 25.0 per cent at post-primary level. This reflects the male/female proportion in the primary teaching profession. The parents who frequent the schools and HSCL activities are largely female. This may account for the fact that proportionally speaking post-primary males do not apply for the role of HSCL coordinator. In *Where Have all the Fathers Gone?* the Bernard van Leer Foundation point to the fact that in marginalised communities women tend to hold on to the nurturing role as so much else in life has been taken from them (BvLF, 1992: 1-24). "Maybe they fear that men will try to dominate in the one arena in which females have firm control" (Ibid., 11).

In her research on *Gender Differences in Parent Involvement in Schooling*, Lareau point out that "social class provided parents with unequal resources to assist their children in schooling" and that working-class families have a "pattern of separation between home and school" (Lareau, 1992: 207-208). In addition, she repeatedly stated that "the routine activities of supervising schooling overwhelmingly fell to mothers" in working-class families (Ibid., 208). This was also the case in middle class areas with fathers often citing the "demands of their careers" (Ibid.).

The style of leadership, management and involvement (particularly in relation to the partnership process) in the HSCL scheme may appeal more to women than to men. Lareau points out from her research that when fathers became involved they often made "important decisions and often took an assertive and controlling role in their interactions with female teachers" rather than a partnership approach (Ibid.). The aim of the HSCL scheme regarding male/female interaction with pupils is one of partnership. The aim of the Bernard van Leer Foundation is to raise

the status of care for children and they define it as "a shared responsibility of all members of the community whether they work inside or outside the home" (BvLF, 1992: 13).

Other angles on the relationship between partners can be noted from the works of Hirshman, Block, and Seeley. Hirshman's book *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* addresses only the issues of institutional malfunction and the human response of withdrawal. Seeley adapts the "concepts of voice and loyalty" and changes the term "exit" to "choice" to accommodate both positive and negative responses (Seeley, 1981: 67). If used from a partnership stand point, Seeley's use of "voice" which would enable parents to register disagreement with policies and practice and his use of "choice" which would enable them to change to other institutions, would lead to empowerment of individuals and groups. For him "loyalty" is inherent in voice and choice. "The job of fitting voice, choice and loyalty into a sound policy for educational partnerships must be accomplished through public policy determined by citizens, legislators, school board members, community leaders and educators...shifting the policy focus in education from bureaucratic 'service delivery' to partnership" (Seeley, 1981: 102-103).

Block holds that each person is responsible at every level for defining vision and values in the partnership situation "Purpose gets defined through dialogue...with each person having to make a declaration...Each has a voice in discussing what the institution will become" (Block, 1993: 29). For him choice is enshrined in the right to say no. "The notion that if you stand up you will get shot undermines partnership. Partnership does not mean that you always get what you want. It means that you may lose your argument but you never lose your voice" (Ibid., 30). Hirshman's and Seeley's "loyalty" is in evidence in Block's statement

"absolute honesty is essential for partnership" (Ibid.). In a partnership situation people should feel less vulnerable so dishonesty is "an act of betrayal" (Ibid., 31). Hirshman's "exit" would not hold in Block's theory that "partnership maintains contact" (Block, 1993: 31).

Joint accountability is another corner-stone of a partnership model. The outcomes and quality of co-operation of the institution are each person's responsibility "the price of that freedom (partnership) is to take personal accountability for the success and failure of our unit and our community" (Ibid.). This level of individual and corporate responsibility is outlined by Lombardi, the legendary football coach, when Iacocca asked him about "his formula for success". Responding, Lombardi said "you have to start by teaching the fundamentals" to the players. Then you ask them "to keep in line" because the discipline of team spirit is vital. Playing as a team demands that members "care for one another" and "love each other". Every time a football player goes out to play "he's got to play from the ground up - from the soles of his feet right to his head. Every inch of him has to play". Head and heart must play in tandem, Lombardi says and "if you're lucky enough to find a guy with a lot of head and a lot of heart, he's never going to come off the field second" (Iacocca, 1985: 56-57). Iacocca believes that some capable people fail to advance because "they don't work well with their colleagues" (Ibid., 57).

Common interest articulated and agreed, planning together, an equal share in decision-making processes and interdependence are all part of a solidarity that is inherent in partnership and "partnership is a central notion of solidarity" (Crowley and Watt, 1992: 97). Ruane states that "solidarity is about partnership. The partners share a common and specific vision...From this basis flows a practice which

is, in essence, the pursuit of common interests. Solidarity is about involvement in common struggle" (Ruane, 1992: 38). This notion of uniting in struggle is parallel to the Freirean notion of understanding the oppressed. "Solidarity requires that one enters into the situation of those with whom one is identifying; it is a radical posture" (Freire, 1972: 26).

### **Partnership and Empowerment**

It can be said that "people want to make a difference" yet employers and management are often unable to take advantage "of the human creativity and initiative" that is available (Scott and Jaffe, 1991: 14). Empowerment is a process of enabling people to acquire "skills, knowledge and confidence" to make "responsible choices and to carry them out in an interdependent fashion" (Paz, 1990: 17). Block would hold that the empowered person is the one who serves, the one who chooses service over self-interest and that the recipients of our service are the ones we become accountable to (Block, 1993: 41-51). We can say that real power, "empowerment", is service.

Empowerment of the local community is a strong theme running through much literature today and through all of the Bernard van Leer publications (see 1.8.9, The Bernard van Leer Foundation). Its development is in reaction to authoritarian attitudes, or hand-outs, which can ease the distress of people but without changing the causes of deprivation or helping people to come to full dignity or humanity. Salach, a native of Morasha, set about change and development in her own community by

beginning with the family unit and ending with the entire community...through a process of working and learning...so that, when prepared and ready, they will be able to provide their own services without dependence on outside assistance...This encourages a process of growth and development of local leadership that can empower the entire community (Salach, 1993: 10-20).

The main thrust of the Bernard van Leer Foundation (BvLF) as we shall see is its focus on the child. This enables their educational theorists to make important contributions to the interrelation of the professional teacher and the parent. Thus in the study the *Parent as Prime Educator*, we note that the role of the professional is not to teach the parents but to "widen their common meeting ground" and in particular to develop a teaching-learning situation so as "to enable the validation of the parents' knowledge and self-confidence" (BvLF, 1986: 14-15). Relating to the development of para-professionals "the jewels in the crown" who "empower themselves" and "their communities" (Paz, 1990: 2) Paz says that their involvement transfers them from "being passive and dependent recipients of assistance...to becoming active members of the community...able to take pride in themselves" (Ibid., 53). Salach expresses the same view-point about empowerment of local people when she says that "due to their ability to create direct ties with parents and children in the community, they personified the process of replacing apathy and dependency with a responsible and active approach...these women were also the harbingers of future change in the community" (Salach, 1993: 23).

Empowerment, according to Freire, releases a new power in the individual to act upon and to transform the world. This power comes through "a new awareness of self, has a new sense of dignity, and is stirred by a new hope" (Freire, 1972: 12). Freire's theory of working "with" and not "for" finds further expression in a transformation of life which is a sequence of real generosity and "lies in striving so that those hands - whether of individuals or entire peoples - need to be extended less and less in supplication...they become hands which work and, by working transform the world" (Ibid., 21-22). Freire points out that when the op-

pressors cease to interfere even in the name of "false generosity" and allow the oppressed to achieve transformation, oppressors and oppressed become part of "the process of permanent liberation" (Ibid., 31). Pignatelli put it succinctly at a conference in Dublin in 1992 where he claimed that "partnership can be defined as identifying, releasing and sharing our own gifts and the gifts of others, not only gifts of personality but gifts of experience as well" (Pignatelli, 1992, see also Short, Greer and Melvin, 1994: 38-58).

Whether partnership is a desired and feasible end-state, an attainable aspiration or whether it turns out to be unrealistic, a responsibility still lies on all educators "to become more responsive to the needs, wishes and experience of parents and children...the development of an honest partnership that recognizes important differences as well as shared concerns" (Bastiani, 1988: xvii). As we have noted the call of partnership is for personal transformation which would hopefully lead to the recognition of strengths and concerns of individuals and to genuine interdependence. Structural transformation will be demanded in order to bring roles and plans into greater congruence with values. This will demand, in the words of Block, "a choice for service, with partnership and empowerment as basic governance strategies" (Block, 1993: 49).

### **1.8 PARENTS AND EDUCATION IN SELECTED EUROPEAN UNION AND NON-EU COUNTRIES**

When we come to look at the actual situation and educational practice it is easy to state generalities. Just as Americans are all said to be in favour of "motherhood and apple pie" so all educationalists will see possible roles for parents, teachers and pupils. However, the concrete expression of values varies from place to place. Passing over quickly the obvious generalisations, one can indicate some matters of particular interest mainly in the countries of the European Union (EU).





It will be helpful to continue our examination of the literature from two additional perspectives. Some authors are detailed about facts, organisations and structures, and may or may not give evaluation. Other authors, whilst not divorced from facts, are more interested in the theoretical grounding and principles. In this section we shall give some examples of places, apart from Ireland and Scotland, where there are helpful indications of what is being done. These will include a number of EU countries, with special emphasis on some projects in Britain. Some projects in Trinidad and Tobago, Israel, and the USA are also indicated. The rationale for selecting Coventry, Nottingham, Northamptonshire, Reading, Hampshire, Trinidad and Tobago, Israel, and USA for more detailed review is that there are parallels with the HSCL scheme in Ireland. With these prefatory remarks we can look at a number of models which include the following elements:

- common general principles;
- some literature giving detailed accounts of what has been attempted;
- developments in various parts of the world.

### **1.8.1 BELGIUM**

In all EU countries the responsibility to educate the child rests with parents. Belgium allows parents free choice of schools and "schools have to adapt to all comers" (Sallis, 1988: 90). Belgium has three official languages: Flemish, French and German. Each community has separate education systems, but they are similar to one another. In all three communities schools are administered in four different ways:

- financed and run directly by the community;
- run by provinces and subsidised by the community;

- run by communes and subsidised by the community;
- as "free schools" (Catholic private schools) subsidised by the community.

Parent associations are encouraged and national parents' organisations are subsidised. With some differences in regulations between the communities, each state-run or state-subsidised school has to have an advisory committee on which parents and other interested parties are represented. For community schools in the French community and all state-run or subsidised schools in the Flemish, this is a participation council, on which parents are represented alongside teachers, and other staff, pupils, unions and members of local authorities. Participation councils have a right to be consulted, and to receive relevant information, on a wide range of teaching and administrative matters (Mackinnon, Newbould, Zeldin and Hales, 1997: 31, see also Bogdanowicz, 1994: 4 Section 3). In Belgium, there is a national integrated service from the psychological, medical and sociological fields and their work is increasingly concerned with relations between parents and teachers. The Flemish Ministry is urging greater contact between home and school as are Teachers' Centres.

### **1.8.2 SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES**

Denmark has been to the fore in promoting practical participation in education. In Denmark there are nine years of compulsory education but parents may educate their children at home. Parents may choose between a state school and an approved independent alternative. They may also choose which subject options their children study. Since 1970 Danish parents have had a legal right to be represented on the school board. They are the only voting members of school boards, which are established by law in all public sector schools, and their national organisation is well respected. The Danish model is unusual in that it has been

"praised by visitors from the educational left and right alike" (Sallis, 1988: 88). Parental influence seems to exist without noticeable stress on teachers so "perhaps parent influence is easier to live with within a framework of mutual responsibility for the child in a clearly defined partnership" (Ibid., 88-89). Sallis suggests that we look beyond the relationship between school and family for the success of the Danish system:

to the values conveyed by Government policies as a whole; to a society much less class-conscious than ours; to the pay and status of teachers; and the character of the independent schools, which seem to have an 'alternative' rather than an elitist flavour and are often set up by parents. Perhaps because parents have influence in schools they are less obsessive about choice or rather see choice as just a part of a system which is basically designed to meet their needs and in which they are participants (Ibid., 88).

Parent responsibilities are emphasised just as much as their rights are. Recently parents' councils were required to be established by law in all educational institutions. A new *Basic School Law* has come into effect recently which recommends across-subject teaching and parents may suggest teaching materials from their own knowledge and experience. This law increases the requirement for teachers and parents "to cooperate about 'improving' the acquisition of knowledge" (Ravn, 1994: 69). Ravn speaks of the fact that Norwegian parents are also formally represented "at a central level on a national board, whose members are appointed by the Government" (Ibid., 70). A new law is being prepared to "assist both parents and teachers to be better informed and involved in school activities" (Ibid.). In Finland there is relatively little experience of parents having a formal role in schooling but there is a council in each school "to which parents are appointed by local municipality employees" (Ibid.). In Sweden and Iceland parents have a legalised right to have two days a year, with salary paid, to attend their children's school. In a national statement on increasing the role of parents it was recom-

mended that parents should be "considered a resource" (Ibid.). In Iceland efforts are being made to formalise parent-teacher partnership at present.

### **1.8.3 FRANCE**

France has a "politically vocal Catholic education lobby", outside the Government system but with "heavy direct subsidy" (Sallis, 1988: 91). It also has "a strong secularist parents' lobby" and "powerful central determination of the curriculum" (Ibid.). It is recognised nationally that parents are "a political force of some importance" (Ibid., 92). The parent voice "remains a powerful one in French politics" (Ibid., 93). Parents as a group "are represented on the administrative councils of schools at all levels" (Mackinnon et al., 1997: 83). Parents of individual children "have extensive rights" to be informed regarding the progress of their children and the right to appeal "against decisions with which they disagree" (Ibid.).

There is "a powerful inspectorate" enforcing the curriculum, and the state has "the monopoly of organization of examinations at all levels" (Macbeth, 1984: 25 and Mackinnon et al., 1997: 83). Much of the initiative with regard to home school links is achieved at local level. Some steps have been taken to explain the curriculum and education system to parents through the Ministry of Education. Booklets have been issued to explain the stages of public schooling and to assist parents with option choices.

### **1.8.4 ITALY**

The structures of school democracy were formed in Italy, as they were in most other countries, following the student up-risings of 1968-69. The outcome according to Sallis "was a system of class, school district, provincial and national councils to make decisions on education policy" (Sallis, 1988: 89). Professionals

were represented at all levels, with parent and student participation at all but national level. About half a million Italian families belong to parents' organisations which operate without Government subsidy. The Italian education system is "substantially regulated by central decree and much of the curriculum is nationally determined" (Macbeth, 1984: 28). In addition the "programmes of study" laid down by the Ministry of Education concentrate "on school learning and not on that part played by parents in the education of their children" (Scaparro 1994: 27). Scaparro also holds that the outcome from educational laws in the past twenty years has been disappointing.

Legislation "failed to promote active educational partnership between parents and schools" (Ibid., 26). The programmes of study laid down by the Ministry concentrate on school learning and not on the part played by parents in the education of their children. Laws relating to "progress in school" did not address the question of the relationship between "in-family learning and in-school learning" (Ibid., 27). Established rules have not recognised "partnership and communication between parents and teachers" and so "waste" educational "potentialities" (Ibid.). However, "an important and constructive role is played by Italian parents' associations" (Ibid., 28). Scaparro holds that schools must build on the educational process which has "already been started in the home" (Ibid., 29).

### **1.8.5 THE GERMANIC COUNTRIES**

Over most of Germany participatory councils operate. The state is "the guardian of the quality of schools" but the Länder are the "legally sovereign providers" (Sallis, 1988: 90). Structures for participation were in evidence in 1919 when there was a strong parents' movement and in the 1920s they had their own newspaper. Most development took place in the late 1960s. By the beginning of the

1970s all the Länder had "parent representation at class and school levels and various types of parent councils were emerging" (Macbeth, 1984: 26). To the present day all observers comment on "the excellent quality of information provided for parents" (Ibid.). According to Macbeth parental responsibility for the individual child remains the starting point and there is much emphasis on co-operation. The following extracts from provincial laws illustrate the emphasis. In Baden-Württemberg "parents have the right and duty to co-operate in education in the schools". In Bavaria "the common educational task which confronts school and parents requires co-operation carried out in mutual trust". In Bremen "the parents whose child attends a public school are required to co-operate with the teachers". In the Rheinland Palatinate "parents have the right and the duty to co-operate with the school in the education of their children". In Schleswig-Holstein "teachers, parents and pupils must co-operate" (Macbeth, 1984: 26-27).

The German approach to relations between home and school is characterised by legislation. Legislation is based on a recognition of the parents' fundamental duty, and on the awareness of the outcomes of research regarding the impact of the home on learning and on the growing emphasis on collaboration in relation to policy making and curriculum planning (Ibid., 27). Krumm points out that the 'Germanic' countries of Austria, Germany and Switzerland "tended to rate more highly than average the qualities of thrift, stamina and self-assertion...[over] religiousness, modesty and enjoyment of the arts" (Krumm, 1994: 15). According to a report by the European Population Conference in Geneva in 1933 the "Family" is regarded as the "most important value" in many European countries, "the three German speaking countries included" (Ibid., 19). However, other values are highly sought after "a satisfactory job and the desire to experience enjoyable lei-

sure pursuits" (Ibid.). It is also a feature of the Germanic countries that they "generally support their children more fervently than any professional teacher could do" (Ibid., 22

#### **1.8.6 NETHERLANDS**

Sixty-five per cent of Dutch children attend independent but state funded primary schools and thirty-five per cent attend public schools. Public schools must respect the views of parents. Participation councils were set up on a legal basis in 1982, representing parents and teachers. Since 1985 "parents can assist with daily instruction" (Smit and van Esch, 1994: 59). In the Netherlands parents can establish their own schools with one hundred per cent state finance. Legally, school boards are responsible for all school activities. In many schools a division of tasks has developed in which the school board takes care of buildings, financial matters and staff appointments with parents taking on executive responsibility.

Parents of the participation councils can influence board decisions. The parents' council "provides parents with the possibility to exchange views about child rearing and education and to make suggestions to the school management, the participation council and the school board" (Ibid., 60). Not all parents, according to Smit and van Esch, are given the opportunity to contribute to policy making. It can happen that "non-religious or Islamic parents are regarded as providers of children without being allowed to have a seat on the board of a denominational school, the participation council and the parents' council because they are not prepared to or are unable to commit themselves to the school's denominational basis" (Ibid., 61).

Parents who can become involved are anxious to do so. "Many parents consider schooling to be too important to leave to professionals only" (Ibid.). Here

we have a resonance of Wolfendale (1983:14) as quoted at the end of 1.5. Sixty per cent of teachers involve parental assistance in carrying out daily instructions. This can mean that parents are involved in "policy-making and executive duties, in addition to their practical assistance" (Smit and van Esch, 1994: 62). Teachers resent parental interference as "this is not conducive to students' learning performance" and in these circumstances parents "are faced with closed doors" (Ibid.).

The National Government provides national parent organisations with finance to promote training courses for parents who wish to become active in education. The purpose of such training is "to raise awareness of parents regarding their own role in education, to promote self-confidence, and to catch up on information, knowledge and skills" (Ibid., 66). Smit and van Esch believe that "the school really belong[s] to the parents" (Ibid.). They contribute to the belief that information on the role of parents in education should be readily available to parents because "parent participation will improve the relationship between the teacher and participating pupil, it will strengthen parental involvement in schooling and it will promote education-supporting behaviour of the parents at home" (Ibid.). Smit and van Esch concluded that the "formal school system should leave more room for parents to substantiate their responsibilities for their children" (Ibid., 67). Though there are some indications of experiments on different structures regarding parents in the Netherlands it is not possible to generalise. The author was assured by some Dutch teachers that the situation in Ireland is more developed than many places in the Netherlands.

### **1.8.7 PORTUGAL AND SPAIN**

The emergence of democratic political systems in Portugal in 1974 and Spain in 1978 brought fundamental changes in the field of education. Local authorities



gained power and became more responsible for schools. This initiated the basis for the participation of parents in the life of the school. The economic difficulties of Spain and Portugal have led to competition in the job market. According to Martinez, Marques, and Souta this situation has influenced parents "to become more interested and worried about their children's formal education than some years ago and so are aware of how schools are preparing their children for social and economic life" (Martinez, Marques, and Souta 1994: 45). The shifting value system has confused parents in Spain and Portugal and "this is one of the main reasons why they delegate their responsibilities to schools" (Ibid., 46). Teachers expect parents to share the responsibility with them.

Parent involvement in schools had been legislated for in Spain since 1970, and in Portugal since 1977. According to this law parents have the right and obligation to co-operate in primary schools in order "to increase the quality of children's education" (Ibid.). Parents have the right to set up Parents' Associations. Theory provides the opportunity for parents to become involved yet "their impact has been slight" (Ibid.). Relationships between parents and teachers is often "tense and disagreeable" (Ibid.). In 1985, it was established for the first time, that "the policy of each school must be regulated democratically by the School Council composed of principal, studies organiser, parents, teachers and students" (Ibid.). The responsibility of the School Council included the management of resources and the assessment of education processes.

In 1990, a new law, the Organic Law for the Organisation of the Education System aimed to "reorganise the structure and content of the educational system, so that they may become more suitable to the new reality of Spain" (Ibid.). The law sought to develop partnership between parents, school staffs and policy mak-

ers. In 1986, the Portuguese Parliament approved the Education Act which provided guidelines for family involvement in schools. For five years (1988-1993) Marques co-ordinated research projects in Portugal which show the correlation between "schools reaching out" and the "positive effects on pupils' achievement" (Ibid., 51). Epstein's typology guided the intervention encompassing six types of home-school partnerships:

- school help for families;
- school-home communication;
- family help for schools;
- involvement in learning activities at home;
- involvement in governance, decision-making and advocacy;
- collaboration and exchange with the community (Epstein, 1987a).

Marques conducted surveys on parental involvement and concluded that progress in this area was due to two factors "first, changes in the educational policy, with school legislation being approved which fosters parents' participation in the school's decision-making and secondly, a new emphasis on in-service teacher education which has started to stress school-family partnership issues" (Martinez, Marques and Souta, 52).

The partnership practices which have operated in the schools for the past four years included individual meetings with parents, general or group meetings for parents, participation in decision-making and finally family involvement in supporting the school. School-home communication is currently the most common type of practice in Spain and Portugal. Spanish and Portuguese school legislation "compels teachers to be available for parents once a week and to hold a general meeting with them every term" (Ibid., 53). Participation in decision-making may stem from the fact that parents are entitled to be part of the school council and the pedagogical board and teacher education stresses the importance of parents in decision-making. Collaboration and exchange with the community was almost ab-

sent in the survey. Only "2.5 per cent of parents reported that they knew about these types of practices" (Ibid.). Involvement in learning activities in the home was "almost non-existent from the fifth grade on" (Ibid.). Martinez et al. believe that two kinds of strategies should be developed:

informative and consultative actions...that influence parent-teacher relationships, parent-child relationships, learning processes and school achievement...[and] programmes in schools to increase parents' involvement. Through formal and informal activities performed at school, these programmes would allow parents to understand better the educative reality of the schools and feel they belong to them (Ibid., 54).

As part of the on-going evaluation of parental involvement in Spain and Portugal three major questions emerge:

Does the planned action help improve pupils' achievement?

Does the action help strengthen family involvement in school life and education of the children?

What conditions are required in order to make it possible to guarantee and extend good programmes for school-family partnerships? (Ibid., 57).

These are three very focused questions and relevant to the "whole development" of young people. They could valuably be asked in any country.

### **1.8.8 UNITED KINGDOM**

In the United Kingdom the beginning of the parents contemporary role in education can be dated from the time of the Plowden Report in 1969. Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) noted in 1984 that schools called on parents to join forces "in eradicating undesirable behaviour or attitudes which adversely affected work" (Widlake, 1986: 16).

Around the same time Widlake recognised that schools had moved from the "compensatory model" which saw the child as "deficit" to the "communications model" which emphasised relationships between home and school. He held that the level of parental involvement which would make a difference to disadvantaged pupils was the "participatory model" (Ibid.). In this model parents are

viewed "as people exercising some control over their own lives, with more than marginal responsibility for the development and education of their children" (Ibid.). Another element "which has led to some reconsideration of the educational contribution of parents in the United Kingdom has been the development of and publication of national curricula" (Macbeth and Ravn, 1994: 84-85). The curriculum in England is authorised by law and is binding in all state schools. In Scotland the curriculum is not based in legislation but is part of a consultative process. However, the Scottish Office Education Department, 1994 (SOED) "recommends, through guidelines that primary education be based on a number of broad curricular areas, set in an appropriate balance" (EU, 1995: 410).

We will now look at practices in parent-teacher collaboration in Coventry, Nottingham, Northamptonshire, Reading and Hampshire. All these areas serve populations of pupils in disadvantaged communities. Home-school relationships were important to all, some of the experiences placed much emphasis on the community, a multi-disciplinary team was used in Northamptonshire and listening to parents and the identification of needs was a priority. In the words of Widlake these types of activities would be termed "participatory" (Widlake, 1986: 16).

#### **1.8.8.1 COVENTRY**

Coventry was chosen for close examination because of the similarities between Coventry, as an area, and the designated areas of disadvantage in Ireland within which the HSCL scheme is carried out. There are also similarities in work practices. The Coventry Community Education Project (CEP) originated in 1971 as part of the national (Home Office) Community Development Project (CDP) which was established in 1966 to revive communities in disadvantaged areas. Coventry "has sustained this innovation. It has given community education a permanent

place within its Education Service" (Widlake, 1986: 55). CDP focused on the Hillfields area "because it was thought to contain an abnormal share of families with personal or psychological handicaps or deviant patterns of behaviour" (Widlake and Macleod, 1984: 1). According to Widlake and Macleod "local people disagreed strongly with local agencies about the nature of their needs and aspirations...residents saw the problem as their powerlessness to influence the decisions which affected their lives, their homes, and their areas in the directions they wanted" (Ibid.).

Initially CEP operated as a small team from a base in an infant school "in the heart of the city's multi-ethnic and disadvantaged area" (Widlake, 1986: 55). Its work incorporated twelve primary schools, a nursery centre, and one community school. Additional support was provided for teachers, pupils and parents by

developing a programme in schools designed to encourage home-school and community-school links... developing in-service training for teachers... supporting teachers in their first year from college, developing an adult programme seeking to respond to community needs...establishing a home tutoring scheme for mothers, assisting with the extension of pre-school provision (Ibid., 56).

In 1975, four additional areas of the city were included "on the basis of the degree of disadvantage suffered by the pupils" (Ibid.). While community education strategies differed in each area "all regarded home-school relationships as a priority" (Ibid.). In the area of home-school, strategies and supporting materials have been developed which have "widened, deepened and informalised parental involvement...Parents are being accepted as genuine partners in the educational process" (Ibid.).

Pre-school initiatives include the development of mother and toddler groups, home visiting strategies, the dissemination of information booklets, toy libraries and clubs, mobile displays of toys and materials and offer strong encouragement

of play groups run by local mothers. The Bernard van Leer Foundation has also funded initiatives in this area of pre-school development in Coventry.

Adult education provision ranges from "informal beginnings" to attending classes for 'O' and 'A' level examinations (Widlake and Macleod, 1984: 4). In relation to curriculum the local community has been used "as a resource for learning...Particular interest has been centred on the teaching of reading skills" (Ibid., 5). Home-tutoring services are operating and there is a variety of afternoon and evening activities for women. Other activities of CEP include "the provision of in-service training for teachers, the publication of regular communication links with schools... and holiday play-time schemes engaging the practical support of students attending Lanchester Polytechnic and Warwick University" (Widlake, 1986: 58).

As a consequence of deliberate policy formulation over a twelve year period in Coventry, "most primary schools take the presence of parents for granted and they are included in many activities" (Widlake and Macleod, 1984: 48). It is to be noted that in parts of the city children have been "socialised into a school system where there are few barriers between the home and the school" (Ibid.). Observations by the researchers include "highly effective organisation" in the primary schools using "varied and flexible methods" within an overall framework of community education (Ibid.). Additional resources and the support of CEP "is associated with good results in reading, writing and oral language skills, with lively and adventurous curricula and with an unusual degree of parental participation" (Ibid.). These schools Widlake says

revealed high levels of achievement in oral and written language and in reading comprehension...some levels of achievement in Coventry were significantly better than the norms provided for 'middle class' children...Good quality written work was found at eight, nine and ten years. Among the ten year

olds more than ninety percent would write 'legibly', 'fluently' and accurately' (Widlake, 1986: 61).

In Coventry a "clear linear relationship was found between the amount of parental support for their children's reading and the reading scores obtained" (Widlake and Macleod, 1984: 7). This is a very encouraging fact, yet it does not "establish the causes of good results" (Ibid.). However, a strong lead in parental involvement has been given by the schools in Coventry where in a follow-up study in three of the same schools "there was a significant trend associating higher reading scores with greater support from parents. The results certainly scotch the idea that allowing parents free access to schools diminishes educational attainment. On the contrary, schools that have followed such policies have obtained higher scores than the national norm, and in the basic subjects too" (Widlake, 1986: 62).

#### **1.8.8.2 NOTTINGHAM**

What has been called in British educational circles the "Nottingham Style" promotes practices in home-school partnership which reflect practices here in Ireland. It also promotes the interlink of policy and practice. Atkin, Bastiani and Goode had worked in the area of home-school links with teachers in Nottingham during the eighties and hence the title "Nottingham Style". Some of the elements in this "Nottingham Style" approach to home-school relations are the need to develop thinking and practice together, home-school relations as a responsibility for all schools, opportunities to develop partnership and mutual support, as well as new, different ideas and practices with a response to the perspectives and experience of parents (Bastiani, 1989: 9).

While engaged in home, school, community training with teachers Atkin, Bastiani, and Goode became aware of many claims that practising teachers were

making about parents. They became increasingly aware that such claims were rooted in "teacher lore and staffroom mythology" rather than in "first-hand experience" (Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988: 14). Their growing experience of working with parents confirmed their view "that there were many things that parents know and were good at that were of critical importance in the education of their children" (Ibid., 15). As a result Atkin et al. built "a credible picture of parental perspectives and experiences based upon what parents themselves told" (Ibid.).

The outcome was as follows:

- improved communication and contact between parents and teachers;
- enhanced understanding on the part of parents regarding their children's schooling;
- increased belief on the part of parents in their own distinctive skills as educators.

In *Listening to Parents*, the "Nottingham Style" as an effective way of working in home-school liaison and of bringing about improvements in practice is outlined.

Thinking and practice need to develop together...teachers and parents need to proceed on the assumption of a wide range of attitudes and experience...there are currently many interesting challenges...also many actual and potential pitfalls...joint exploration of common ground is important...begin with a critical and thorough examination of existing practices...our hallmark has been a growing concern to find practical ways of 'listening to parents' (Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988: 16-17).

### 1.8.8.3 NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

The model of partnership found in Pen Green Nursery in Corby, Northamptonshire is presented here because it serves children in a socially and economically disadvantaged area. In addition to Corby resembling some of the areas within which the HSCL scheme was established in Ireland, there are also many similari-



ties in practice. Listening, the identification of local needs, networking with other professionals and with local people and parents involved in policy-making were central to Pen Green Nursery. These matters are also central to the HSCL scheme in Ireland (2.2.1, 2.2.5, 2.2.6, 2.2.9, 2.4.1 and 2.4.2).

Corby in Northamptonshire was transformed in 1923 "from a rural agricultural community into a frontier steel town" and became a "mecca for employment" (Whalley, 1994: 6-7). In 1980 the British Steel Corporation closed the Iron and Steel Works which resulted in large scale unemployment with the accompanying difficulties of poverty, "boarded-up houses...and few local facilities for women with children" (Ibid., 8-9). Staff at Pen Green Nursery got to know the local area which was made up of three distinct communities, the old Corby village, the houses near the steel works and the estate which linked them to the new town centre. Social workers had concerns in the early eighties about so many "families with problems" being placed on the same estate and described the area as a "ghetto community of the elderly and the poor" (Ibid., 8). Local people viewed the advent of the Corby Centre as a threat to what had been achieved in the area and resented the lack of consultation between the County Council and themselves (Ibid., 9). Locals saw the Centre as a focus for "problem families". By July 1983, when the centre was officially opened, the Pen Green team had "gathered a great deal of information about the community; listened and talked to representatives of local groups; read accounts of the area written by the local social work team; [and had] visited local play groups and been inside the primary schools" (Ibid., 10).

The listening and the visits enabled the nursery team to inform their decision-making and their practice with the "views and expressed needs of local families" (Ibid.). They also considered the views of the professionals they networked with.

The outcomes included responding to children with special needs during holiday time, the meeting of adult education needs and the re-introduction of health services. This process of identifying needs and then attempting to meet these named needs gave the nursery a status in the eyes of the local community. The Local Education Authority, the Local Authority Social Services Department and the Area Health Authority decided to jointly finance a community-based service for under-fives and their families in Corby. This service was to be staffed by a multi-disciplinary team and by 1983 was financed by the Education and Social Services Departments. Strategic policy-making was the responsibility of a group made up of parents, officers from the Education and Social Services Departments, a clinical medical officer, a primary school inspector and staff members.

Staff at the new Pen Green Centre acknowledged the need for a deep understanding of their roles and management structures under a multi-disciplinary system. An understanding of the community and the issues faced by families was of paramount importance. They knew that there was a "fine line between empowerment and policing" (Ibid., 14). The articulation of their values and the understanding of power, in the real sense, provided a method of development for the staff. They wished to have, as their maxim, a process outlined at the university of Leicester/Humberside:

Community education should be concerned with the individual's capacity to be self-directing...should help individuals to gain more control over their lives...should be about raising self-esteem...should promote learning as a life long experience...should be about equal opportunities...should be about pushing boundaries...should be about constructive discontent...should encourage people to feel they have the power to change things...should be about self-fulfilment (Ibid.).

In Pen Green Centre parents participated from the beginning, the staff involving them in decisions around prioritising and the delivery of services. Parents in-

interviewed all prospective staff. Whalley, author of *Learning To Be Strong* and the head in Pen Green Centre, admitted that on occasions when staff made decisions, parents sometimes challenged them and resented the refusal on the part of the teachers to compromise. She believed that this was "an inevitable consequence of attempting a partnership" (Ibid., 16). Pen Green Centre staff experienced the difficulties of partnership on two levels, with parents on one side and with three government departments on the other. The Departments of Education, Social Services and Health "weren't used to talking to each other and often didn't appear to speak the same language" (Ibid., 18). She considered that "departmental priorities were still sufficiently blurred in the early eighties, for the centre to go its own way" (Ibid., 19).

Work in the centre included the community nursery, health work, family work and adult and community education. In the community nursery there was an extended day and an extended year provision, day care for under-threes, the integration of under-fives with disability, parent-run play groups and home visiting schemes. Health resources included all the areas of mother and baby care and family planning. In the family centre a number of activities was available, such as, counselling, group work, support and leisure time activities.

In the areas of adult and community education a range of courses from a basic one right up to Open University courses were established. Courses to help parents with the transfer from home to nursery school and from nursery to primary school were also established. Curriculum courses were run, assertiveness training and personal development courses were set up and provision was made for writing, poetry, art and drama groups.

"Life experience" and "qualifications" were the criteria for selection of staff (Ibid., 27). Staff were required to "read widely", to "reflect on their practice" and "to keep detailed records" and undertake "practitioner research" (Ibid.). Pen Green called for staff who welcomed, in their own lives, "a different kind of challenge" (Ibid.). The job specification "emphasised innovative work, non-traditional hours and home visiting and raised the issue of training and supervision for all staff" (Ibid., 28.).

All the activities in Pen Green seem to be clearly defined. There has been an integrated approach during the twelve years of the project. The process was put succinctly by its Head: "we have come to understand the difference between inviting people to share in a finished piece of work...and setting priorities and establishing principles together with the people who are going to use the services. Parental and family involvement was not tagged on...if we wanted real participation then we needed to share decision-making" (Ibid., 148).

Outcomes for children included:

- valuing of "autonomy" in children;
- encouraging children "to challenge" and "to choose";
- providing for "emotional needs" of children;
- protecting of "personal play" and "personal space";
- creating a "workshop environment using all the most basic materials";
- watching out for "withdrawn vulnerable children";
- developing "confidence and self-esteem" in children;
- providing programmes for future parental involvement.

Is the model of practice at Pen Green a partnership one? Pen Green Curriculum documents, 1985, gives a glimpse into what constituted their partnership pro-

cess: "the building was here, but we have created together the space for parents children and staff to work, play and grow. Parents and staff have jointly defined the use of the space and constantly challenge and evaluate the centre's development"(Ibid.).

#### **1.8.8.4 READING**

Redlands Primary School in Reading presents an interesting account of the partnership process over seven years and the benefits that accrued to parents, pupils and teachers. It was chosen because of the simplicity of the activities with parents and because of similarities with the HSCL scheme in Ireland. Welcoming parents to the school, listening to parents, helping parents to prepare children for school were some of the practices. Curricular support and home visitation were put in place. Prior to 1977, Redlands Primary School in Reading "was typical of many primary schools...efficiently run...with a body of professionals at the helm...The emphasis was on the transmission of knowledge rather than on learning processes...Parents came to school only for formal open evenings" (Edwards and Redfern, 1988: 68).

The appointment of a new head teacher and deputy head brought many changes. The head had a facility "to make relationships quickly and with people of all walks of life...and was genuinely interested in them [parents and children] as people in their own right... he was also a key figure in the staff room, an equal partner in the life of school" (Ibid., 69). The head listened to parents.

The role and status of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) became enhanced moving from fund-raising "to educational concerns" (Ibid., 71). Many efforts were made to make parents feel welcome in the school, to encourage them to attend school assemblies and to prepare for the starting of their children at school.

Curricular support was provided on an on-going basis during their child's schooling. Home visitation was initiated, measures to resolve conflict were introduced and written communication was regular. Parent governors looked for more dinner-time supervision in the playground, worked on increasing the quality of school meals and on the shortage of educational psychologists in the county, on better transport facilities to secondary school and they supported teacher action.

As staff became more united they began to seek the assistance of those parents who were "experts in the appropriate fields" to help in the classroom (Ibid., 119) and found that "the value of having more than one adult in the classroom is inestimable" (Ibid., 121). Edwards and Redfern (the latter was deputy head during the project) say that "there can be no doubt as to parents' interest in, or commitment to, their children's schooling. We have learnt never to underestimate them" (Ibid., 93). Redlands started off wanting to let parents know what their methods in teaching and hopes for children were. They expected to influence the home to adopt this method. However, they have learned "that parents should be listened to, rather than talked at" (Ibid.).

In Reading, where parents were actively and influentially involved, outcomes included a strong sense of school as community, with parents interacting, having a sense of belonging, a promotion of openness and trust, an understanding of common aims, and more effective communication. This enabled "teachers in school and parents and others outside simply to provide the right environment to interest and motivate children and facilitate their learning" (Ibid., 162). In addition parents and teachers in Redlands grew "confident of the value of involving parents fully in the life of the school...learnt to trust parents...respect one another...[were]

equal partners...which would have been unimaginable even a short time ago (Ibid., 157).

Additional outcomes were monitoring and evaluation. To be effective, Edwards and Redfern believed that there was need for "careful monitoring and evaluation...it is only when all parties—parents, children and teachers—are given the opportunity to share their views openly and honestly that we can build up an accurate picture" (Ibid., 159). One of the interesting facets of the research done in this primary school is that the views of children were constantly sought. It was affirming to find that "they enjoy having their parents in school" (Ibid., 161). This could be viewed as the most powerful outcome.

Other outcomes for children included "improved reading performance...greater interest in reading...and the opportunity for children to have a one-to-one relationship with an adult other than the teacher" (Ibid., 42). The individual support in Mathematics enabled parents and teachers to report that children showed "greatly increased enthusiasm for mathematical activities" (Ibid., 44). The school was developed as a "resource centre" where the teacher was the chief organiser of "learning resources including the invaluable resource of parents and community" (Ibid., 47). "Out of school activities increased" also and access to the playground after school was permitted. An "action group" was formed which "laid the foundations" of multi-racial education (Ibid., 58).

#### **1.8.8.5 HAMPSHIRE: FRONT LAWN FIRST SCHOOL AND ST. JOHN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Front Lawn First School in Hampshire is situated in a lower-working-class estate with no community facilities. The previous head had been autocratic with a "no parents beyond this point" notice clearly displayed. This project was chosen for

presentation here because of the attitude of the new principal towards parents and the partnership process.

In Front Lawn First School "a decade of parental involvement", hand in hand with "democracy in the staff room", started for the new head teacher in 1981 (Wolfendale, 1992: 146). The school was a "poorly achieving school" on a lower working-class estate with no community facilities according to Evans the head teacher (Ibid.). With a gathering momentum, generated by the new head, the curriculum was constantly being evaluated and in time the school won the School Curriculum Award for a school "at the heart of its community" (Ibid.). A mother and toddler club was set up followed by a play group and home visitation strategies. A new urban-aided library enthused children, parents and staff and prompted a partnership in reading. Parents helped on school outings and acted as classroom helpers. Parents visited the classroom in small groups to see a "classroom in action...In spite of some initial doubts, the staff gained tremendously in confidence...knowing themselves to be held in such esteem by the parents...Realisation dawned that parents are educators too, and could have choice and bring influence to bear on the way the school was run (Ibid., 147).

Mutual respect, trust and willingness to compromise were the hallmarks of this school with the real outcome being a parent uptake of the various facilities reaching "ninety-five per cent" (Ibid., 148). In addition, teachers claimed that "discipline improved" and "the delivery of the curriculum to a higher standard became increasingly possible" (Ibid.).

St. John's Primary School in Bournemouth, Hampshire has 400 pupils. The school has pursued "a declared policy of parental involvement" (Ibid.). Saint John's has involved its parents in school policies and practices in the spheres of



encouraging children's reading, literacy support and educational workshops. According to Waller, the head teacher, staff and parents have aimed at "mutual understanding" (Ibid., 152). Outcomes for pupils are not recounted in relation to St. John's Primary School. The focus was on involving parents and on devising "two parental profiles, for the pre-school/reception-age child and for the school-age child" (Ibid., 155). Both these schools, Front Lawn First School and St. John's Primary School, have adopted a parent participation model which is closely related to the teaching-learning situation and could be described as "proximal" (Epstein, 1987: 6-9).

### **1.8.9 THE BERNARD VAN LEER FOUNDATION**

Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist, supported a broad range of humanitarian causes. In 1949 he created the Bernard van Leer Foundation, (BvLF), to channel his money to charitable purposes after his death (1958). Under the leadership of his son Oscar van Leer (1914-1996), the Foundation started to focus on enhancing opportunities for children and young people who were growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage, in order to develop their innate potential. This very important work is carried out on a worldwide basis.

The Foundation accomplishes its objectives through two interconnected strategies. Firstly, by assisting the development of contextually appropriate approaches to childhood care and development through grant aid. Secondly, by disseminating the wealth of knowledge and experience that is generated by projects in order to inform and influence policy. The information is spread through quality publications and videos. For the purposes of this study we shall outline the work done by Pantin, Paz and Salach in projects funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, where an essential ingredient of projects is the close involvement of parents and

community. This involvement builds up local skills and self-esteem, so that an entirely new dimension is introduced into the context of the school. The Foundation stresses familiarity with the wider community and its reality, the importance of real life experiences, so that professional services may be transformed (BvLF, 1988).

The Bernard van Leer Foundation co-funded the work of Pantin in Trinidad and Tobago and of Paz and Salach in Israel. Paz reminds us that "communities are untapped reservoirs of human potential" (Paz, 1990: 19). The Foundation also noted that when parents are interested, community members are brought together, "children learn how to communicate better together" and "adult mothers...can group around their shared interest in the child" (BvLF, 1986: 6). The work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation through Pantin, Paz, and Salach has been chosen here because of the strong parallels between their programmes and the HSCL scheme in Ireland.

#### **1.8.9.1 TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

One of the most interesting community and education projects funded by the BvLF is the "Servol" one in Trinidad and Tobago. "Servol" (Service Volunteered For All) operates out of the Port of Spain and its activities cover much of the two-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The population is 1,253,000 with just 50,300 on Tobago and the rest on Trinidad. Trinidad's land area is 4,828 sq. km. and Tobago's is 200 sq. km. Trinidad has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the Caribbean (Bendure and Friary, 1984: 505-507).

Servol started in 1970 in Trinidad. As a consequence of civil disorder the area was inhabited by people who were "poorly educated and poorly housed, had little chance of finding or holding down a job, and who believed that their ability to

succeed in life was virtually nil. A major problem was the lack of a stable family life" (Cohen, 1991: 2). The Project Director, Pantin, and his co-worker went from street-corner to street-corner, speaking to groups, while the people "watched and weighed the situation they wanted so much to believe...they were all desperately in need of help...but suppose it was just another scheme...could they bear the burden of yet another disappointment?" (Pantin, 1979: 11). Pantin never offered to give anything to an individual or to a group, rather, he made a deal to share the cost and the effort. Servol is not a welfare organisation. It does not give hand-outs. Respectful intervention also means respect for the other's dignity "those who receive also give and those who give receive much" (Cohen, 1991: 4).

As already stated, Trinidad and Tobago were chosen because of the strong similarity in theory and practice with the HSCL scheme in Ireland. In Trinidad and Tobago Pantin developed his theories of "Attentive Listening", "Respectful Intervention", "Cultural Arrogance" and "The Philosophy of Ignorance" all emanating from a simple question, "how can I help you?" Thus he advises "You listen to the people...you never stop listening...you begin to hear the voice of the people as the important element of their own development...you let the thing grow in its own way and in its own time" (Bourne, 1983: 146).

Pantin elaborates further on this theory in *A Mole Cricket Called Servol*:

You begin immersing yourself in the community and absorbing their attitudes, their outlook, their priorities...choosing a small number from the community to bridge the gap between you and the people...you are responsible for the spark, the jolt, the new-born hope...you help them to start little projects here and there...There can never be a five, a ten or even a twenty year development plan...[they] grow in their own way, at their own speed and in their own time...You are prepared to present your views...while the group is free to examine and reject, modify, accept or lock away...You must be prepared to sit out the early suspicion...You waste your time attempting to explain yourself and your motives (Pantin, 1979: 74-75).

Pantin believes that this process "hurts" the community worker, for some time, but it actually spurs them on to a respectful understanding of the people, thus enabling the local community "to follow the road they have chosen and not the one you feel they should travel" (Ibid., 76).

By 1975, Servol had many courses for young people in skills as varied as welding, music, plumbing, painting, child care and carpentry. In order to unite activities Servol started building the Beetham centre and "in typical Servol fashion, the construction was undertaken almost entirely by its own trainees" (Cohen, 1991: 3). This building became the first Servol "Life" centre and was opened in 1978, the word "Life" being added at this stage. Activities included training in a number of vocational skills.

The Life Centre became the focus for a unique course now known as the Adolescent Development Programme (ADP). The interesting feature of courses in the Life Centre is that they ranged from skills development through to parenting skills for teenagers. Pantin outlined the Centre's work in building boy-girl relationships that were not based on sexual exploitation, in non-threatening relationships with an adult, in a relationship of respect with senior citizens and in self-understanding and personal development. He added that all the time the skill training continued, "we saw the rebuilding of family life as a real challenge" (Bourne, 1983: 144-145). What is surely impressive is that the group he was working with was 200 boys and girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, with one or no functioning parent, so that they were drop-outs from school, carrying knives, and addicted to marijuana. He saw them as a rootless, disadvantaged group of young people, brutalised by life-experience and their environment. Each Community and Regional Life Centre is different "reflecting the area where

it is located, the background of the trainees, and also the interests and personalities of the staff" (Cohen, 1991: 23).

Very young children have been the heart of Servol from the beginning, from its early attempts to help communities to set up their own pre-schools and to train young women from the communities to run them. Servol has evolved a pre-school teacher training programme. This course is based at the Caribbean Life Centre and the Port of Spain and consists of one year full-time study and two years internship. This programme is accredited by the University of Oxford in England, following a refusal from the University in West Indies due to entry requirements. The training programme is based on child development and teaching methods with major emphasis on parental and community involvement: "It is not unusual for parents to help out in the classroom, in many cases they will even take over...they assist with field trips...they are occasions for teachers, children, parents to get to know one another...they provide opportunities for outings which very few families can afford by themselves and they are a learning experience for all concerned" (Ibid., 55).

Pantin sought to bring families together, and to overcome "broken promises, disillusionment and exploitation" (Pantin, 1984: 38). On nursery schools Pantin quotes, with approval, Montrichard: "the nursery school then becomes a sort of listening device through which you can listen attentively...intervene respectfully...they play an integral part in both planning and implementation...it prevents you from making a lot of mistakes" (Ibid.).

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago asked Servol to co-operate in the dissemination of its two major programmes, for adolescents and in pre-schools, throughout the country. This led to a major policy shift and by September 1990

thirty-one Life Centres for adolescents and one hundred and fifty five pre-schools had been established. All these facilities were run under the auspices of the joint Ministry of Education/Servol Programmes and were locally managed by Boards of Education made up of local community members. The former Ministry of Education Pre-School Unit was disbanded. In addition to education services Servol has been involved in agriculture, fisheries, medical services, adult education, local community development and in small business enterprises. All the programmes emerged as a response to a need, both expressed and underlying, of the people it had been working "with". Addressing the expressed needs enabled Pantin and his co-workers to address the underlying needs. They did not solve the poverty issues of Trinidad and Tobago, the problems of family life in inadequate housing or unemployment but they did "motivate people...people are beginning to believe in themselves" (Cohen, 1991: 5).

### **Outcomes from the Servol Programme**

The agenda of Servol is being fulfilled in many ways, firstly, by insisting that centres are run by communities. Secondly, the adolescent programmes deal with actual and potential parents at an age when they are still open to new ideas. Next, the pre-school teacher training programme emphasises the role of parents in bringing up their children above the role of the teacher. Fourthly, parents are expected to play a role in the adolescent programmes as well. Pantin sees "parenting and self-awareness as the crucial parts of the programme, because these help to train people to be parents in a more enlightened way and, ultimately, this will transform society" (Cohen, 1991: 61).

The illustrations we have been citing show the "partner" concept as including parents being active and central in decision-making and implementation, contrib-

uting to, as well as receiving, services. They are recognised as having equal strengths and equivalent expertise while with professionals they are mutually accountable.

#### **1.8.9.2 ISRAEL**

As already stated, the work of Paz and Salach has also been included because of the strong similarities in policy and practice with the HSCL scheme in Ireland. Paz worked in Ofakim and Negev in Israel. Salach adapted and implemented, in so far as this is possible using a community development process, the policies of Paz in Morasha, in Israel. Early programmes aimed at disadvantaged communities, generally focused on children in isolation from their families and environment and were based on the notion of compensation for deficits. As already outlined in this chapter, a central argument of the HSCL scheme and similar schemes is that improvement in children's life chances can be enhanced by improvements in their surroundings.

When the report of the Prime Minister's Commission for Children and Youth in Distress was published in 1973 it shocked Israel by its revelation of the extent of educational and social disadvantage. In 1974 Paz became involved in a volunteer project in Ofakim, in northern Negev. This project, in its initial phase, seemed "over-directive" and "paternalistic", creating another form of "dependants" (Paz, 1990: 31). Following discussion with the mayor of Ofakim a project proposal was submitted to the Bernard van Leer Foundation. "This ambitious document proposed the development of a comprehensive, integrated programme of community based educational activities, to be designed and operated by the community itself" (Ibid.). In September 1977, the Foundation approved the proposal. Ofakim had a population of 11,500 and there was a high birth rate, skilled

jobs were scarce and unemployment was high among young people. Most of the professional jobs were held by commuters.

The community in Ofakim was asked to define its needs, establish priorities and develop its resources. Two primary schools were chosen for a community school programme "to encourage parent participation in the life of the school and the school involvement in the life of the community" (Ibid., 32). Involvement by parents in a network of kindergartens was also established. The project experienced difficulties and fears of extinction because of political issues. Para-professionals were trained in this project as they were in Morasha with Salach. Emphasis was placed in both projects on the training of local people to continue on their own

to move from being passive and dependent recipients of assistance...to becoming active members of the community able to give to others...able to take pride in themselves...Indigenous workers who share the lifestyle, values, traditions and mentality of their 'clients' are best able to understand the latter's problems and build a relationship of empathy and trust (Ibid., 53).

During the first three years of the project the emphasis had been on intervention and the plan for the next phase was that of consolidation. During the project's second three-year phase, a third neighbourhood centre was opened and programmes for teenage girls were initiated jointly with the Department of Welfare. The parent programmes in the kindergartens provided the impetus for another programme developed in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and the Early Childhood Resource and Training Centre. In the neighbourhood family centres, mothers' and toddlers' groups evolved into play groups. Morning activity sessions were designed and implemented by the para-professionals and the mothers.



In December 1982, the Bernard van Leer Foundation terminated funding and by the end of 1983, with politics favourable towards the project, it was transferred to the municipality. Ofakim Community Centre was assigned the administration and co-ordination of the project's activities preserving its integrated character. The Community Centre fell victim to power struggles "directors were hired and fired...Some of the activities survived; others were unrecognisably changed in the hands of people who had little understanding of their intent and purpose; yet others were terminated as funding dried up" (Ibid., 38).

The outcomes according to Paz are that "concerted and coordinated efforts did indeed change parents' perceptions of their role in the education of their children...innovations became a permanent feature of community life, such as enrichment centres, the parents' cooperative playgroup, and the Early Childhood Research Centre" (Ibid.).

The integrated community education programme did not act as a lever for social change, according to Paz, and she is "by no means sure" that the quality of life was "significantly improved" in this "backwater of a town" (Ibid., 39). However, Ofakim provided a model for other initiatives and "the indigenous para-professional came to be regarded as the mainstay of community education" (Ibid.). In Morasha the women who began the Early Childhood and Family Project are

successfully running family day care centres in their home, some work as para-professional counsellors in other communities, others are continuing their studies in institutions of higher education. The day care centres and other settings for child care in Morasha are filled to capacity. Many more women are going out to work, to attend enrichment classes to pursue higher education " (Salach, 1993: 94).

Perhaps the experience of Paz has enabled Salach to provide more opportunity for interdependent functioning when funding was withdrawn. However, Salach also

regrets that the "reality is still far from the vision of an autonomous community" (Ibid., 95).

It seems that the Bernard van Leer Foundation, as did the local agents, withdrew funding in both these cases in Israel prematurely. Both projects still required "nurturing at the community level" when they were asked to stand alone (Ibid.). Both project leaders, Paz and Salach regret that they did not "manage within the project to deal more intensively and deeply with the ability of the community to take over the work and carry it on" (Ibid.). This would entail keeping the delegation process clearly in focus from the very early stages of programme development.

#### **1.8.10 UNITED STATES**

Two American studies are considered here. Firstly, that of Comer who started a creative programme in the mid sixties in New Haven, and secondly, the Schools Reaching Out Project which started in Boston and New York in the late eighties. Both programmes sought to maximise children's learning experiences. They set out to do this through involving parents, teachers, pupils and the wider community in collective endeavour. These two case histories are chosen because their aims so resemble the aims of the HSCL scheme in Ireland.

##### **1.8.10.1 NEW HAVEN**

Solnit and his colleagues at Yale's Child Study Centre believed that educational reformers should develop their theories "by directly observing and intervening in schools over long periods of time" (Comer, 1988a: 25). Solnit's ideas inspired the schools intervention research project that was begun by the Centre and the New Haven school system in 1968 and continued until 1980. Comer was asked to direct the project which focused on promoting development and learning

by building "supportive bonds that draw together children, parents and school" (Ibid., 24).

In *Educating Poor Minority Children* Comer quotes the lofty ideal of Jefferson, an advocate of free public schools and of democracy, who knows no safer depository "of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves: and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion" (Ibid., 24). Comer believed that this ideal is far removed from the grim reality "facing young people on the margins of society" (Ibid.). In the 1960s Comer began to speculate that the contrast between a child's experiences at home and those in school "deeply affects the child's psychosocial development, and that this, in turn, shapes academic achievement...Yet current educational reforms de-emphasize interpersonal factors and focus instead on instruction and curriculum" (Ibid., 25). The way forward for Comer and his team of three, a social worker, a psychologist and a special education teacher, was "to immerse" themselves in the schools, to learn how they function. They held that on the basis of these findings they could "develop and implement a model for improving the schools" (Ibid.).

The model evolved in two schools in New Haven, the Martin Luther King, Junior School, which had about three hundred pupils and the Katharine Brennan School which had more than three hundred and fifty pupils. Almost all the families were poor and received "Aid" for "Families with Dependent Children". The programmes initially experienced "deep-seated distrust and limited relationship skills among all involved" (Comer, 1988b: 217). There were problems of a serious nature with attendance and discipline. The staffs were discouraged, parents were dejected, distrustful, irate and alienated. Staff and parents approached the

project with hope but the school opening was difficult because teachers and administrators could not agree on "clear goals and strategies" (Comer, 1988a: 25). Teachers blamed the administration for a lack of resources and parents became angry.

The analysis by Comer and his team among parents, staff and students revealed "the sociocultural misalignment between home and school" (Ibid., 26). He developed this notion of misalignment and its consequences on "underdeveloped" or "differently developed" students and how this can have students labelled "bad, unmotivated or stupid" (Ibid., 28). He outlined how their parents "lose hope and confidence and become less supportive of the school" (Ibid.). The outcome of this was "a high degree of mutual distrust between home and school" (Ibid.).

As outlined by Comer in *School Power* and in *Maggie's American Dream*, the key to academic success in the New Haven schools lay in seeking to bond the children with the schools through personal development classes. Another aspect was to create strategies in order to overcome staff resistance to change, and to enable further training in child development, for teachers. There was also a need for general skills development for teachers in order to foster relationships with parents. Their experience led Comer and his team to believe that no progress would be made until destructive interactions between parents, teachers and pupils was eliminated. A management team was established in each school and included the principal, elected parents and teachers, a mental health specialist and a member of the support staff. Their brief was to manage academic and social programmes and school procedures generally. On the teams there had to be a mutual recognition of the rights and responsibilities of team members and the focus was on problem-solving rather than on blaming. Parents were involved at three levels "shaping

policy...participating in activities supporting the school program, and attending school events" (Ibid., 29). Parents became involved in classroom activities, formed a parents' group, held book fairs and attended ceremonies. Parent participation at extra-curricular classes was poor because they were not "owned by the parents" (Comer, 1980: 131-132). In addition parents wanted to participate in programme policy issues but "they could not do so unless they had some way to learn about and understand school operations" (Ibid.).

As the needs of an individual student emerged a team member was assigned to work with the student. "A Discovery Room enabled 'turned off' children to form a trusting relationship with an adult and, through play, rediscover an interest in learning. A Crisis Room provided a refuge for children who were out of control" (Comer, 1988a: 30). By 1975, behavioural problems had declined, relations between parents and staff had improved and the intelligence of the children was being manifested. Comer indicated results in *School Power* which in the circumstances are worth noting at some length:

social performance and learning...significantly improved among low-income minority group students...the school staff is a critical variable...[the] staff desperately want to be successful...Educators are as much victim of the educational system as students...parents are likely to sustain and make a major contribution to healthy school life, if they are adequately prepared for participation and are then invited to share in making important decisions. The critical prerequisite for success, however, is that decision making be shared willingly, not on a token basis ...many highly competent parents can be threatened by school staff...many staff are more wary...than strongly and unalterably opposed...(Comer, 1980: 232-233).

More detailed results are found in the writings of Comer on how the intervention programme in New Haven produced significant gains. The children had once ranked lowest among the thirty-three elementary schools in the city. However,

by 1979...students in the fourth grade had caught up to the standard norm. By 1984 pupils in the fourth grade in the two schools ranked third and fourth highest on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. By the early 1980's attendance rates

at King were either first or second in the city. There have been no serious behavior problems at either school in more than a decade (Comer, 1988a: 30).

Comer believed that success in New Haven came about because the underlying developmental and social issues were addressed.

The Prince Georges County, Md., and Benton Harbor, Mich., school districts have used similar interventions for many years and have achieved success "on a par with those of the two New Haven schools" (Ibid.). In 1988, fifty schools around the country were implementing the programme (Ibid.). By 1990, the programme was being used in more than one hundred schools in eight different states (Elder, 1990: 52). Among the factors common to the programmes were strong leadership through consensus decision-making, high expectations, positive attitude, emphasis on reading and phonics, individualised instruction and evaluation. Sensitivity to the needs of parents and children was of paramount importance and was noted in *Maggie's American Dream*. Comer believed that children are alienated from their families when they are developed in isolation from their parents. Put succinctly by Comer himself, it reads as follows: "when we ask low-income children to achieve well in school...we are often asking them to be different than their parents. With parents involved, there is no conflict" (Comer, 1988b: 219).

In 1989, similar findings about parental involvement were made in Princeton. Factors associated with underachievement of pupils were "permissiveness, nagging and prodding, and less encouragement and approval" on the part of parents. The underachievers "perceived their parents as less interested in their work or school...they were less able to communicate with their parents...siblings had similar school records" (Mufson, Cooper and Hall, 1989:9).

In the USA a large number of citizens' advisory councils function in different states "with the role of bringing parent and other lay influence to bear on the deci-

sions of educationists and education administrators" (Sallis, 1988: 86). It is estimated that at least a million citizens belong to such councils. At intervals, reports on the effectiveness of these councils and the special educational facilities available to disadvantaged areas are reported on through the Institute for Responsive Education in Boston. One such report on the work done in Ellis School in Boston and P.S. III in New York City follows.

#### **1.8.10.2 BOSTON AND NEW YORK**

The Schools Reaching Out (SRO) programme began in September 1988 when two schools, the David A. Ellis School in Boston, and the Ochs School called P.S. III. The Ochs School in New York City, agreed to collaborate with the Institute for Responsive Education as "laboratory schools" trying out strategies to build new relationships with parents and the community. The SRO project attempted to demonstrate that urban public schools "can fundamentally change their relationship with low-income parents and their communities, and in so doing, move closer to the goal of academic and social success for all children" (Krasnow, 1990a: Introduction). Krasnow believes that "it is the attitude of teachers, not the socio-economic or marital status of parents that determines involvement" (Krasnow, 1990b: 34). In an issue of the *American Journal of Education* we find a similar view in interpreting the evidence relating to effective schools (Rosenholtz, 1985: 352-388).

During the two years of the project at P.S. III a parents' centre was established, trips were organised for parents, workshops supporting children's learning were run, courses in English as a second language were provided and children lived with host families during the summer holidays. McAllister Swap noted during her two years of research that parents who were originally viewed as "barriers to chil-

dren's success" were seen as "useful and important in accomplishing the school's objectives" (McAllister Swap, 1990b: 62, see also Wilton, 1975: 32-15).

The major focus in the first year in the Ellis school was that of providing support for families particularly those that did not have a history of connection or contact with the school. In the second year the focus shifted to parent and teacher empowerment. Notable points at Ellis included the development of a parents' support team, the outreach to parents and children in crisis through the Parent Centre and the many activities that brought parents and teachers together in a supportive context. Special efforts were made to reach out to Hispanic parents, a predominant ethnic group.

Some of the outcomes are significant. Most of the connections that were established between home and school were in the "school to home transmission model" (McAllister Swap, 1990b: 69). Krasnow says that parents and teachers had their own agenda for change, "parents wanted the school to be more like a home; teachers wanted the homes to more supportive. Both groups needed resources and encouragement to develop their ideas" (Krasnow, 1990b: 120). McAllister Swap found that the administrators at Ellis and P.S. III "had important strengths...but none was initially comfortable with a collaborative model; none had demonstrated a commitment to parent partnership as an underpinning for school success" (McAllister Swap, 1990b: 119).

The principal in P.S. III worked well with the project but for him "the conflicting realities of teacher and parent empowerment versus principal accountability continue to be confusing" (Ibid.). At Ellis the principal was supportive of the project but "did not play a leadership role in moving it forward" (Ibid., 120). Issues such as the boundaries between the role of the parent and the role of the



teacher emerged. In the daily life of the schools the "fundamental questions of power and authority were negotiated" (Krasnow, 1990b: 122). Neither parents nor teachers were at ease with the prospect of deeper working relationships. It would seem that a major shortcoming in this project was its brevity.

### **1.9 SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES ARISING FROM THE LITERATURE AND MODELS OF PRACTICE**

If schools are to be places of learning within the home-community context, where learning should be on-going, then parents and teachers must be helped to self-confidence. Legal rights, the task of governments to provide for education, good habits of consultation and communication on education policies and skills development all lead to establishing this confidence. The countries examined displayed some of the features while no one country displayed all the features.

In this chapter we have reviewed the literature relating to the involvement of the home, the community and the school in children's learning. We began with an acknowledgement of the rights of parents and worked through home-based learning, community-based learning and school-based learning culminating in a summary on children's learning. Home, community and school were viewed separately while the function of each overlaps, the three are interdependent and are inherently integrated. The issue of partnership as a key ingredient in the building of relationships was introduced in 1.7 and will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Five. Some structures in the EU were outlined, excluding Ireland and Scotland which will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Two and Chapter Seven respectively. Finally, practices in Coventry, Nottingham, Northamptonshire, Reading, Hampshire, Trinidad and Tobago, Israel, New Haven and Boston and New York were given in some detail. The rationale for this choice was the parallel between them and the HSCL scheme in Ireland.

In Coventry findings included many similarities between work practices there and the HSCL scheme in Ireland. An interesting fact was that community education had a "permanent place" within the education service. Home-school relationships were a priority. The schools achieved high levels in oral and written languages and in reading comprehension. Nottingham promoted an interlink of policy and practice. Home-school relations were viewed as a responsibility for all schools and opportunities were developed to provide mutual support.

In Northamptonshire, listening to parents, identification of their needs, networking and the involvement of parents in policy making resembled practices in the HSCL scheme in Ireland. Reading was notable for the simplicity and the practicality of its practices with parents. Among them were the welcoming of parents, listening to parents, helping parents to prepare children for school, curriculum support and home visitation. Outcomes for children included the valuing of autonomy and choice for children and providing for their emotional needs and their protection. Care of the withdrawn and vulnerable child was also a priority.

In Reading there was a very strong sense of the school as community. Outcomes for children included extra support in reading and mathematics with improved performance and a higher level of enthusiasm. Out-of-school activities became a priority as was the issue of multi-racial education.

In Hampshire we noted how a new principal could change school ethos and how the school was viewed as a "school at the heart of its community". Mutual respect, trust and a willingness to compromise were the motivating factors. Parent groups were established, partnership in a reading programme was begun, staff gained in confidence, discipline improved and the curriculum was delivered to a higher standard.

The work of Pantin in Trinidad and Tobago, as we shall note in Chapter Two, has coloured the development of the HSCL scheme in Ireland. We draw particular attention to his theories of "Attentive Listening", "Cultural Arrogance" and "The Philosophy of Ignorance". Servol provided many life skills courses: welding, music, plumbing, painting, child care and carpentry. "Life" centres were opened and included training in a number of vocational skills. Parenting skills were developed with teenagers and care was given to the "rebuilding of family life". The approach was "preventative" because of its work with the very young child.

From the experience in Israel we note that the learning for Paz and Salach was to allow the local community to become autonomous. This is a valuable contribution to developing communities and was achieved through intervention initially, through a consolidation phase to successfully running programmes and acting as para-professionals.

The key to academic success in the New Haven schools stemmed from the bonding of children with the schools through personal development. For staff the development was that of coping with change. Comer focused on the development of learning by building supportive bonds between children, parents and school. Comer believed that the child's experiences at home coloured their performance in school. There were serious attendance needs and problems with indiscipline. In fact he held that there was a "misalignment between home and school". With parents and staff, Comer and his team focused on problem-solving rather than on blaming. Results indicated that social performance and learning significantly improved, there was increased staff motivation and students in the fourth grade had reached the national norm within a few years.

In Boston and New York the Schools Reaching Out programme provided support for families, particularly the marginalised. Many activities brought parents and teachers closer. However, due to the brevity of the programme the parent - teacher relationship was not developed beyond the point of teachers wanting the home to adapt to the needs of the school while parents wanted the school to adapt to the needs of the home. In Boston and New York parents were viewed as "useful and important in accomplishing the school's objectives" when barriers were broken down.

There is a strong awareness in the literature of the need to enable parents and teachers to work collaboratively in the development of the whole-child. There is an emphasis on the development of parents and local community particularly in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. That same emphasis needs to be placed on the development of teacher attitudes and behaviour so that the school becomes a community resource. In the next chapter we shall examine the philosophy and structures of the HSCL scheme in Ireland.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE HOME, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY LIAISON SCHEME IN IRELAND

There is a particular difficulty in writing about the Home, School, Community Liaison scheme (HSCL) in Ireland. Unlike schemes in other countries and unlike many educational initiatives in Ireland in the past forty years, there has been little primary research, excluding the Rutland Street Project, in the area of home and school.

The HSCL programme has evolved through activities, trial and error, planning, implementing, and evaluating within the Department of Education over a nine year period. The author of this thesis has been involved in this process at every stage. The problem, therefore, of exploring the HSCL scheme in Ireland is the lack of records in journals, newsletters and correspondence to which reference might be made. A second difficulty is the fact that a full evaluation will not be possible for some time yet as the scheme is on-going and has very long-term goals. The present dissertation is a contribution to serious evaluation of the practical and theoretical issues that are at work in the scheme. Therefore, this chapter is not the definitive, final word on the scheme.

There is, however, a real advantage in the present author presenting an outline of the HSCL scheme. This exposition has the strength and weaknesses of an insider's view. The most obvious weakness that one might fear would be prejudice, unbalanced evaluation arising from being too close physically, temporally and, one might add, emotionally, through the evolution of the scheme. The alert reader will be aware of this weakness and the risks involved. A positive value lies

precisely in it being an insider's view. The reader can have some idea of what those in the Department of Education were trying to achieve, how they saw the scheme, the management theories, values, strategies, and philosophy used and underlying the work. With these few clarifications we can attempt a description and some evaluation of the history of the HSCL scheme.

The aim of this Chapter is to outline the reason why the Department of Education in Ireland established the HSCL. A further aim is to clarify the purpose, the preparation made, the processes used and the outcomes noted from activities and initiatives at local school level so that the reader can have an overall picture of the scheme in Ireland.

## **2.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

We have already stated that under-achievement in school, unsatisfactory retention rates and poor participation in higher education have long been linked to the absence of a favourable home and community environment particularly in areas of identifiable socio-economic disadvantage. Consequently, successive Irish Ministers for Education and the Department of Education had undertaken various initiatives over the years to alleviate the effects of disadvantage on children's education. In 1984, a scheme of special funding for schools in designated areas of disadvantage was initiated.

In 1990, the Minister for Education launched a major initiative in HSCL with a pilot scheme involving the appointment of thirty teachers as liaison coordinators in fifty-five primary schools. These local coordinators were appointed from the staff of one of the schools which they served. In-career development for coordinators, was a priority with the Department of Education from 1990. The three-

year pilot phase of the scheme ended in June 1993. During the pilot stage the HSCL scheme was evaluated by the Educational Research Centre (see 2.3.8).

At the end of the evaluation stage the HSCL scheme became a mainstream resource at primary and post-primary levels. For the year 1993-1994 there were 133 primary schools and 50 post-primary schools from designated areas of disadvantage in the scheme. This was the population used in the research sample. By the 1998-1999 academic year the total in the scheme had increased to 310 schools. Of these, 225 were primary schools with 85 at post-primary level. All designated primary and post-primary schools will have a liaison service from September 1999. The HSCL scheme has received unstinting support from the various Ministers for Education, senior Inspectors and Civil Servants from its initiation to date.

In 1991 the Minister for Education issued Circular 24/91 to all National Schools and Circular M27/91 to all Post-Primary Schools. The circular *Parents as Partners in Education* urged that policies be formulated and practice in partnership be initiated nationwide. The resource personnel and finance were allocated to designated areas of disadvantage.

### **2.1.1 THE THEORETICAL EVOLUTION OF THE HSCL SCHEME**

The HSCL scheme has evolved both theoretically and practically over the years. Theory has informed practice and practice in turn has informed the theory. With regard to the theory or philosophy of the HSCL scheme there are several important stages. The first stage was the creation of *Aims* which were worked out in the Department of Education during the Summer of 1990. The second stage soon followed, which involved the development of twelve *Basic Principles* which were devised within the Department of Education in 1990. These principles controlled

the evolution of the scheme from 1990-1993. There was little modification in their formulation when finally they were published for schools in 1993. An examination of the Aims and Principles, highlights the philosophy and points to significant stages in the practical development of the scheme. These matters will emerge in greater detail in this and the following chapters.

## **2.2 PHILOSOPHY OF THE HSCL SCHEME**

*Aims* for the HSCL scheme were worked out by Department of Education personnel during the Summer of 1990. The present writer was seconded to the Department of Education in 1990 (see below 2.3.2). Extensive discussion and study took place with two senior inspectors from within the Department of Education. As the work of developing the scheme was an on-going process involving formal and informal discussion within the three person group and with others, it is not possible or even desirable to attempt to indicate the source of the various ideas that came together to form *Aims* and *Basic Principles* of the HSCL scheme. We were aware of various educational writing, especially Pantin and the work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, though we may not always have been conscious of direct borrowing. More significant perhaps was the cumulative experience of the group as teacher and as inspectors, as well as shared vision based partly on educational convictions and partly on practical experiences in the field. The implementation of these aims has remained a priority for the management of the HSCL scheme since its initiation in November 1990. The aims of the HSCL are as follows:

- to maximise active participation of the children in the scheme schools in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure;
- to promote active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children;
- to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's education progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills;



- to enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their life-long attitude to learning and
- to disseminate the positive outcomes of the project through the school system generally (Department of Education, 1991: 2).

The underlying philosophy of the HSCL scheme is one which seeks to promote partnership between parents and teachers. The purpose of this partnership is to enhance the pupils' learning opportunities and to promote their retention within the educational system. This is pursued by identifying and responding to parent needs and by creating a greater awareness in teachers of the complementary skills of parents in their children's education. The scheme seeks to promote active co-operation between home, school, and relevant community agencies in the education of young people. The scheme focuses directly on the salient adults in the pupils' educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves. In short, the HSCL scheme seeks to develop the parent as prime educator.

Although presented as a national scheme by the Department of Education, it was always intended that HSCL would be "area based" and designed at local level with marginalised families in mind. The Department of Education was ready to guide educational change through providing leadership, through pointing out the new direction and through providing the necessary resources, training and support. Believing that self-discovery is the essence of organisational change, the Department's HSCL management team continually endeavoured to bring about change through "ownership" of the process. This was promoted through a process of individual and group consultations where active listening was advocated and adhered to. It was intended that it should be tailored to meet local needs and that it would flourish through self-generating initiatives. Modern literature supports this way of thinking. It is interesting to note that in more recent times, Burkan,

who is known for his visionary thoughts and practices when dealing with and implementing change claimed that "organizational change must be led top-down but must be engineered bottom-up" (Burkan, 1996: 190). The Halton Effective Schools Project held in 1986 that "the change process would be 'top-down, bottom-up' - the system would provide broad direction and support for schools' own plans" (Stoll and Fink, 1996: 15).

While the HSCL scheme was led "top-down", the "bottom-up", area based, approach had been endorsed by the Department of Education since the inception of the scheme in 1990. It was intended that the HSCL scheme would be developed in each area as a response to local needs but within the framework of the Basic Principles. We shall now elaborate on the twelve Basic Principles underpinning the philosophy and practice of the HSCL scheme (2.2.1-2.2.12). The role of the National Coordinator will be dealt with in 2.3.2.

The Basic Principles which were operative from 1990 are twelve in number. Most of them will be virtually self-explanatory and they will be treated in greater detail as the study progresses. Under each a brief explanation is given, and where appropriate practical steps to put these principles into practice are noted. While the Basic Principles existed from 1990 they were not forwarded to schools in written form until 1993. Between 1990 and 1993 the Department of Education allowed practice on the ground to further inform the theory.

#### **2.2.1 "THE SCHEME CONSISTS OF A PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION OF THE COMPLEMENTARY SKILLS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS" (Department of Education, 1993)**

The notion of partnership has been a theme in in-career development for coordinators since the inception of the scheme in 1990. It can be said that schools which operate collaboratively with family and community are much more likely to be

effective. Partnership presupposes equality and implies that the relationship has been formed on a basis that recognises that each has an equally important contribution to make to the whole (1.7 and 5.3-5.3.4). It implies a commitment to working together, exploring possibilities, planning, decision-making and on-going evaluation. An example of this practice is the Local Committee (2.2.12 and 2.3.7). Partnership as a way of working is challenging and calls for changes in individual and corporate attitudes, methods of work and structures, particularly on the part of schools. The Department of Education has recognised this and has encouraged whole-school development.

**2.2.2 "THE SCHEME IS UNIFIED AND INTEGRATED AT BOTH PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY LEVELS" (Department of Education, 1993)**

The HSCL scheme began at primary level in 1990 and was extended in 1991 to the post-primary sector. In most school situations a number of coordinators serve the same catchment area. A junior primary, senior primary, and post-primary school campus could have up to three coordinators. It is expected that coordinators use a team approach across the schools but any family would deal with only one coordinator. Co-operative activities are provided. One example is the transfer programme for parents and pupils to ease the transition from home to primary school and on to post-primary. In addition, space for parents is shared across the schools in the same catchment areas as are the courses, classes, and activities for parents. It took some time to develop this co-operative approach which currently varies in quality from area to area.

**2.2.3 "THE THRUST OF THE SCHEME IS PREVENTATIVE RATHER THAN CURATIVE" (Department of Education, 1993)**

The scheme promotes initiatives which are preventative rather than compensatory or curative. The coordinator works with, and fortifies, the family so that instances

of absenteeism and disruption will be obviated. It is the working policy of the Department of Education that engaging home and school in meaningful educational activities promotes the child's interest in school, often reducing absenteeism and disruptive behaviour.

The emphasis on the preventative quality of HSCL work has been difficult to implement because the outcomes are by nature long-term. In their experience of demanding classroom settings, teachers tend to look for short term benefits, and may not be enthusiastic about longer-term remedies. The preventative approach was well expressed by Welling at the Community Education Development Centre in Coventry in 1985: "The emphasis should be on habilitation rather than rehabilitation, on self-determined change rather than on the cure of some supposed disease" (Welling, 1985). The notion of prevention was studied and covered such areas as illiteracy, unemployment, drugs, jail and psychological collapse.

#### **2.2.4 "THE FOCUS OF THE SCHEME IS ON THE ADULTS WHOSE ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS IMPINGE ON THE LIVES OF CHILDREN, NAMELY, PARENTS AND TEACHERS" (Department of Education, 1993)**

The work with adults enables coordinators to target the needs of both parents and teachers and indeed those of community personnel also. This principle may perhaps be seen as the kernel of the scheme bringing together and involving as it does, home, school and community. The theoretical justification may again be seen in Welling. In identifying favourable learning environments, Welling concludes that just as children need healthy and strong bodies so too do they need "healthy and strong supporting communities. To that extent, we are in the business of community development, just as much as we are in the business of child development" (Welling, 1988: 13). The other theoreticians whose thinking was influential in the development of the HSCL scheme include the Bernard van Leer

Foundation (BvLF) literature (1987-1999), that of Pantin (1979, 1984), and Mezirow (1990, 1991, and 1996). This Basic Principle was worked out through a particular type of in-career development for coordinators (2.3.4) and through providing courses and activities for parents and at times for teachers. On other occasions the two groups worked together as will be evidenced in policy making (2.4.1).

**2.2.5 "THE BASIS OF ACTIVITIES IN THE SCHEME IS THE IDENTIFICATION OF NEEDS AND HAVING THOSE NEEDS MET" (Department of Education, 1993)**

The focus of the scheme is on the identification of the needs of individuals and families and on the meeting of those needs to enhance the continuity between home, community and school. The theories of Pantin (1.8.9.1) underlie practice here: "Respectful Intervention", "Cultural Arrogance", "The Philosophy of Ignorance". From the last he advises: "never presume that you know the needs and priorities of people, confess your utter ignorance of their background, the way their minds work, the reason for their attitudes, and ask them how they would like you to help" (Bourne, 1983: 132). When the scheme began there was within the Department of Education and amongst schools, much general awareness of needs, clustering with ideas such as marginalisation, deprivation, unequal opportunity, absenteeism, unruly behaviour, societal and family problems and culture changes. From the initial stages the Department of Education stressed the fact that the scheme should respond to local needs — "learning decisions must be made as close as possible to the learning workplace" (Hatwood-Futrell, 1986: 8). The Department encouraged coordinators to focus on parent and teacher attitudes and behaviours so that these key people would work together to develop the whole child. This led to many courses and activities for parents with some in-career

development for teachers. In the following years, while this focus was maintained, other needs emerged. An example was the need to focus on the most marginalised.

**2.2.6 "THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER AND STAFF ATTITUDES IN THE AREAS OF PARTNERSHIP AND THE 'WHOLE-SCHOOL' APPROACH IS FOSTERED" (Department of Education, 1993)**

Significant clarity has been introduced into the area of teacher-staff-parent relationships through the language of partnership and whole-school. The work involved in developing positive staff attitudes is easy to define but can be hard to bring about in practice. The scheme demands from professionals new attitudes which challenge their approaches and values. There are three types of in-service provided within the HSCL scheme:

- intensive and on-going for coordinators;
- occasional/annual for principals;
- sporadic and by invitation of the school, for staff.

**2.2.7 "THE SCHEME PROMOTES THE FOSTERING OF SELF-HELP AND INDEPENDENCE" (Department of Education, 1993)**

In this second half of the twentieth century the notion of self-help, independence, interdependence and empowerment became common currency in many disciplines. While all the basic principles of the scheme interlink, there is an obvious bond between the identification and meeting of needs and the fostering of self-help. The Department sought to develop this principle of self-help through training for parents, through encouraging coordinators to identify leadership skills and to delegate as soon as possible to parents. Coordinators have endeavoured to draw together people, actions and events. They have worked with and between groups and programmes. The aim was to encourage people away from depend-

ency and to enable them to make decisions in relation to their own lives and those of their children (Paz, 1990). The hope of the Department of Education was that when parents change as individuals they will make the transition from personal empowerment to collective growth. This has happened in the case of parents who are now actively involved in their schools. Freire upheld creative approaches to adult learning and community development (Freire, 1972; Freire and Shor, 1987; Freire 1994 and 1997). Lovett promoted the theory of individual growth leading to collective advancement (Lovett, 1998: 148).

#### **2.2.8 "HOME VISITATION IS A CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN ESTABLISHING BONDS OF TRUST WITH FAMILIES" (Department of Education, 1993)**

Home visitation might be seen as a dramatic symbol of the whole scheme. It implies the school going to the home. It demands that those entering the home be respectful and sensitive. Home visitation is open ended in that it is rarely possible to determine in advance the outcome of any single visit or series of visits. Home visitation forms a major part of the role of the coordinators. It is emphasised in the scheme for the purpose of forming bonds of trust and of fortifying all families and pupils in a supportive and self-reliant community. The emphasis on home visitation is particularly directed towards the marginalised. The "link between understanding the community and home-visiting is a circular one; much of that local understanding is obtained through talking to parents in their homes" (MacBeath, Mearns and Smith, 1986: 264).

Developing parents as home visitors has become a focus in the HSCL scheme. It is one aspect of their work that coordinators can delegate, a practice promoted by the Department of Education since the inception of the HSCL scheme. As was recorded in Chapter One the promotion of the "para-professional" is often found

in the Bernard van Leer Foundation literature. A number of "clusters" have adopted this work pattern. Training parents as home visitors, (2.3.6.3), is part of the project management work undertaken by the writer of this dissertation.

**2.2.9 "NETWORKING WITH AND PROMOTING THE COORDINATION OF THE WORK OF VOLUNTARY AND STATUTORY AGENCIES INCREASES EFFECTIVENESS AND OBVIATES DUPLICATION" (Department of Education, 1993)**

Networking is a consequence of the actual series of relationships and interlocking activities within the community. It challenges many previously held assumptions about job demarcation. From the initiation of the HSCL scheme the Department of Education placed a lot of emphasis on networking between schools, and of schools with community agencies. In matching needs with services it is anticipated that coordinators initiate the provision of a specific service only when another provider does not already exist. It was felt that networking would heighten awareness of work being done by other agencies and would prevent the duplication and replication of services. The coordinator was expected to use creative, innovative approaches when liaising with personnel already working in local communities.

This Basic Principle, that of networking, is an aspect of the HSCL scheme that met with resistance initially. The arrival of coordinators, who were teachers, generated a certain fear among other professionals such as social workers, community workers and attendance officers, adult education organisers and some voluntary groups. The resistance sprang from the fear that a group of teachers would take over or interfere with other professional roles. It took almost three years to quell these fears. The writer is aware of this from observation. Gardaí (viz. Police force) in all areas and Social Workers in some areas were both open



and responsive. With the on-going support of the Department of Education, literature from the Combat Poverty Agency and the advent of Area Based Partnerships (2.4.2.1) the task became easier.

However, it cannot be denied that networking is a complex and difficult process because of the different expectations people have about what can be achieved and because of the fears already mentioned. Some teachers moreover, saw networking in a very limited way: namely of making their teaching role more fruitful or even easier.

Since the Department of Education has expanded its services to schools in designated areas of disadvantage the call for an integrated area-based response to educational disadvantage and to networking is even more formidable.

#### **2.2.10 "HSCL IS A FULL-TIME UNDERTAKING" (Department of Education, 1993)**

It was realised that HSCL duties could not be added to a teacher's job specification. Firstly, because new responsibilities would create labour relation problems but more importantly because it was realised that training was needed. It very quickly emerged in the thinking of the Department that the coordinator would have to be not only properly trained but also be full-time. The Department of Education made it very clear that coordinators could not be deployed to the ordinary day-to-day duties of class or subject teachers. They were additional full-time appointments to the new service which had been added to the schools in the HSCL scheme. On the whole, this basic principle does not present difficulties to schools now. In earlier years, however, some schools were very vocal about wanting the coordinator to teach and to carry out routine work such as yard duty, supervision for absent teachers, care for sick children and discipline issues.

### **2.2.11 "THE LIAISON COORDINATOR IS AN AGENT OF CHANGE" (Department of Education, 1990)**

As the Department was outlining its Basic Principles it became clear that the key agent of change would have to be properly trained as well as being full-time. Whilst it was recognised that in the partnership model everyone had a contribution to make, the hope for the school in liaison and the focus would have to be on the coordinator.

In the light of these Basic Principles, especially 2.2.6, which stressed the need for change, there is a special role for the local coordinator as an agent of these changes. To the degree that coordinators have rapport with staff, receive appropriate in-career development and are able to transfer learning, bringing staff with them, they can indeed be agents of change within their area of responsibility. Perceptions of "Important Changes" from principals, coordinators, and teachers in the 182 schools surveyed for this dissertation are detailed in 5.4.1.

### **2.2.12 "THE PROMOTION OF COMMUNITY "OWNERSHIP" OF THE SCHEME IS SOUGHT THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMITTEES" (Department of Education, 1993)**

The final principle sought to address the question of ownership. Whilst it was clear that the more people who "owned" the scheme the better, a serious issue appeared to be how those not professionally involved, as well as teachers, could feel that it was their scheme. The community perspective also needed to be included. It was felt that whereas the school was too narrow a group to take ownership, all the parents, however, were too wide and diffuse a group for the initial sense of ownership. What was chosen was the method of using Local Committees. This wide sense of seeking ownership, it might be remarked in passing, is a reflection of the Department's own experience in having its internal HSCL committee drawn from eleven bodies (2.3.1).

The Department of Education gave guidelines about Local Committees in correspondence with schools. The Local Committees were set up:

- to ensure greater community ownership of the scheme and wider community support for it;
- to enable parents to have input into the development of the scheme in their own area;
- to help coordinate the work of various agencies in the area;
- to receive reports from the local coordinator and to advise him/her of specific needs;
- to support the local coordinator as an important community resource;
- to liaise with the National Steering Committee (NSC) through the National Coordinator (Department of Education, 1992: 6).

When questionnaires were sent to schools in the HSCL scheme, 33.3 per cent had a Local Committee established. Local Committees will be dealt with in greater detail in 2.3.7. Perceptions of principals and coordinators on Local Committees can be found in 5.4.2.

## **2.3 STRUCTURES OF THE HSCL SCHEME**

This section is designed to view the HSCL scheme through organisational and operational structures.

### **2.3.1 NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE**

The Minister for Education appointed a National Steering Committee (NSC) "to direct the progress of the pilot project and to advise her" (Department of Education, 1990: 7). On the NSC there were twenty-two members who were representatives of:

- the Department of Education at primary and post-primary levels;
- the Educational Research Centre and the Economic and Social Research Institute;
- the Departments of Health and Justice represented respectively by a social worker and a senior Garda (police);
- the Catholic Primary School Managers' Association;

- the Joint Managerial Bodies;
- the Management of Community and Comprehensive Schools;
- the Irish National Teacher's Organisation;
- the Teacher's Union of Ireland;
- the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland;
- the National Parents' Council at primary and post-primary levels and
- the Conference of Religious of Ireland.

The NSC remained for three years after the pilot phase of HSCL had ended. The role of the NSC was advisory.

### **2.3.2 NATIONAL COORDINATOR**

In September 1990, two months before the scheme started, the author of this thesis was seconded to the Department of Education as National Coordinator of the scheme. For about ten years as principal of a large urban Dublin primary school, she had been implementing a scheme which was to become a *de facto* pilot HSCL strategy. The Department of Education was aware, through the local inspector, of the practice of this school. The Department had been planning to introduce a HSCL scheme. The appointment of the principal as National Coordinator was intended to promote and extend HSCL practices.

The National Coordinator brought to the appointment the experience of a ten-year principalship, during the 1980s, in an 800 pupil school in a designated area of disadvantage. Throughout these years, HSCL was established and strengthened through the Parents' Room, courses and activities for parents, preparation of and involvement in classroom work and home visitation. This was possible because teachers were taken through a process of preparation which enabled them to embrace parent partnership with varying degrees of commitment. In a Memorandum

for Schools the Department of Education said of this principal "Over the period of her principalship she has led her staff to the development of a HSCL programme and has developed considerable personal and professional skills" (Department of Education, 1990: 6). Linked to the development work with the staff of this school, a teacher was released from classroom teaching to work until mid-day each day with parent development. In the afternoon the same teacher worked with colleagues in the classroom developing a coordinated approach towards music in the school.

The Department of Education explained the role of the National Coordinator: "to advise, support and animate the local coordinators and the local committees. She will liaise with the local coordinators on an individual, local and school cluster basis and will act as a liaison person between the cluster areas and the National Steering Committee" (Department of Education, 1991: 6). In a short time this role developed into the preparation and provision of on-going in-career development for coordinators, principals and staffs, while work with the Local Committees and Boards of Management soon followed.

In September 1992, an Assistant National Coordinator was appointed to the scheme to work in the Dublin area. Among the duties of the National and Assistant National Coordinators were:

- to visit schools;
- to support coordinators in their role as change agents;
- to develop coordinators' interpersonal skills;
- to build coordinators' personal and professional networking capacity;
- to liaise with coordinators in their Cluster Groups (2.3.6);
- to attend and develop Local Committees (2.3.7);

- to enable coordinators to undertake needs analysis, to research possible progress, to design and to develop suitable responses;
- to promote on-going evaluation and assessment of the HSCL scheme locally, regionally and nationally.

In addition, the role of the National Coordinator encompasses

- introductory meetings for school management;
- in-career development for coordinators, principals and school staffs.

While the foregoing is an outline of the role of the National and Assistant National Coordinator it is also a summary of the organisational and operational structures of the HSCL scheme. The National Coordinator has also been involved in the development of the Department of Education "Early Start" pre-school project in forty locations with concentrations of disadvantage. Early Start is a preventative initiative focused on the most marginalised three year olds. Each centre is staffed by a primary school teacher and a childcare worker. In addition the National Coordinator has responsibility for "Breaking the Cycle", rural dimension. This initiative is focused on schools with fewer than five teachers. These schools serve dispersed populations which have concentrations of children who are at risk of not reaching their potential in the school system. A fourth project with which she is associated is the Department of Education "Early School Leavers' Initiative" (ESLI), focused on small groups of children, again in designated areas of disadvantage, who are in danger of dropping out of the education system. This project is very closely allied to the HSCL scheme. The coordinator of ESLI and of HSCL work very closely together in the on-going training for both schemes. A fifth, and final project, in which the National Coordinator is involved is the revised "Support Teacher" programme. This is a programme of support for primary schools, in disadvantaged areas, which have numbers of children who are "dis-

ruptive, disturbed or withdrawn". Support teachers are expected to teach "suitably adapted core areas of the curriculum" in a way that is appropriate to the "level of need and attentive capacities" of the child (Department of Education, 1998).

### **2.3.3 INTRODUCTORY MEETING**

When the Department of Education invites a school to become part of the HSCL scheme, there is an introductory meeting for the chairperson, the principal and a representative staff member from each school. The purpose of the introductory meeting is:

- to disseminate information regarding the aims, basic principles, rationale and practices of the HSCL scheme;
- to advise school representatives regarding their written response to the invitation to join the scheme;
- to outline procedures for the appointment of coordinators;
- to hear and to work through the expectations concerns and queries participants might have regarding their involvement in the HSCL scheme.

The introductory meetings began in 1990, at the inception of the scheme, and continued with each extension to the scheme since. This writer knows from observation that in the early years of these meetings, there was a lot of fear and tension stemming from anxiety around change and the involvement of parents. This is quite different now as issues have been clarified for new schools to the scheme by virtue of the practice on the ground in other schools. It is evident from the progress and from the development of the scheme that the questions now arising are different.

In 1993, a further development in the HSCL scheme took the form of a contract. The following is a copy of the letter returned by schools to the Department of Education on their acceptance of the invitation to join the HSCL scheme. This

letter acts as a contract between the Board of Management and the staff of the school with the Department of Education.

A Chara,

Further to your recent letter and the local information meeting, I wish to notify you formally of our acceptance of your invitation to join the Department's Home, School, Community Liaison scheme for schools in designated areas of disadvantage.

In accepting your invitation we will endeavour to ensure that:

- the coordinator will be viewed as an important school and community resource;
- the coordinator will be afforded the necessary freedom and flexibility to develop the role taking local circumstance/conditions into consideration;
- the thrust of the liaison activities will be preventative and will not involve the coordinator in routine interaction with children;
- the coordinator's work will focus on the adults (parents and teachers) whose attitudes and behaviours impinge on the lives of children in order to enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their lifelong attitudes to learning;
- the coordinator will identify parents' needs through home visitation and through formal and informal meetings and will facilitate and coordinate meeting those needs;
- the coordinator will have the support of the Board and of the principal and the co-operation of the staff (i) in fostering partnership with parents, (ii) in developing the 'whole school' approach, (iii) in engaging the skills, knowledge and experience of staff and parents in collaborative effort in the interest of the children's education and (iv) in establishing a Local Committee;
- the coordinator will not undertake or be expected to undertake any existing role in the school, or in the community;
- the National Coordinator will be invited to (i) brief applicants for the post of coordinator about the aspects of the scheme and (ii) advise the appointment board about the coordinator's role;
- funds allocated for the development of the liaison scheme will be made available to the coordinator and accounted for by her/him;
- the Board of Management and the school staff will co-operate with the National Coordinator in developing the thrust of the scheme.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Principal.                      Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
On behalf of the school staff.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Chairperson.                      Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
On behalf of the Board of Management.



In 1993, all schools already in the HSCL scheme and those joining the scheme were required to complete this letter. This was a determined effort to copperfasten structures and processes in relation to HSCL. When this letter has been returned the selection procedure for the coordinator begins.

### **2.3.3.1 SELECTION OF THE LOCAL COORDINATOR**

In the HSCL scheme the coordinator must be an existing staff member, with standing in the eyes of colleagues, of parents and of the community. The selection of the coordinator, the pre-service and the in-service process is as follows:

- the post of coordinator is advertised by the chairperson internally in the relevant school(s);
- the interview and selection of the coordinator is conducted by the principal(s), chairperson(s) and an independent person;
- the newly appointed coordinator is asked to visit selected schools;
- the newly appointed coordinator learns about his/her own local situation for about one month;
- there is then an invitation from the Department of Education to the newly appointed person to an initial one-week training module;
- the learning during training intertwines experience and theory with opportunities to appropriate what is learned;
- preparation is then made for the transfer of learning and the return to work in the school;
- finally, support in the transfer of learning to the local situation is available.

Bramley sums up this process as the "pre-programme", the "programme" and the "post-programme" (Bramley, 1991: 36). This process will be further developed in the next section (2.3.4).

### **2.3.4 IN-CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

As already stated, the HSCL scheme demands from professionals new attitudes which challenge their approaches and values. The work of the coordinator in

strengthening family and community bonds with the school has required the provision of a comprehensive in-career development programme. The programme for coordinators has encompassed personal and professional development, together with leadership and management skills.

Research shows that effective in-career development sessions should begin with the identification of a need. The gap between the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for a particular job and the levels currently held by the participants should be part of the consideration. The existence of a training need states that a change is necessary, "a change from a situation or performance which is below that level required to at least the required level. The change agent is the training event" (Rae, 1997: 13, see also Wills, 1993). It is widely held in the literature today that ownership of the training process will evolve if a "partnership is produced between the three parties, learner, boss and trainer, each contributing their own special expertise" (Rae, 1997: 16). Bramley holds a similar view speaking of training as "a systematic process with some planning and control rather than random learning from experience... concerned with changing concepts, skills and attitudes... [improving] effectiveness...of the organization" (Bramley,1991: xv). Rae speaks about the "need" that leads to the "training event" and Reay gives in synopsis form the key questions relating to the design of in-career development sessions:

- were the "training needs properly identified?"
- were the "learning objectives relevant?"
- were the "performance standards correctly set?"
- were the "right priorities established?" (Reay, 1994: 55).

It can be stated that in-career development training which was provided through the HSCL scheme is linked with all the above findings.

The purpose of in-career development provision is to improve the performance of coordinators so that the effectiveness of the school can be enhanced. According to Rae, "the purpose of training is not to satisfy the trainer or the training function...but to provide the learners with the opportunity to improve their *skills for the benefit of the organization*" (Rae, 1997: 75). In designing in-career development programmes since September 1990, the inservice planning team constantly viewed and reviewed:

- the expected changes resulting from the in-career development programmes in terms of *individual* performance;
- how these perceived changes could link into *the effective organisation of the school as a whole*, the principal, staff, parents, Board of Management, Local Committees, and wider community, thus affecting pupil performance;
- how these changes could bring about the *overall vision* of the HSCL scheme to maximise pupil potential (Bramley, 1991: 1-35).

In their first year the HSCL coordinators are offered a minimum of eight days in-career development in their role. During each of the following years, coordinators receive four days in-career development per year. In addition, training and development takes place at cluster meetings of coordinators (2.3.6).

#### **2.3.4.1 THE METHOD USED AT IN-CAREER DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS:**

- input of material;
- interaction with the facilitator and with participants;
- group work.

**Input of material** is designed to develop coordinators on a number of levels:

- personal development;
- professional development, including skills development;

- rationale and current/developing practices of the HSCL Scheme;
- findings from HSCL type schemes and relevant research evidence.

**Interaction** with the facilitator and among participants takes place regularly to clarify issues and to promote the transfer of learning in the coordinator's home base.

**Group work** is designed to meet:

- the needs, expectations and fears that coordinators have;
- the needs of a developing scheme.

We shall now take a closer look at the topics covered and the skills developed during in-career development sessions.

#### **2.3.4.2 COMPONENTS OF IN-CAREER DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS**

##### **Personal Development**

The personal development of coordinators has been concerned with the positive aspects of self-esteem, decision-making, experience of respect, empowerment and the ability to delegate as positive attributes of the coordinators themselves. It has also been concerned with being models of these qualities and influencing teachers and parents to develop the same skills. Coordinators are also trained and supported so that they can: cope with negative feelings and blocks to progress, work to develop positive attitudes and hopefulness in others, and still maintain their energy.

##### **Skills development**

In the skills development area the following topics were covered: active listening; observation methods; body language; communication; feedback process; trust building and a sense of belonging.

## **Group work**

Within group work the following was undertaken: how to set up a group; how groups function; characteristics of groups; belonging to a group; inner circles; group turnover; stages of development; responsibility in groups; dependence/independence/interdependence in groups; group defences and ending a group.

## **Managing/Leading /Planning/Monitoring/Evaluating**

In the area of managing, leading, planning, monitoring and evaluating the following have been included: sense of purpose; value system; vision statement; mission statement; naming goals; defining objectives; methods of organisation; implementation process and including an understanding of the work cycle; time management and systematic monitoring, evaluating, and delegating.

Action research involves coordinators reflecting on their practice, reviewing strengths and weaknesses, revising the practice, acting on it and reflecting again on a cyclical basis. The HSCL scheme encourages this model.

## **Meetings**

Training in the theory and practical aspects of meetings included: preparation for meetings; purpose of meeting; processes used and named outcomes, including conditions necessary for the implementation of outcomes.

## **Partnership and the Scheme in Ireland**

In 1990 and 1991, the theory and practice of partnership in the HSCL scheme was facilitated by an employee of the Strathclyde Education Department during in-career development for coordinators.

Within the partnership module other aspects covered over the years were the clarification of roles including inherent rights and responsibilities. The rationale

of the scheme designed to meet Irish needs was explored. *The Basic Principles* of the scheme in Ireland were worked through. Experience of partnership from other countries was shared.

### **Topics and Processes**

In relation to general topics, and the processes used, the following were included:

- models of education and their implications;
- processes to identify needs, gifts and differences;
- evaluation models on an individual and group basis;
- the need for and use of structures;
- leadership, including change, attitudes, creativity, empowerment, motivation, delegation, issues around power and the use of power, conflict resolution and oppression;
- feelings—understanding/owning/experience of;
- counselling skills.

### **2.3.4.3 OUTCOMES FROM IN-CAREER DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS**

It would appear from talking to school personnel and from the research evidence that the foregoing topics/processes/skills development have consequences for schools (5.4). The effects for schools which vary in degree include the following:

- the on-going development of the parent as prime educator;
- the continuing growth of cluster groups;
- the setting up of Local Committees;
- the development of a whole-school approach;
- the increased effectiveness of coordinators working with principals and the Board of Management;
- the training of parents as home visitors, facilitators of courses and classes and deliverers of services with local communities;

- a start in the formation of school policy between groups of parents and teachers in 94.0 per cent of the schools in the HSCL scheme;
- the linking with other services to schools in designated areas e.g. Early Start, Support Teachers and Early School Leavers' Initiative;
- networking with voluntary and statutory bodies;
- an ease in transfer from home to primary school and from primary to the post-primary sector.

The topics covered at in-career development training are given further treatment within the normal HSCL scheme sequence of review-plan-implement-review. Coordinators need sustained support so that the learning at in-career development sessions does not lose momentum on return to school. The importance of coordinators appropriating this learning cannot be over stressed so that new behavioural attitudes and practices become routine.

The second last phase of the training cycle is the "incorporation into normal work of new ways of thinking or carrying out tasks" (Bramley, 1991: 25). In a number of schools, coordinators have been actively supported by the principal and management in the transfer of learning. In other situations it was presumed that the coordinator had the motivation and the ability to introduce the HSCL scheme alone, while in some settings it seemed that coordinators were inhibited in the fulfilling of their role. In order to further facilitate the transfer of learning and the development of the scheme, action plans are a priority during in-career development training. The "analysis of situations which are likely to test the new learning and the consideration of strategies to enlist support and to deflect opposition" have also been carefully considered through leadership training and conflict resolution modules during in-career development sessions (Ibid.).

The final phase, and yet one that began with the identification of its need, is evaluation. In the HSCL training programme, evaluation runs throughout the

process and afterwards into the work place through school visits to coordinators by the National and Assistant National Coordinators where the needs for in-career development training in the future are identified. To expand the process of evaluation more fully it can be stated that there is:

- on-going review with participants during the modules, with opportunities for the group to change the direction;
- an open-ended question validation review at the end of the session;
- action planning, which is not specifically an evaluation but a personal contract on the part of the learner himself/herself takes place;
- constant evaluation identified through job behaviour/performance at school and community level;
- identification of the extent to which the local school community has acknowledged, accepted and promoted the ideals of the HSCL scheme and the partnership process and the extent to which pupils are staying within the educational system and are benefiting from it. Evaluation is at all times carried out with people, it is not done for them or to them.

The action planning above is also an opportunity for the National Coordinator or Assistant National Coordinator to link with the individual to determine the success or otherwise of the plan at a later stage. While an evaluation was never carried out on the costs attributable to the training function, and the ensuing outcome at school level, it is the perception of the Department of Education personnel, that in-career development training has been cost effective. However, it is recommended that "fixed costs" such as salaries of those involved in training, "supportive cost" including travelling, subsistence, room hire and accommodation cost and "opportunity costs" relating to salaries of absent coordinators be considered from a monetary viewpoint (Rae, 1997: 149).

At this point the following should be stated. A National Coordinator could choose to be the organiser/coordinator of in-career development sessions and for some this might be a wise and valid choice. In this particular situation it is per-



ceived by the Department of Education personnel to be valuable, beneficial and enriching for the scheme that the National Coordinator has been in a position and has had the personal capacity to be in a hands-on mode as co-designer, deliverer-facilitator and co-assessor of in-career development modules. This has given credibility to training because of her depth of knowledge and experience, it has allowed for creativity and flexibility on any given day during the modules and it has enabled the delivery of material from an experiential and theoretical point of view. Most significantly it has allowed interaction, encouragement and immediate feedback so that coordinators are helped in their ownership of the scheme.

#### **2.3.4.4 AN ASPECT OF IN-CAREER DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF ACTION RESEARCH**

While still speaking on in-career development, it seems appropriate to outline some of the work done in the HSCL scheme, within the framework of action research and delivered during the training for coordinators. Altrichter, Posch and Somekh define action research as

research carried out by people directly concerned with the social situation that is being researched...starts from practical questions...must be compatible with the educational values of the school...offers a repertoire of simple methods and strategies for researching and developing practice...is characterised by a continuing effort to closely interlink, relate and confront action and reflection...[while] reflection opens up new options for action and is examined by being realised in action" (Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh, 1993: 6).

It was the insight gleaned from Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh together with the expertise and experience of the coordinators that prompted their training to deliver ten workshops. These workshops related to their work practices. Each of the ten clusters chose a topic at the Autumn 1995 in-career development session which they agreed to research and put into practice during the 1995-1996 academic year. The preparation of each workshop was the responsibility of the entire cluster. The workshops reflected the stated needs of the coordinators and involved working

through the purpose, preparation, process and intended outcomes. Each topic was researched at local level with the National Coordinator and the fact that the workshops were experience-based added significantly to their usefulness. "Connecting theory to practice is more than examining instructional effectiveness and devising new forms of professional development. It also means placing research in the service of teaching and school improvement" (National Academy of Education, 1991: 19). The workshops were delivered during Autumn 1996. We shall now outline each workshop and the process used.

#### **2.3.4.5 WORKSHOPS AT HSCL IN-CAREER DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF ACTION RESEARCH**

The ten workshops are outlined here in order to highlight the action research element in their preparation and presentation. Key words that will keep emerging are: research, adapt, evaluate, reflect on, refine, monitor and deliver.

*Supporting Families through the Development Stages:* This workshop explored the development stages of the child/pupil 0-18. It identified the relevant supports, links and programmes for parents. Group work dealt in detail with specific projects appropriate to Early Start, Junior Primary, Senior Primary and Post-Primary. Coordinators researched the theory of development stages, identified the needs of parents, provided trainers to work with parents, and monitored the process. The work was evaluated, reflected on, refined and delivered at in-career development.

*Group Functioning:* The aim of this workshop was to highlight successful elements of group dynamics and how these related to cluster meetings (2.3.6 and 2.3.6.1) and other group settings. In addition strategies to promote participation, inclusion, co-operation and conflict resolution were outlined. The workshop involved practical exercises which could be used in any group situation. This workshop was particularly relevant to coordinators as "Cluster Groups" were

going through a growth process (2.3.6). Again the theory was researched, adapted, delivered by appropriate personnel, monitored, evaluated, reflected on and refined. The outcome was delivered at in-career development.

***Parents and Teachers Working Together:*** This workshop explored the possibility of parents and teachers working together in small groups in order to enable both parties to come to a deeper understanding of their different roles and the responsibilities that accompany those roles. Emphasis was placed on a process approach leading to parent involvement in policy making. As the process of policy making was part of an action research module, in its own right, it will be dealt with in detail (2.4.1).

***Children at Risk:*** This workshop provided an opportunity for participants to explore the complex issue of children at risk. Various initiatives that coordinators had found successful in supporting families at risk were presented. An art therapy programme, a special needs team and parent/pupil interventions were outlined. Once more, groups prepared during a full academic year. Material on "at risk" was researched, needs identified at local level, suitably qualified trainers were employed and programmes were delivered to parents and to children. The process was monitored, evaluated, reflected on, amended and the outcomes were delivered during in-career development.

***Transfer Programmes:*** This workshop provided an opportunity for exploring the process of working with parents on transfer programmes from the pre-school to Leaving Certificate. It provided input and resource packs concerning transfer at post-primary level. It gave an opportunity for a group who focused on the topic for a year to share the outcome of their research and findings with the entire group of coordinators during in-career development.

***The Care Team:*** The Care Team refers to a group of teachers with specialised responsibility within a school for children at risk. The principal and coordinator are usually members of this team which links into the pastoral care system of the school. The purpose of this workshop was to create an awareness of the value of teamwork with particular emphasis on the role of the coordinator in this area. Experiences were shared around initiating, developing, maintaining and evaluating a care team. The concept of care team includes specialised teams, pastoral care teams, support groups, etc.

***Staff Development:*** The purpose of this workshop was to direct attention to the value of staff development, to help identify staff needs and possible blocks and to share examples of working models. The process included delivery of material, use of video and group discussion. This workshop was timely as there were renewed efforts in the HSCL scheme to involve staff in the process of change. This is part of the role of the coordinator and the success with staff rests very much on the attitude of the principal.

***Parents and Post-Primary Classrooms:*** The aim of this workshop was to explore the possibility of parents working in the post-primary classroom. Currently, parents are identifying and helping to meet the needs of pupils in some post-primary schools. The programmes they run include drug awareness, young adult assertiveness, first year retreat mornings and growing in faith together programmes. Outlines of programmes and information on training requirements were provided. Again the experience provided during this workshop was researched, practiced, evaluated and refined. The outcome was particularly welcome because only a very small number of coordinators had parents involved in post-primary classrooms.

***The Local Committee:*** This workshop focused on a working understanding of local committees and incorporated the following elements: functions, membership, dynamics, planning, progression, administration, methods of evaluation and delivery during in-career development. Specific reference was made to models currently operating. The establishment of Local Committees has proved tedious. Coordinators have been slow to accept responsibility for setting up and monitoring a committee. Further analysis of the Local Committee can be found in 2.3.7 and 5.4.2.

***Developing Self-Esteem:*** This workshop examined the nature of self-esteem. It explored ways of fostering self-esteem so that parents would believe in themselves and be enabled to develop their children. The process included the giving of material, interaction, and group work. Coordinators got a practical model/guidelines for running a self-esteem programme with parents or other groups from this workshop. The need to develop self-esteem at local level proved to be high on the coordinator's agenda. Two cluster groups researched, experimented, evaluated and amended their experiences in the course of a year and then delivered the workshop at in-career development. It was particularly well received.

Lomax sees action research "as a disciplined method for improving practices in order to bring about educationally worthwhile outcomes" (Lomax, 1996: 152). She further states that the classic cycle of "plan, act, observe and reflect" needs the "different vocabulary" of "question, listen, think and change" (Ibid., 50). Speaking of teachers examining their practice Whitehead has this to say: "they are developing ways of understanding practice which involves the systematic examination of practical problems. They are imagining solutions, acting and evaluating

the outcomes of their actions" (Whitehead, 1995: ix). This could be said of the coordinators in relation to their preparation, practice and delivery of the ten workshops. When this type of "teacher/researcher movement" becomes integrated into in-career development provision it makes "an important contribution to professional knowledge" (Ibid., x). Through in-career development evaluation this has proved true in relation to the workshops.

### **2.3.5 VISITS TO SCHOOLS BY THE NATIONAL AND ASSISTANT NATIONAL COORDINATORS**

The National Coordinator and the Assistant National Coordinator visit schools on a regular basis. The main focus when visiting a school is to support the local coordinator. In listening to the local coordinator's account of his/her work the story of the HSCL scheme in the school is heard. A form of SWOT Analysis, (the Scott Analysis: Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Targets and Threats), is used as an informal mechanism for meaningful, in-depth discussion.

The process on visits is as follows:

- successes are recounted and affirmed;
- needs are expressed and discussed;
- advice is sought and followed by shared reflection;
- blockages are named and worked through;
- realistic goals are considered and aligned with the overall vision of the HSCL scheme;
- monitoring and evaluation techniques are enlisted.

Another important aspect of school visitation is to animate the school personnel: principal, teachers, parents, chairpersons of Boards of Management and members of the wider community. The aim is to encourage and facilitate them to live out the shared vision of partnership in education as defined and exercised in each

school community. A visit from the National and Assistant National Coordinator often holds out hope to people who live and work in difficult and demanding conditions. Their visits are also a conduit for data gathering. Knowledge gained from first-hand experience of the HSCL scheme in action at ground level is used to inform and transform the direction of the scheme at national level. School visits are also an opportunity for networking and for both the encouragement and support of this practice. Networking in many instances has:

- enhanced respect for the family through more comprehensive services;
- encouraged greater uptake of educational opportunities;
- maximised personal resources such as shared thoughts/pooled talents;
- established effective, economical budgetary practices;
- facilitated time-management and provided an in-built support structure for individuals and groups (see also 2.4.2).

We now outline from the National Coordinator's Annual Report in 1993-1994 how every effort was made during school visits to involve staff members in the HSCL scheme through:

- encouraging coordinators to focus on this area of work;
- discussing with coordinators ways of involving the principal and staff;
- sharing positive current practice about the liaison scheme and the process involved with staff members and with coordinators;
- the facilitation of staff sessions regarding rationale and practice of the scheme;
- encouraging in-career development for teachers, helping to raise their self-esteem and confidence and leading them to work with parents in a more equal partnership and supporting principals in working towards a whole school approach (Department of Education, 1994b).

A further development and important initiative in 1995-1996 was the training of coordinators to act as facilitators to school staffs. The eighty-three new schools that joined the HSCL scheme in September 1995 were invited to avail of the services of a staff facilitator, one of the twenty-three experienced coordinators

who received training as staff facilitators. This was considered to be a delegation of one of the important duties of the National Coordinator.

### **2.3.6 CLUSTER GROUPS**

From the initial stage, clusters of coordinators were established on a regional basis. The Department of Education had given some norms: "Depending on the demographic structure of the clusters or of areas within clusters, the coordinators will work on an inter-school, local and cluster level and will act as mutually supportive and co-operative teams using their complementary skills to the best advantage" (Department of Education, 1991: 5). At this point in time four different types of cluster meeting have developed within the HSCL scheme. They are identified as follows:

- clusters of coordinators serving the same local community and known as "family clusters" of coordinators;
- clusters of coordinators serving a number of communities within the same geographic area and known as "local clusters";
- multiple "local clusters" known as the "cluster group";
- meetings of chairpersons, principals, coordinators, some parents, and departmental personnel who meet annually and are known as "regional clusters".

#### **2.3.6.1 CLUSTER MEETINGS**

The "family cluster" and the "local cluster" have developed with reasonable ease and, apart from an unhealthy competitive element at times, have proved an invaluable structure for coordinators. The purposes of the "family cluster" is to plan in such a way that coordinators use their time, their personal resources, and financial resources wisely. It is of paramount importance that only one coordinator visits a family. This ensures the "respectful intervention" which Pantin speaks about (1.8.9.1) and which the HSCL scheme seeks to emulate. The "family cluster" meets once or twice per week. The "local cluster" meets on a monthly basis



for about two hours when coordinators support each other and plan on a local cluster basis. This ensures work between schools and between different communities.

We now leave the "local cluster" and move to the "cluster group". The "cluster group" formed from a number of "local clusters" has been problematic since its inception in 1990 as can be gathered from the following extract from the National Coordinator's annual report 1992-1993. Coordinators expressed dissatisfaction, in May 1992, with cluster group meetings. Cluster work was redesigned in September 1992 along the following lines and we quote details of the proposed new method:

- a day per month would be designated for each cluster or multi-cluster;
- an agenda and minutes would be circulated in advance of the meeting;
- the meeting would be held in one of the cluster schools from 09.00 hours to 14.30 hours" (Department of Education, 1993a: 31).

In addition it was decided that the format for the cluster meeting would include:

- review, evaluation and forward planning components;
- meeting in sub-groups to share current good practice and to examine 'blocks' which were encountered;
- an in-service component;
- the facility to meet the National and the Assistant National Coordinators on an individual basis;
- an opportunity to work as sub-groups, for example, primary, post-primary and primary and post-primary serving the same families (Ibid.).

One year later coordinators expressed the following:

- their need for trust building between members of the cluster;
- their need for non-competitive, open, honest sharing of current practice at cluster group meetings;
- negative feelings about their ability to move on and develop their own cluster;
- anxiety around the formation of some clusters;
- anxiety about new cluster members;
- anxiety around the presence of the National and Assistant National Coordinators at cluster meetings;
- a need for relevant research material (Department of Education, 1994a: 1).

The National Coordinator responded to the needs of the coordinators by providing structured input training at cluster meetings and at in-career development on topics such as time management and group skills. She also circulated suitable reading material. The National and Assistant National Coordinators:

- heard coordinators' views;
- supported the blending of new and experienced coordinators;
- encouraged coordinators to recognise and use their own/others' particular strengths;
- worked through the coordinators' anxiety at the presence of the National and Assistant Coordinators at cluster meetings and supported coordinators through listening on an individual and group basis (Ibid., 2).

The hope was that time management skills would help coordinators:

- to plan;
- to evaluate;
- to delegate more effectively.

The group skills development provided should have helped coordinators:

- to understand how people behave in groups;
- to create safe structures for themselves at cluster group meetings;
- to respect and be sensitive to each other's needs;
- to hear and value each coordinator's contribution and work practice.

It is the view of HSCL personnel in the Department that skills acquired at in-career development sessions should be modelled at cluster meetings and transferred at local community level. Between 1995 and 1997 evaluations were carried out on the value of the monthly cluster meeting by the clusters themselves and reported on to the National and Assistant National Coordinators. Following repeated requests from over half of the coordinators, during the 1996-1997 academic year, a decision was made by the HSCL team in the Department of Educa-

tion, during the Summer of 1997, to experiment with the full day cluster on a termly basis.

The final type of cluster to be dealt with in this section is the "regional cluster" meeting. These meetings are convened for coordinators, principals, chairpersons of Boards of Management, some parents, and departmental personnel on an annual basis.

The purpose of these meetings is:

- to hear the needs at local level;
- to share the good practice of the HSCL scheme;
- to appraise the relevant people of developments within the scheme;
- to consider liaison within the context of the various interventions and research findings relating to educational disadvantage;
- to be involved as a team in the ongoing evaluation of the scheme;
- to provide school inspectors and psychologists with an opportunity to keep abreast of development in the HSCL scheme and to inform themselves of initiatives undertaken in local schools.

It is not always feasible for inspectors, teachers, coordinators and principals to engage in lengthy discussion on HSCL matters during a school day. On the regional cluster day the topic is focused, the atmosphere more amenable for discussion and reflection and opportunities can present themselves for sharing of theory and practice. It has proved to be very meaningful for both parties when inspectors and school personnel engage in discussion on a different level.

It is illustrative to outline two examples where coordinators worked as a team in two different "local cluster" areas: parents as community leaders and parents as educational home visitors.

### **2.3.6.2 PARENTS AS COMMUNITY LEADERS**

In one situation in 1994-1995 coordinators provided advanced training for parents. The thirteen coordinators in this local cluster selected parents who they deemed to be ready for further training. Some parents with basic training volunteered to participate in the advanced training and were selected. Some parents selected were already deeply involved in the community. A group of parents and coordinators was set up to monitor this process.

#### **The programmes used in the advanced training**

- The *Parents in Education* programme was funded by the Department of Education and delivered by the National College of Ireland (NCI).
- The Partners Programme (i) and (ii), a community leadership training programme was based on the principles of Freire and enabled people to take a more responsible role in their communities. The training programme had five main elements which were: skills in human relationships, organisational development, an introduction to social analysis, the principles and methods of Freire and the concept of transformation.
- Group facilitation skills were provided in NUI Maynooth.
- Family Studies were held in the Marino Institute of Education. Coordinators financed parents who attended this programme in family development.
- Local Committee training was funded by the Department of Education and delivered by NCI.

#### **The process used in advanced training**

- There was parental involvement in the initial planning of the NCI and NUI Maynooth programmes. Parents were involved in planning the Partners Programmes every week.
- Coordinators stayed in touch with the course providers and participants and supported all the training programmes provided for parents. Their involvement varied from a non-structured to a structured one. In the case of the Partners Programme six coordinators participated with the parents.
- There was continuous formal and informal evaluation of the programmes.

The outcomes from advanced training were:

- parent-to-parent contact;
- a trained pool of parents providing local leadership;
- more efficient and effective cluster work;
- more time for creative work on the part of coordinators, due to the process of delegation;
- increased focus on the school in the community forging local links and the development of the partnership process.

In this cluster sixty parents have completed advanced training programmes in community leadership over the last three years. In the school year 1996-1997 coordinators worked to access funding collaboratively. These trained parents now offer their services in a leadership role within the school community.

#### **2.3.6.3 PARENTS AS EDUCATIONAL HOME VISITORS**

The second "local cluster" where a creative initiative took place involving eleven coordinators was the training of parents as educational home visitors. In 1996-1997, coordinators co-operated in setting up the educational home visitors programme across school levels. The HSCL coordinators targeted a group of parents whose children attended the local schools. These parents had become actively involved in school life at many levels. The coordinators realised their potential and believed that with training they could be a resource in helping other parents. They had hoped to involve these parents as educational home visitors.

The home visiting programme was discussed at local cluster level and the coordinators made a proposal to the Area Based Partnership (2.4.2.1) and got funding for the first year of the project. A twelve-week training programme preceded the work in the homes. The outcome was that thirty parents were trained as educational home visitors. Their work has been mainly concerned with

visiting parents in the summer term on transfer programmes relating to moving from Early Start to Junior Infants, from second class to third class and from sixth class to first year post-primary.

Each home visitor was equipped with a relevant information pack for the primary and/or post-primary sectors. These packs contained information about school activities, uniform, book rental schemes, policies on homework, bullying and discipline. Evaluation of home visitation was carried out by each coordinator with the family cluster and its parents. The families who were visited valued the experience. On the whole, the home visitors found their task easy and pleasant.

### **2.3.7 LOCAL COMMITTEES**

The role of local committees is defined by the Department of Education as one of advising and supporting the local coordinator. Its vision is clear from the following:

Depending on active support and enthusiasm being present, the committee would have a representative from the school board of management. There would be school staff representation, parents' representatives, and there would be representation from voluntary and statutory agencies in the area. These latter representatives (parental and agency) would be identified by the local coordinators through the networking activities and involvement in the committees would be by invitation, initially at least. (Department of Education 1, 1992: 6).

The membership of local committees is divided equally between parents and representatives of voluntary and statutory agencies in the community. As with the HSCL scheme in general, so too specifically in relation to the Local Committees, the aim was to build the activity from the community upwards. It was envisaged that the work, energy, and creativity to see any project through to completion must come from parents and community groups. It was the belief also that programmes had to be practical, appropriate to the needs of the community, planned on their terms and delivered in their language. The multiplier effect was stressed

from the beginning. It was, and is, the task of Local Committees to identify school related issues, at community level, and to seek to address them by working collaboratively with other interest groups.

Transfer needs, relating to progression from home to school and from one school level to another within the system, have been addressed by Local Committees. School attendance issues, drugs awareness and self-esteem projects have also been targeted. The strength of the Local Committee is partnership in action. In 5.4.2.1 we shall find the positive "consequences" of Local Committees. The community element was not strong initially and the observation of the National and Assistant National Coordinators from attendance at Local Committee meetings was that the professionals did the talking instead of drawing out and including the parents. In the interval between Local Committee meetings the coordinator regularly meets the "core group" of parents to facilitate the development of committee skills and to enable parents to express their point of view. In fact all coordinators have a core group of involved parents who work with them and support the aims of HSCL. Most of the Local Committee members have done training together on the development of teams, committee work, partnership, and community development.

In 1998, eight years after the inception of the HSCL scheme, just one third of the schools had a Local Committee. A challenge to the development of their committees seems to have been a lack of clarity around the role and function of such a body which is essentially voluntary and subject to the Board of Management. The need for an additional committee was not obvious to many principals and coordinators since other committees often existed. In 5.4.2.2, we shall find details on the "blocks" to setting up the Local Committee. However, that too is

changing. The current climate and the flow of literature which accepts the mutually interacting roles of community and school has opened up possibilities for the development of Local Committees (see Sergiovanni, 1994 and 1996 and Shepard, 1997). In addition "different geographical areas and groups of people dictate that there cannot be a uniform solution" when it comes to the linking of community and school (Thomson, 1991: 195).

### **2.3.8 EVALUATION PROCEDURES**

The official evaluation structures in the HSCL scheme were operated through the Educational Research Centre 1990-1993. The ensuing report is now in two forms: (i) a report by Ryan of the Educational Research Centre (Dublin) commissioned by the Department of Education and covering almost the first three years of the scheme (Ryan, 1994); (ii) a Ph.D. thesis based on this research, in Western Michigan University two years later (Ryan, 1996).

Ryan's research proceeds descriptively and is based on questionnaires to fifty-five primary schools in the scheme, initially for base line data. Six schools were studied in depth, with extensive interviewing and standardised achievement testing which was carried out in English and Mathematics in first, third and fifth classes in primary schools. Thirteen post-primary schools were included in year two and three of the general evaluation.

The present dissertation differs (1) in being a study from within the scheme (2) in quantitative research being sought for all 182 existing schools as of 30th June 1994 (3) in the focus on the coordinator as a key innovative contribution of the Irish scheme (4) in the detailing and evaluating of in-career development (5) in carrying out of action research (6) in highlighting scheme shortcoming through the findings and in setting out to rectify them (formative evaluation) and (7) in



carrying out a small comparative study with Scotland. As this thesis was done at a later time it was appropriate to give a more extensive literature review. The two dissertations can thus be seen as complementary and, as noted elsewhere, the first studies in areas that will need much further research.

Ryan indicated that "a considerable amount of activity was generated in schools", that the reaction to such activity "among teachers and parents was very positive", and that as a result "a major start" had been made in promoting "active co-operation between home and school" (Ryan, 1994: 201). She also held that "movement had occurred in realising the second aim of the HSCL scheme" that of raising the awareness of parents (Ibid.). Since many parents were "uninvolved" Ryan recommended that there might be "more intensive work in the home with mothers" (Ibid.). As we shall see later the training of parents as community leaders (2.3.6.2) and parents as educational home visitors (2.3.6.3) seeks to answer this need.

In the 1994 evaluation report it was noted that the community aspect of the scheme had "received less emphasis " (Ibid., 202). Again, in this dissertation we shall see how acceptance of the community as part of the school and vice versa is a growing phenomenon (5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.3, 5.4, 5.4.2.1 and 5.5.3, this dissertation).

Evaluation of the HSCL scheme as part of an integrated package of services of the Irish Government supported by the European Social Fund, to tackle disadvantage needs to take place.

While this thesis is a study of partnership in Irish education, it is also, in essence an evaluation of the HSCL scheme undertaken by the National Coordinator. The role of the National Coordinator, since the inception of the HSCL scheme has been outlined in 2.3.2 and indeed throughout this Chapter. Her involvement in

policy making and the implementation of that policy through the development of the HSCL scheme has been noted. The dual role has also been acknowledged in the Introduction. Precautions taken to remain objective will be discussed in Chapter Three. The findings will be available to the Department of Education and to the schools and interested parties.

The personal and professional development of coordinators has been dealt with at length in 2.3.4 above and outcomes of that development will be named in 5.1.5 and 5.2.4.

## **2.4 THE ROLE OF THE HSCL COORDINATOR**

We shall now examine the role of the HSCL coordinator as envisaged by the Department of Education. In keeping with the aims and principles of the liaison scheme, the local coordinator must address the development of the parent-teacher relationship and collaboration to enhance the nurturing of the whole child. This implies noting personal and leisure needs, the curricular and learning needs of parents so as to promote their self-worth and self-confidence. Equally, it implies the development of staff and teacher attitudes and behaviour so that the school becomes a community resource.

Coordinator initiatives are focused on adults, parents and teachers, rather than children but should impinge indirectly and over time on children's lives (2.2.4).

The initiatives are concerned with:

- promoting parents' education, development, growth and involvement;
- the participation of parents in their children's education including homework support;
- the provision of a parents' room and of crèche facilities for parents;
- developing principal and teacher attitudes and behaviour on partnership and a whole-school approach;

- engaging the complementary skills, experiences and knowledge of parents and teachers in collaborative effort.

Almost all initiatives including courses and classes for parents were organised as a direct result of a needs identification process held by the coordinators on both a formal and an informal basis (2.2.5). Examples of HSCL scheme activities for parents, organised by coordinators, can be categorised on four broad levels. There tends to be a pattern in the participation-involvement of parents, some parents progress through the following sequence, while others enter at a particular stage.

We now outline the sequence:

- leisure time activities;
- curricular activities in order to bring parents close to their children's learning;
- personal development courses including parenting, leadership skills development, and involvement in formal learning;
- parents supporting and becoming a resource to their own child/children, to coordinators and to teachers by organising activities. These parents pass on their skills to children by acting as teacher aides in the classroom and as support persons in the community.

It is held by the Department of Education that activities are never viewed as ends in themselves but rather as a means of enabling parents to fulfil their role as primary educators of their children, thus encouraging maximum benefit from the school system and retention in it. Parents are also encouraged to make decisions in relation to their own lives and those of their children. Activities included home maintenance, cookery, art and craft, money management, parents' choir, gardening, helping with the school environment and dancing. Through all the school activities parenting at an informal level took place, which in many instances led to formal parenting programmes. Curricular development generally centred around basic Mathematics, Irish, English and Computers in order to enable parents to help their own children. For senior primary and post-primary pupils parents got

involved in study skills procedures so that they could support their children's homework practice. In the areas of personal development and formal learning-education the following were included:

- parenting programmes for parents of children under twelve years old and for parents of teenagers, parenting and sex education, substance awareness programmes and child protection programmes;
- self-development programmes to raise self-worth and self-confidence;
- courses on facilitation skills for parents;
- pre-entry classes for parents on language, numeracy, nutrition and social skills. Toy libraries were established;
- transfer programmes were the focus of meetings organised jointly by primary and post-primary coordinators for parents of pre-entry pupils, 6th class pupils, their parents and their teachers;
- leadership and child care training programmes;
- formal learning spanning the spectrum from basic literacy to the Leaving Certificate.

Parents are a resource to their own children and also to the wider school community. As we have already noted, various programmes in schools, ranging from pre-entry through to Leaving Certificate level, enable parents to help and support their children's learning. Parents work with children in the classroom in such areas as reading/paired reading, art and craft activities, drama, library organisation, mathematics, computers and cookery. In addition to helping their own children with homework many parents are involved, on a rota basis, in community run "homework clubs" where children who have personal or home difficulties around homework are encouraged, helped and supported (see Chen and Stevenson, 1989). This branches out to include third level students who give their time and support on a voluntary basis. One teacher training college has students involved in pairs with Leaving Certificate pupils who have had babies. One student

teacher helps the young mother with her homework while the other student teacher cares for the baby. In another situation the young mothers come to the school on Saturday morning with their babies who are cared for in the crèche while their mothers are involved in personal development and parenting programmes. All these efforts are intended to support the young mother in parenting and to enable her to remain in education.

Parents have, for some time, facilitated parenting and personal development programmes for other parents. A further and exciting development in the training of parents as educational home visitors (2.3.6.3). This practice embodies the principle of delegation, of parents in the role of multiplier, and affords more opportunity to reach the most marginalised families. Parents who have been empowered and affirmed now have the capacity to visit other families and to offer support. Concerns such as homework, punctuality, uniforms, books, school transfer and bullying are dealt with on these visits. Parents are also a resource in some of the supervised study centres or "homework clubs" organised by coordinators for marginalised families and funded through the Area Based Partnership. The "core group" of involved parents who are close to the coordinator and to the activities of the HSCL scheme give of themselves constantly in a resource capacity as is evidenced in the findings in Chapter Five and again in Chapter Six when they were interviewed. These parents would have a very good understanding of themselves, of others, and of the school and wider community.

Other features of the role of the coordinator involved setting up a parents' room and crèche facilities. When difficulties arose, where perhaps a group of parents was dominant in the room, most coordinators have successfully facilitated a process to remedy this. The parents' room provided a forum for a non-verbal method

of communication and is one of the strongest ways of making parents feel comfortable and welcome in the school.

The role of the coordinator also includes a systematic approach to home visitation. Home visitation is a purposeful outreach dimension of the HSCL scheme to parents. It is both a symbolic and a real expression of interest in families many of which have been alienated from the educational system in the past. So the purpose of home visitation is clear. During the visits, coordinators give information and they support parents in the education of their children and seek to establish a rapport with the parents. Coordinators offer information about the services available in the community. They encourage parents to become involved with the community, to work with community needs and to harness community energy thereby enabling the community to solve its own problems. Through home visits the coordinators endeavour to show the welcoming, hopeful and human face of the school in the context and circumstances of daily life. Coordinators seek out families who are considered to have specific needs:

- parents of incoming pupils;
- parents of children transferring to post-primary;
- parents experiencing personal difficulties;
- parents "who never come" to the school.

Coordinators also seek out potential parent leaders who are willing to participate in the HSCL scheme's activities and to share their talents. These parents are directed towards relevant training. When visiting homes, coordinators aim at helping parents to:

- express their fears around approaching schools;
- break down negative attitudes;

- develop self-worth and self-confidence.

It is highly recommended by the Department of Education that home visitation be carried out in a caring way. Coordinators are expected to be sensitive to the needs of the person. Coordinators aim to be non-threatening and friendly and they work with the family agenda. Coordinators try to show a willingness to listen and and to stay as long as is necessary. If we can briefly anticipate some later findings we note that coordinators state that the quality of the contact far outweighs the relevance of quantity where home visits are involved. Encouragement is the key word in home visitation. There is a deep awareness that one is there for the good of the family and coordinators offer support and gently encourage parents into the school.

Regarding outcomes from home visitation, coordinators stated that being involved in visits is a learning experience where they get an insight into the real needs, fears, successes, frustration and interests of parents. Coordinators say parents are "impressed" that they "care enough to call". Listening to parents' needs strengthens bonds of trust and parents feel valued. As a result many parents have joined in school activities. The theory regarding home visitation, outlined by the Department of Education, should be clearly understood by coordinators. However, the findings in Chapter Five tell us that, up to the beginning of 1995 at least, home visitation was a neglected aspect of the HSCL scheme. This was the case despite repeated modules at in-career development sessions on home visitation and the emphasis on it as the most important aspect of the coordinator's work.

#### **2.4.1 PARENTS AND TEACHERS WORKING TOGETHER ON POLICY FORMATION**

In order to strengthen links between the home and the school, coordinators work with teachers, developing deeper awareness of pupil and family circum-

stances, promoting the concept of parental involvement in children's learning and providing opportunities for parent-teacher interaction. Some teachers continue to explore new ways of working with parents through identifying both their expectations and concerns for children. They also involve them in class behaviour and homework codes. An emerging focus and one that took almost three years to develop in the HSCL scheme, was that of parents and teachers working together in policy formation.

In the Spring of 1996 the principal of a large urban junior primary school facilitated the National Coordinator in working with sixteen staff members and sixteen parents. The National Coordinator in consultation with the group designed the workshops as the process evolved. The local HSCL coordinator was actively involved at all stages. She had approached the National Coordinator initially. The following Autumn the local coordinator delivered the process and outcomes as an in-career development module for coordinators. During the academic year 1996-1997 the process included two local coordinators coming to work with the experiment and continuing the process of policy formation. In March 1997 the policy outcomes in relation to "homework" and "good behaviour" were presented by teachers and parents at the "regional cluster" meeting. The following Autumn the outcomes were presented during in-career development sessions for coordinators. At this point all coordinators were asked by the National Coordinator to work on the development of policy within their schools. The emphasis was to be on process and not on outcomes.

In the 1997-1998 school year 94.0 per cent of the schools in the HSCL scheme formulated a draft policy on home, school, community relationships and practices. The emphasis was placed on the process and not on the outcome. At nine of the



ten "regional cluster" meetings in the Spring of 1998 the following strengths of the policy making process were noted by principals, chairpersons, some parents and coordinators. Almost all of the points noted, recurred across all the meetings in either the same or similar language. Where a point was the exception rather than the rule this has been stated. Participants claimed that fears about policy making between parents and teachers were "dissolved", that parents and teachers were "relaxed" in each others company and that the experience was "enjoyable" and "very positive". There was a sense of "enthusiasm" and "equality" among participants and discernible "changes in attitude", particularly on the part of teachers.

In moving from the atmosphere to the process itself participants stated that "the task was clear", that there was cause for "more agreement rather than the opposite", and that there was a common "sense of purpose" with "similar aims" and "aspirations". The "clarification of roles" made working together "much more acceptable". The "commitment all round" was noted, so too was the "exchange of ideas" while the "listening to feelings and to fact" displayed the "trust", "flexibility", and "discovering together" which typified the "group". One of the regional cluster groups put it succinctly "the process was worthwhile, simple, flexible, with whole-child development in mind". They concluded by saying that "the process is a model" for further work in any policy area.

There were references to the "time" given by staff, to their "generosity", "honesty" and "surprise", to their being "willing to be involved", to their "fears being unfounded" and to the fact that teachers were "listening to parents". The "report to the staff meeting" brought "very positive comments" and there was an "interest among the staff generally".

The community aspect of the school was heightened in that "primary and post-primary schools came together" for policy formation in some instances and there was "consensus regarding the policy content" across the sectors. Teachers "got to know other teachers" through "inter-school" contact and this gave the staff a "broader base". The "inter-school aspect also helped integration". Cognisance was taken of "parent-parent concerns and needs". The "community approach" created "a sense of ownership" and "stresses school values" which then became "values owned by the community". One of the regional cluster groups believed that they should "celebrate this participation in school celebrations".

The fact that the Board of Management "was involved in the process", supported the coordinator", "provided facilities" and "took part" added an invaluable and very necessary dimension to the task.

In addition to the trust building which took place between home, school and community, and the inter-school contacts the theme of "affirmation", of "self-worth and confidence building", and of having been "energised" constantly recurred. So too did the fact of the "parent as prime educator". The challenges for the future of policy making included "the finding of time", which was an issue for most regional cluster groups. The "involvement of fathers" and of the "marginalised parent" will also be a challenge facing schools in the future. It was the opinion of some participants that the "selection" of parents and teachers which took place, in most instances, for the 1997-1998 policy sessions would need to be reviewed for the future. Parent "expectations" have been raised regarding their involvement and this needs to be "maintained". There was also an issue around the feasibility of bringing parents and teachers together in the "multiple school" situation and where "primary and post-primary schools serve the same families".

It was strongly held that staff required "development" and that the "workload of teachers" who were "already stressed" should be monitored. It was pointed out that there was a need to "implement-evaluate-update" the current draft policy document. It was stated clearly that in the policy making process, the coordinator was the key link agent.

#### **2.4.2 NETWORKING**

We now examine the role of the coordinator and the theory and practice of "networking". The coordinators liaise with various voluntary and statutory bodies and groups within the community and encourage a cohesive delivery of service, in relation to parents, teachers, and community all in the interest of the pupils. Just as the school is a significant resource to the community it serves, there are also many advantages for the school in drawing from the strengths of the community. The HSCL scheme philosophy recognises that the school on its own cannot effect meaningful change but that it can, working collaboratively with other interest groups, ameliorate the effects of the problems associated with educational disadvantage. The links are very obvious in relation to the prevention of early school leaving.

From its inception, the scheme has emphasised the responsibility of coordinators in the area of networking and in directing parents towards existing agents and agencies already working in the community. Courses, classes and activities for parents, provided by coordinators at the behest of parents, were a source of conflict in some areas until 1995 approximately. Coordinators who have easier access to the family, through the school, were deemed to be very successful in a short space of time and this would seem a valid judgement. In other situations it would seem that coordinators did not work diplomatically with community groups

and did not adhere strictly to the principle of networking. We should not lose sight of the fact that there may have been some fear on the part of community groups of their territory being invaded. Experiences through various aspects of the scheme have highlighted the need to clarify the rights and responsibilities of various roles and thereby obviate misunderstanding and tension. The role of the coordinator will be further analysed in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

#### **2.4.2.1 AREA BASED PARTNERSHIPS**

One of the statutory bodies with whom the coordinators have been networking is the Area Based Partnership Companies (usually referred to as Partnerships). Through the European Social Fund (ESF) support has been made available in disadvantaged areas to Local Urban and Rural Development Operational Programmes (LURD) between 1994 and 1999. The support under LURD was channelled via Area Development Management (ADM) through to these Area Based Partnership Companies at local level.

ADM was set up as a management company in 1992 by the Irish Government in agreement with the EU, although twelve partnerships were in place ranging from the late eighties to early 1992. The main role of ADM was to support integrated social and economic development through programmes targeting disadvantage and social exclusion and promoting reconciliation and equality.

In all, there are thirty-eight Partnerships which target people who are socially excluded, the long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming unemployed. In a typical urban or rural centre the partnership would consist of possibly a community development manager and an education coordinator linking with the local community, local business and the statutory bodies. Although at first, it was envisaged that Partnerships might develop a strategy for local unemployment, the

practice up to now has tended rather to be a funding and training agency for projects suggested locally. Partnerships seek to bring together the community and voluntary sectors, the social partners and the statutory agencies at local level in order to contribute to the identification and resolution of the needs of the area. Local development planning takes place and a sense of local "ownership" is created.

Partnerships seek to develop local potential by using premises, business networks, skills and the energy of local people. "Community development is about enabling people to enhance their capacity to play a role in shaping the society of which they are a part" (Area Development Management Limited, 1995: 36).

Particular efforts are made to work with disadvantaged women, travellers and potential early school leavers. Training and awareness building on environmental issues and training for social and cultural action is promoted. As we shall see later the Area Based Partnerships in Ireland resembles the Partnership in Scotland (7.2).

The Partnerships provide a range of activities at local level. In relation to the HSCL scheme, the coordinator (HSCL) initiates the activity and then seeks funding from the Partnership. Accessing funds is often a long and arduous task for the HSCL coordinator. We get a flavour of activities from the following:

- training for leader parents;
- a school attendance tracking service;
- supplementary educational and developmental programmes for potential early school leavers;
- support training for schools in providing positive behaviour programmes;
- pupil services such as homework;
- Information Technology training for school support;

- Subvention of staff teachers, psychologists and youth club workers.

The *Evaluation Report* points out that the "broadened focus" of the Partnerships "impinged significantly" on the primary focus in that the long term unemployed benefited "from only 19.0 per cent of specific expenditure" by Partnership Companies in 1997 (ESF Evaluation Report, 1999: 223).

The evaluation claims that the setting up period "was intensive, involved and difficult" (Ibid.) and that this aspect almost became an end in itself to the extent that some organisations only began "to engage in serious expenditure in the last year of the programme, 1999" (Ibid.). This start up process, according to the evaluation, absorbed the energies of the Partnerships "to the detriment of setting up programmatic, thematic and strategic structures, conduits for communication, lateralisation, systematic transfer of learning and facilitation of mainstreaming" (Ibid., 224).

While the thirty-eight Partnerships deal with significant numbers of individuals and groups (7,000 enterprises and 1,500 groups), "these data do not inform us of what the nature and intensity of the Partnership input was...what the duration of contact with individuals and groups was...the cost of that contact...[or] prior engagement with State services" (Ibid., 226-227).

It is recommended by the evaluators of the Partnerships that there be large scale actions rather than a "multitude of small scale, stand-alone activities" (Ibid., 239)

## 2.5 SUMMARY

In Chapter Two we have traced the strategies introduced by the Department of Education to deal with disadvantage. The focus was on the HSCL scheme. The five *Aims* of the scheme were listed. The philosophy of the scheme was illus-

trated through the framework of the twelve *Basic Principles*. In Chapters 4-6 dealing with research findings we shall note how the implementation of the Aims and Basic Principles is progressing and recommendations will be listed in Chapter Eight.

The hope of the Department of Education to establish partnership in education between parents, teachers, and community agencies was highlighted as part of the philosophy. So too was the desire of the Department of Education to promote and sustain an integrated approach to disadvantage and educational failure. Difficulties encountered in establishing the Basic Principles were recalled. Some of these were impatience: on the part of teachers with the "preventative" approach; a lack of in-career development for staffs; an unclear view on the part of coordinators relating to "needs analysis" and the "networking process"; and fear around the establishment of Local Committees. All of these issues will surface again in Chapters 4-6.

Personnel and structures that provided support for the development and maintenance of HSCL were described. The advisory role of the National Steering Committee was recorded and the agencies were named. The work of the National and Assistant National Coordinators was detailed as was in-career development for coordinators. Two areas of the HSCL scheme where action research was carried out, the preparation and delivery of workshops by coordinators and policy making processes, were outlined giving an indication of their history and current development.

Finally the role of the coordinator was dealt with in some depth. The Department of Education views the coordinator as a change agent. Their brief is to develop meaningful partnership processes with parents, teachers and community

agencies without duplicating or replicating services. Flexibility was highlighted, by the Department of Education, in relation to the coordinator as this would provide scope for initiative and creativity. The importance of coordinators working as a team, establishing an area profile, analysing needs, identifying and training leader parents and networking were clearly established as Department of Education policy.

It can be said that the HSCL scheme has a purposeful orientation towards partnership in education. Its activities are focused on directing the ability and talent of parents, teachers, and community towards collective endeavour. The remainder of the thesis will be devoted to research and evaluation of the HSCL scheme as outlined in this chapter against the background of the literature surveyed in Chapter One.



***PART TWO***

***RESEARCH***

## CHAPTER 3

### THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When it came to a critical evaluation of the HSCL scheme there were many methodologies possible. Since the scheme is rapidly evolving, as well as expanding regularly to new schools, there is an obvious problem of different levels of commitment and maturity in the schools. Another problem already noted in an earlier chapter is the need for objectivity on the part of the writer, who is also closely involved with the scheme. The issue of objectivity is dealt with in 3.1.3.1.

#### 3.1 RESEARCH STRATEGIES

Research Strategies shall be dealt with through the following framework:

Planning the Research (3.1.1);

The Survey and its Procedures (3.1.2);

Objectivity, Reliability and Validity (3.1.3);

Action Research and Evaluation (3.1.4);

Cross National Comparison: A Scottish Project (3.1.5);

Presentation of Data findings (3.1.6).

##### 3.1.1 PLANNING THE RESEARCH

The first year of study was spent planning the research project. It was important during that time:

- to identify and to define the *research problem*;
- to build a preliminary *knowledge base*;
- to formulate the *hypotheses*;
- to select the *sample in Ireland*;

- to plan a small comparative study and to select the *sample in Scotland*;
- to decide on *methods and tools of research*;
- to select the *analysis procedures*.

In the initial year a review of the literature was started which continued systematically right through the years of the research project. The review of the literature involved locating, reading and evaluating reports of research, and the reading of a wide variety of text books and journals on different subject areas, including secondary source materials. In the first year of study the questionnaires were *formulated and tested* many times. This work will be documented fully, later in this chapter.

We shall now examine the Research Design and Methodology in more detail. Great care and time was given to identifying and defining the research problem as the "ultimate value...is probably determined more by the imagination and insight that goes into the research problem than any other factor" (Borg and Gall, 1989: 49, see also Miles and Huberman 1994).

### **3.1.1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The role of the coordinator is to develop parents as prime educators, and in conjunction with the principal, to initiate and to promote staff development so that both parties can work collaboratively for the benefit of the whole child. In addition to linking with all school personnel, the coordinator links with voluntary and statutory bodies in the area to foster an integrated and local approach for the development of both family and community life, so that the child can grow up in an environmentally rich atmosphere. The coordinator is the centre of a complex network. There are different expectations, demands, agenda and perceptions which may be in conflict. The coordinator needs to identify and balance these interests

taking into account the different influences at work and leading individuals and groups towards a collaborative approach. Some of the groups act as support to the coordinator.

#### **3.1.1.2 PRELIMINARY KNOWLEDGE BASE**

A preliminary knowledge base had been generated by the author as a teacher-principal, as National Coordinator of the HSCL scheme, and particularly during the first months of this study.

#### **3.1.1.3 HYPOTHESES**

Two hypotheses were used in this study.

Hypothesis 1 proposes that there is no difference in the attitudes of principals, coordinators and teachers, these being three sub-groups of one of the partnership bodies, namely, the school, the others being the home and the community. The research was conducted, and the research instruments were designed, to detect anything that might disprove this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 proposes that the coordinator is an important link agent in the partnership enterprise of the HSCL scheme. It focuses on the role of the coordinator as the key link agent between three existing bodies, namely, home, school and community. There was a clear understanding from the outset, that the evaluation of the coordinator's role would require extensive research about each of the groups with whom he/she was working.

#### **3.1.1.4 RATIONALE FOR HYPOTHESES**

There is much emphasis today on the role of the home and its environment in the field of education. In the past, schools held the educative role and were slow to partner parents and community (1.2 - 1.5). Within the HSCL scheme in Ireland, parents are being encouraged to be centrally involved in their children's education.

The vision of the scheme is that of collaboration of skills, knowledge and experience of parents and teachers in partnership for the children's benefit. To attain this partnership, coordinators target adults in the child's life across home, school and community because their attitude and behaviour impinge directly on the lives of children.

In Hypothesis 1 the partnership way of working may call for change on the part of these adults, especially members of the Board of Management, school personnel, and parents. It may call for role definition by all parties followed by training in partnership practices.

The question of training for the *Board of Management* may arise so that the Board manages and supports the work of the school and encourages its parents and teachers to be proactive. Currently Board members may be doing little more than responding to decisions already made. In particular they and all education-  
alists run the risk of being reactive to problems with little time for vision and creativity. *School Personnel* are called on to become involved in processes which will promote:

- the development of self-confidence and self-esteem among the principal and staff so that they may be open to new ways of relating, of supporting and of working;
- changes in school structure whereby the school names priorities, allocates responsibilities within a time frame and includes an evaluative component;
- conditions in which students, parents and staff will become serious, committed, life-long and co-operative learners.

*Parents* are called on to develop their role as prime educator and to communicate and to participate with the partners in education. Parents care deeply about their children, but may be unaware of how they may help and may be fearful of

approaching schools. Is there a need for someone to initiate, bring about and sustain development and involvement in an age of change?

In Hypothesis 2 we note the *Coordinator* in the HSCL scheme who is a member of staff who liases with the principal, is close to parents and may be a member of management. The coordinator links with key personnel within the school community, who are themselves link agents. He/she has a role to bring groups together in collaborative effort. The coordinator has knowledge of each group (management, staff and parents) and is distant enough to maintain objective view points around their needs.

- Does this lead to more effective interrelatedness?

The in-career development that coordinators undergo should keep them abreast of educational changes, should empower them with communication and co-ordination skills, and should enhance their morale.

- Is this a reality?
- Is there an effective transfer of learning from in-career development to practice?
- Is someone with a teaching background the most effective person to be a link agent with management, principal, staff and parents?
- Does the coordinator promote and foster key people as link agent in these groups?
- How would leader parents be perceived in this role?

### **3.1.2 THE SURVEY AND ITS PROCEDURES**

The decision was made at an early stage to send a questionnaire to all the schools involved in the scheme as of 30th June 1994. It was obvious that the views, attitudes and judgements of the main partners in the scheme be sought in a way that would give statistical reliability and validity. Thus, questionnaires were sent to

principals and coordinators in 182 schools. These questionnaires included both open questions and questions with pre-coded responses.

### 3.1.2.1 THE RESEARCH SCHOOLS IN IRELAND

The schools chosen for research purposes were all those in the HSCL scheme on 30th June 1994. These schools numbered 133 at primary level and 50 at post-primary level. One school undergoing difficulty at the time was not asked to participate. When the questionnaires were completed a stratified random sample of sixteen schools was chosen for an in-depth study with the assistance of an independent statistician. Sixteen strata were identified. One school was randomly selected from within each strata. This sample included schools from different areas in Dublin and outside, from different types of schools and from different sized communities.

The primary school strata were:

<b>Infant School</b>	boys and girls
<b>Junior School</b>	boys and girls
<b>Senior School</b>	boys and girls
<b>Senior Boys School</b>	second class to sixth class
<b>Senior Girls School</b>	third class to sixth class
<b>Vertical School</b>	boys
<b>Vertical School</b>	girls
<b>Vertical School</b>	boys and girls

At post-primary level the strata were:

<b>Secondary School</b>	boys
<b>Secondary School</b>	girls
<b>Secondary School</b>	boys and girls
<b>Community School</b>	boys and girls
<b>Community College</b>	boys and girls
<b>Junior Comprehensive</b>	boys
<b>Junior Comprehensive</b>	girls
<b>Senior Comprehensive School</b>	boys and girls

The sixteen schools were randomly selected with the assistance of an independent statistician. The schools were then approached in order to seek their agreement and co-operation. Despite many letters, two schools did not reply, one was late in

saying "yes" and a fourth school asked to be excused because of its own internal difficulties. Four further schools were randomly selected as replacements bearing in mind the criteria (category of school, objectivity and credibility) mentioned earlier. The permission of the principal of each of the sixteen schools was then sought for the following:

- to hold an interview with the principal himself/herself;
- to hold an interview with the coordinator;
- to send a questionnaire to a random sample of the staff;
- to send a questionnaire to a random sample of parents;
- to hold an interview with the "core group" of involved parents.

All the principals agreed to the foregoing.

### **3.1.2.2 METHODS AND TOOLS OF RESEARCH**

This thesis is concerned with the coordinator as a link between home, school and community and as a key person in the scheme. However, the role of the coordinator could not be studied detached from a complex of issues. These issues include not only the actual situation in which the coordinators find themselves but the understanding /lack of understanding of the scheme held by the coordinators. The expectations about the coordinator held by principals, teachers, parents and not least by the coordinators themselves are also relevant. Hence, the primary tool of research was a detailed questionnaire sent to a variety of scheme participants. The questionnaire sought to give an accurate backdrop to all the complex questions against which the key issue of the coordinator as a link agent could be studied and evaluated (Appendix 3).

The quantitative research consisted of questionnaires for principals and coordinators in 182 schools and teachers in the sixteen selected schools. Chairpersons



and parents got a short questionnaire which paralleled the information sought in the interviews. Interviews were held in the sixteen randomly selected schools with principals, coordinators and a "core group" of involved parents. Action research, that is practitioner based research, was carried out by the author and encouraged and developed within the HSCL scheme. The main research tools however, were the detailed questionnaires with 18-26 questions, each with multiple responses and including a Likert Attitude Scale on perceptions and attitudes to partnership consisting of thirty-eight statements. The questionnaire was substantially the same form but with modifications for various respondents. It was originally designed for principals. Extra questions were added for coordinators. There was further redesign or modification for teachers and still further for chairpersons and parents.

The questionnaire itself sought to obtain information on six issues (see 3.1.2.3).

Those circularised and their number, together with the completed and returned response rate to the questionnaires was as follows in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Response Rates to the Questionnaires from the Various Respondents**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number sent</b>	<b>Number returned</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Principals</b>	182	165	90.7%
<b>Coordinators</b>	182	177	97.3%
<b>Teachers</b>	151	113	74.8%
<b>Chairpersons</b>	16	16	100%
<b>Parents</b>	123	115	93.5%

### **3.1.2.3 QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT**

The aim of the questionnaires was to obtain information which could be analysed, to extract patterns, to cross reference and to make comparisons. The question-

naire sought information on six themes. Each theme had a number of sub-headings under which the questions were composed before being sent to the sample. The six themes are now given in detail.

**Theme 1** was on "Valuing People" and questions were formulated on the following:

- priorities for school development;
- how the school shows that it respects its pupils;
- how the school shows that it values its parents;
- how school personnel sound out the feelings or opinions of pupils.

"Valuing People" was taken as a starting point which stemmed from the belief that the valuing of others is of primary importance if progress towards partnership is to be made. Following from the valuing of people it was believed that the process of communication could be evaluated.

**Theme 2** related to "Communication" and the questions incorporated:

- communication with parents individually and collectively;
- communication within the staff;
- interpersonal communication.

The underlying assumption in the HSCL scheme, to which these questions relate, is that when people are valued and some level of communication is taking place among staff members, and between staff and parents, it is possible to put structures in place that are human and caring but also task focused.

**Theme 3** examined "Structures" and included questions on key methods/ processes:

- evaluation methods, how principals and coordinators evaluate;
- consultation methods, seeking the views of individuals, groups, agencies and parents;

- feedback methods, how individuals, groups, and agencies give feedback about the school;
- involvement methods, developing and revising the School Plan/Vision-Mission Statement;
- support structures, personal and systemic support;
- the delegation process, the viewpoint of principals, coordinators and teachers.

Formative evaluation is an important element of the HSCL scheme approach. When structures are in place and efforts are being made to work together within those structures, the need for initial/on-going development will emerge. This leads us into the theme on development where the attitudes, views, and practices of respondents were sought.

**Theme 4** dealt with "Development" and questioned people regarding:

- teacher development;
- parent development;
- pupil development;
- coordinator development.

Drawing on review of best practice, the HSCL scheme has assumed since its establishment that a balanced approach of curricular and personal development would help develop the partnership process.

**Theme 5** worked on the "Issue of Partnership" and the questions gave an opportunity to acquire data on:

- attitudes to partnership;
- tasks performed by parents;
- examples of partnership from the HSCL scheme: enriching examples and unproductive examples;
- developing partnership among staff member and among parents.

Finally strengths and challenges of the HSCL scheme were sought.

**Theme 6** focused on "Outcomes" and the questions were directed towards:

- important changes;
- the Local Committee.

The questionnaire went through many changes. The first draft of the questionnaire for principals and coordinators was piloted as an interview among a group of principals not in the sample. This gave rise to many useful insights and clarification of the language took place. Bramley agrees that the beginning stage of the questionnaire formation is to test the questions themselves as "respondents often do not interpret questions in the same way as the writer and the only way to sort out the ambiguity is to ask the questions and discuss the answers" (Bramley, 1991: 120). The outcomes of this initial pilot phase were written up and interpreted. It was at this point that a choice was made in favour of "open form" questions as opposed to the "closed form" (Borg and Gall, 1986: 428). The questionnaire was pretested on four other occasions and changed accordingly each time. For purposes of pretesting two principals working in Dublin, a group of Presentation Order schools nationally and schools in Dundalk were involved on two different occasions.

It was considered important to collect information about attitudes to school issues in general and to partnership in particular. A Likert scale on perceptions and attitudes to partnership was devised for this purpose as part of the questionnaire. Partnership was determined as the attitudinal object and a pool of items stating beliefs about the object was constructed. There were thirty-eight items in the scale, nineteen were "clearly positive" and nineteen were "clearly negative with regard to the attitudinal object" (Mueller, 1986: 10). The advice of Mueller was

kept in mind in compiling the scale: "The wording of each item must convey the same meaning to the respondents that it conveys to the item writer...it must convey the same meaning to all respondents. Items should be worded as briefly, as clearly, and as concisely as possible" (Ibid., 12). "Double-barrelled" items i.e. compound items containing two opinions in the same statement were avoided (Ibid.).

One aspect of reliability involves examining the internal consistency of the items. This was measured using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. This gave a score of 0.9033 in Ireland and 0.8832 in Scotland when the thirty-eight items were considered together. On the subscale, (fourteen items of the Likert scale relating to "Attitudes to Partnership"), the Cronbach's Alpha test yielded a score of 0.7857 in Ireland and 0.8678 in Scotland. This level of reliability is very satisfactory in both cases.

The questionnaire was circularised to principals and coordinators in November 1995 with an explanatory letter and with an assurance of confidentiality and of the highest ethical standards. The purposes of the study were explained and the fact that it was a personal research project under NUI, Maynooth was highlighted. One week after the time limit set in the letter of transmittal a follow-up letter was sent to individuals who had not responded. After a further week another follow-up letter and copy of the questionnaire were sent. In most instances personal contact was made. The fourth, and last reminder, was sent out exactly five weeks after the first closing date. At this stage all principals had made contact with the exception of six and all coordinators with the exception of one. These seven people never replied. In Table 3.1 above we noted that the response rate from principals was 90.7 per cent while that of coordinators was 97.3 per cent.

As already stated, a computer generated random sample was used to select the sixteen schools for in-depth study with the assistance of an independent statistician. In order to select teachers a further random sample was carried out on the sixteen schools chosen for in-depth study. Fifty per cent, of the staff members, within each school, were randomly chosen as the research sample of teachers from lists of names procured from the school. Teachers in the sample numbered 151 of which 64 were from the primary sector while 87 were from the post-primary sector. While the questionnaire sent to teachers in many ways reflects that sent to principals and coordinators, there were also many differences. For example, there were more "closed form" questions with less of the "open form" type. In some instances questions were omitted. These changes stemmed from the amount of thought and pretesting that was carried out on the teachers' questionnaire. In addition to discussion with different teachers, not in the sample, the questionnaire was pretested three times in schools in Dundalk.

With the same clear purpose in mind, as when principals and coordinators were circularised, and observing the same level of ethical standards, the questionnaires were distributed, through the coordinators, to teachers in February 1997. They were returned to the author in a sealed envelope through the coordinator. Two teachers, one from a primary and the other from a post-primary school, returned a blank questionnaire in the sealed envelope to the coordinators concerned. To the knowledge of the writer the coordinators did not seem to be aware of this. After the usual follow-up procedure there was a response rate of 74.8 per cent from teachers. When comparisons are made between principals, coordinators, and teachers the reader should bear in mind that principals and coordinators represent

the responses from the total population while teachers represent the responses from the sample.

In November 1997 a questionnaire was sent to the chairpersons of the sixteen schools selected for the in-depth study. All chairpersons responded. At the same time a questionnaire was sent to a representative sample of parents in these sixteen schools. One parent was chosen for every fifty pupils in the school. Once again the parents were selected randomly this time by one of the "independent coders" (see also 3.1.2.4) through lists of names procured from the schools. A total of 123 parents were circularised, through the coordinators after much pre-testing of the questionnaire among parents who were not in the research population. There was a response rate of 93.5 per cent from parents. Since the questionnaire sent to chairpersons and parents related to the "Interview" schedules they shall be dealt with later in Chapter Six. Each person within the study, who filled in a questionnaire, received a general letter of thanks with a personal acknowledgement from the author.

#### **3.1.2.4 ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

The coding of the responses to the open-ended questions on all the questionnaires was initially carried out by this author. To ensure accuracy, reliability and consistency in coding, a random sample of the coded questionnaires was drawn. These questionnaires were circularised to a group of four persons: three coordinators who are not in the sample, and one former school principal of a school in a disadvantaged area. These independent coders then coded each item unaware of the codes given by the author. There was a 94.1 per cent agreement in the codes assigned by these independent coders with that of the author. The categories that emerged in the coding of all the questions were then given to the independent

group who privately collapsed and summarised each category. This group met with the author and each outcome was discussed. The final coding got 100 per cent approval from the group and the author. This final collapsing and summarising of the categories brought the 94.1 per cent initial accuracy mentioned above, to 100 per cent.

At this point the coded data was processed, using SPSS 6.1 for Windows, which provided frequencies for each category. Where questions invited respondents to list three priorities two approaches were taken in the analysis. The first approach was to take the responses listed as most important, and to crosstabulate it by the three types of respondent (principals, coordinators, and teachers) in order to assess similarities and differences in their orientation to different elements of the scheme. Differences between the priorities of the three groups of respondents were tested for statistical significance by means of the Chi-square test. The second approach involved combining the three coded responses to give an overall orientation to the issue. The data on the combined orientation of respondents to different issues are presented in Appendix 1. The results are presented in Chapters Four and Five.

Having gone through the research methodology from identifying and defining the research problem through to selecting and using analysis procedures we shall now take a close look at how objectivity, reliability, and validity were enhanced.

### **3.1.3 OBJECTIVITY, RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

There was an in-depth study of sixteen schools which included extensive interviewing of key personnel: principals, coordinators, and "core groups" of involved parents. A questionnaire was sent to the chairpersons of these sixteen schools and to a random sample of parents and teachers.



### 3.1.3.1 OBJECTIVITY REVISITED

We return once more to the crucial issue of objectivity. The first protection was the author's awareness of the need for objectivity and her conscious determination not to ask leading or biased questions. The presence of many open-ended questions led to answers which were not subject to control. The choice of schools by others as well as the use of an independent group for establishing the criteria for the analysis of the answers were further protections. Again, the different range of persons consulted gave the possibility of cross checking results. Finally, the fact that the investigation was initiated privately by the author with an assurance of confidentiality may have left respondents with greater ease and freedom than if the research was commissioned by or initiated on behalf of the Department of Education.

### 3.1.3.2 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

As can be gleaned from the methodology every attempt was made to eliminate random and systematic error and to maximise the reliability and validity of the outcomes. **Reliability** of outcomes was enhanced through the closed type questions, and in particular the Likert Scale. As already stated, the Alpha reliability analysis scale gave a score of 0.9033 in Ireland and 0.8832 in Scotland when the thirty-eight items were considered together. On the subscale, "Attitudes to Partnership", these figures were 0.7857 (Ireland) and 0.8678 (Scotland). This level of reliability is very satisfactory in both the scale and subscale.

**Validity** was enhanced through:

- the amount of pretesting of the questionnaires that took place;
- the way the sampling was done through independent people;
- the very high response rates to the questionnaires;

- the involvement of an independent group to check on the outcomes of the author's coding;
- the consistency of the fact that teachers were less positive than principals and coordinators both to the questionnaire replies and in the outcomes from the analysis of variance in the Likert Scale.

### 3.1.3.3 INTERVIEWS

The interviews were carried out by the author of this research. Interviews were held in the sixteen selected schools. All targeted personnel involved in the sixteen schools agreed to be interviewed. Sixteen principals were interviewed and fifteen agreed to be tape-recorded. Eighteen coordinators were interviewed and recorded. Three of the selected schools had access to two coordinators and two of the selected schools shared one coordinator. Fifteen "core groups" of parents were interviewed and recorded. Two of the schools on the same site, and serving the same families had the same core group of parents.

The interviews focused clearly on the HSCL scheme, its strengths, weaknesses, challenges and particularly on the role of the coordinator. The main focus of the questionnaires was the perceptions of key personnel (principals, teachers and coordinators themselves) in relation to the school in general and the HSCL scheme in particular. The purpose of the interview was worked out long in advance, the structure of the interview was clear, the language was simple, every effort to reduce fear and build satisfactory rapport was made. According to Marshall and Rossman "The most important aspect of the interviewer's approach concerns conveying an attitude of acceptance, that the participants' information is valuable and useful" (Marshall and Rossman, 1995: 80). The interviewer avoided giving hints during the interview and sought to maintain a neutral stance.

The interviews with the "core group" of parents, the group of leader parents close to the coordinator and to his/her activities, fall into what Marshall and

Rossman call "Focus Group Interviewing". For them Focus Group Interviewing is selecting a group for interview "because they share certain characteristics that are relevant to the question of the study". The moderator "[asks] focused questions, in order to encourage discussion and the expression of differing opinions and points of view" (Ibid., 84). The only difference between the groups in the theory expressed by Marshall and Rossman and the "core groups" of the HSCL scheme is that the latter know each other in the groups. Out of forty-nine interviews only one was not recorded. The interviews were:

- listened to on tape a number of times to hear the words and sense the feelings;
- transcribed accurately and in full from the tapes;
- collated in topics without any change of word or meaning;
- written with the accuracy of the taped version as the text of Chapter Six.

#### **3.1.4 ACTION RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**

A further tool used as part of the research methodology of this dissertation was that of action research, which is "a form of self-reflective enquiry" (McNiff, 1992: 1). Action research began in the USA in the 1940s with the work of Levin, a social scientist. It appeared in the United Kingdom in the 1970s with Button and Stenhouse. Action research is the study of a particular educational topic or situation with the intention of improving or building on the strengths and overcoming the weaknesses. "Good research practice obligates the researcher to triangulate, that is, to use multiple methods, data sources, and researchers to enhance the validity of research findings" (Mathison, 1988: 13).

At this point it is important to state that the action research methodology used was designed subsequent to and as a direct result of the data findings from the questionnaires and the interviews. It was clearly a case of the data findings being

part of a formative evaluation which led to the shortcomings being redressed through deliberate, planned, action research. The action research used in the HSCL scheme enabled coordinators to develop action strategies to bring about improvement and to evaluate their outcomes (2.3.4.4, 2.3.4.5 and 2.4.1). It was never intended, nor did it happen, that the data findings would be influenced or altered.

#### **3.1.4.1 PRACTICE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF ACTION RESEARCH**

As was noted in 2.3.4.4 and 2.3.4.5, ten workshops within which the coordinators were involved encouraged them to share their expertise and experience and give a level of publicity to the professional thinking that informed their practice. The topics researched had been identified by coordinators as areas of need. Research was done on the level of relevant literature and in the realm of delivering, implementing, monitoring, adapting and evaluating practice. It is obvious that the workshops were experienced-based. Similarly with the policy development which took place, coordinators were encouraged to reflect on their practice and to note strengths and problems. This in turn led to seeking solutions and improvement.

The deeper understanding and awareness that came from "parents and teachers working together" (2.4.1) enabled teachers to look differently at their practices with pupils and their families. Parents came to a deeper understanding of the work of the school. The themes of "affirmation" of "self worth" and "confidence building" constantly recurred. Coordinators have said that both these experiences contributed to their positive self-image as a professional group and thereby to improving their performance and professional satisfaction (see Schön, 1987; Zeichner and Liston, 1996 and Cullingford, 1995).

### **3.1.5 CROSS NATIONAL COMPARISON: A SCOTTISH PROJECT**

A preliminary visit to the Director of Education in Strathclyde in May 1995 and to a number of schools, enabled the identification of the Ferguslie Park area as the Scottish element in the research. Ferguslie Park which will be discussed in Chapter Seven, is an "Area for Priority Treatment" (APT). In a return visit in November 1995 the Likert Attitude Scale on perceptions and attitudes to partnership was distributed to thirty-four teachers and interviews took place as outlined in Chapter Seven.

### **3.1.6 PRESENTATION OF DATA FINDINGS**

The results of the research are presented in detail in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Chapters Four and Five examine the wide implementation of the HSCL scheme and in doing so also examine the attitude and practices of the coordinator. Chapter Six focuses specifically on the role of the coordinator. There was a conviction on the part of the author of the thesis, who was also centrally involved with the initiation and development of the scheme, that the HSCL scheme would stand or fall principally on the coordinator. This central role of the coordinator would spring from his/her relationship with others, primarily with principal and parents and to a lesser extent with other teachers and the Board of Management. The quality of the relationships would be a determining factor for the effectiveness of the coordinator's work. These conditions for effectiveness involve inter-personal relationships, partnership, mutual respect, acceptance and trust and they are likely to have a huge impact on the morale of the coordinators.

Accordingly, the core of the thesis sought to identify, to describe, and to evaluate the situation in the 182 schools. This research may have been more valid than the author might have hoped for, as the rates of response from the different groups

were exceptionally high. Through the questionnaires one can have serious confidence about the knowledge of all the schools in the sample. The results and the analysis of the research is mainly in the next three chapters. Chapters Four and Five study the situation of schools in which coordinators work. Chapter Six which deals with the interviews in sixteen schools can serve as a further cross-check and in-depth study of the findings of Chapter Four and Five.

Chapters Four and Five then, show how the scheme is working. They describe and evaluate the attitudes, values, activities, and inter-relationships of the key personnel in the schools by the questionnaires addressed to principals (response rate 90.7 per cent), to coordinators (response rate 97.3 per cent), and to teachers (response rate 74.8 per cent). The questionnaires to chairpersons (response rate 100 per cent) and to parents (response rate 93.5 per cent) relate to the theme of the interviews and will be dealt with in Chapter Six. So Chapters Four and Five provide the basic information and research for the thesis. It was felt that a more "in-depth" study should be made on sixteen schools randomly selected with the assistance of an independent statistician. In these schools the interviews focused more immediately on the coordinator.

Since the interviews were informal, although carefully structured so that the same material was covered in each interview, there was ample opportunity for negative feelings, personality problems, and criticism to arise. In fact, in the informal/formal structure of the interview, principals, and parents were even more positive about the coordinators than one might have risked deducing from the questionnaires themselves. However, Chapter Six could not stand without the main research of Chapters Four and Five. One could not have the confidence about the findings of Chapter Six without the backdrop of Chapters Four and Five.

One should note that most of the negative statements found in Chapter Six were less about the HSCL scheme than about the general situation of education, local problems and personalities. These are the issues one picks up going around the schools of the HSCL scheme.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE FIELD OF THE COORDINATOR

This chapter attempts to look at the HSCL scheme in its various elements. It studies the school and the attitudes of principals, coordinators, and teachers. The research data used in this chapter are comprised mainly of the results of questionnaires to principals, coordinators and teachers.

#### 4.1 VALUING PEOPLE

As noted in Chapter Three the questionnaire had six underlying themes. Two of these themes "Valuing People" (4.1), and "Communication" (4.2) form the field in which the coordinator works and will be dealt with in the present chapter. The other four elements are addressed in Chapter Five. We begin with the theme "Valuing People". Valuing people is one of the key elements of the HSCL scheme and thus formed an important strand in the questionnaire. Information gathering on the valuing of people took the form of questioning principals, coordinators and teachers on:

- their priorities for school/community/class development;
- their perception of the ways by which the school "respects its pupils";
- their perception of the ways by which the school "values its parents";
- their perception of the ways by which school personnel sound out the "feelings or opinions of pupils".

People are our most important asset. These words appear in reports, they are verbalised at meetings and seminars and they abound in the literature delineating leadership in schools and in other influential organisations. Valuing people, ac-



according to Kamp brings with it "noticeable gains on a variety of levels" (Kamp 1997:3). Enhancing interpersonal relationships, she says, has "benefits for you personally and professionally, there are benefits for your staff personally and professionally, there are benefits for the whole team, and there are benefits for the organization" (Ibid., 3).

Telford examined leadership in urban schools through a "structural frame" and through a "human resource frame" in order "to achieve success for students" (Telford, 1996:58). She built her "human resource frame" on the fundamental premise "that the individual talents, skill and energy of the people in an organization are its most vital resource" (Ibid., 59). Leigh and Maynard held similar views, and claimed that one of the ways "to unlock potential" is by "valuing people" (Leigh and Maynard, 1995: 120). They gave a number of prescriptions if "valuing" is to happen: "Provide a worthwhile role...recognise peoples' efforts...listen to people carefully...speak to people with respect...discover how people are feeling...express concern about their welfare...ensure their work is valued by others" (Ibid., 21).

One of the central objectives of the research was to evaluate the extent to which this central element of "valuing people" was reflected in the priorities of the personnel involved in the HSCL scheme. In this way a clearer picture of the environment coordinators work in could be gleaned.

#### **4.1.1 PRIORITIES FOR SCHOOL/COMMUNITY/CLASS DEVELOPMENT**

There is a wide body of research evidence which indicates that every leader, indeed every individual, needs to articulate a "vision of greatness" (Block, 1987: 105). It is widely held that a vision can only inspire and energise people and attract commitment "[when] it offers a view of the future that is clearly and demon-

strably better for the organization, for the people in the organization, and/or for the society within which the organization operates...a bold and worthy challenge for those who accept it" (Nanus, 1992:27). According to Belasco the vision needs to be shared, it "specifies a mutual destination, the place everyone agrees to go, and the major activities that get you there" (Belasco, 1990: 99). Again from the same author we hear that people "can only be empowered by a vision they understand" (Ibid., 119).

It was decided to seek the priorities of principals, coordinators, and teachers at the beginning of the questionnaire. It was also hoped to note if there was any inter-relation between vision and priorities of school personnel. Prioritisation by school personnel might enable the researcher to see how focused participants were and might highlight their starting points. The main objective here was to determine what, if any, was the sense of purpose of key people, and especially to determine if this would include "valuing people." In total there were 1,274 responses listed by principals, coordinators, and teachers. These priorities fell into 67 categories (Appendix 1, Table 1). The 67 initial categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 2) which showed the patterning of *all* the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers. For the purposes of statistical testing the distribution of the most important or "top" priority for each group is presented.

#### **Top Priority for school/community/class development**

The purpose of school development is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom "through the successful management of innovation and change" (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 3). School development calls for

change in the culture and structures of schooling "reinvented for and realigned with the postmodern purposes and pressures they must now address" (Hargreaves, 1994: 261-262 see also Nias, Southworth and Campbell, 1992). We noted in Chapter One, (1.4) the essential role played by the community in the child's learning, how communities are "untapped reservoirs of human potential" and that childhood programmes must be "rooted in the community" (Paz, 1990: 19 and 3). We now analyse in Table 4.1 the top priority for school/community/class development listed by principals, coordinators, and teachers respectively.

**Table 4.1 Top Priority for School/Community/Class Development Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

<b>Top Priority</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Developing the pupil and the learning environment</b>	68.1	20.3	63.0	47.9
<b>Developing relationships and communicating with parents, pupils, teachers and community</b>	7.5	76.3	12.0	36.0
<b>Developing standards and organisation</b>	18.8	2.3	22.2	13.0
<b>Developing the ethos of the school</b>	5.6	1.1	2.8	3.1
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>445</b>

**Chi-square = 212      DF = 6      P < .001**

In this and the following chapters total percentages are rounded up to 100 per cent.

When comparisons are made between principals, coordinators, and teachers the reader should bear in mind that principals and coordinators represent the responses from the total population while teachers represent the responses from the sample.

Almost half of the total responses to the open question on priorities fell into the category of "developing the pupil and the learning environment ". However, there

were significant differences between the priorities of coordinators and those of principals and teachers. Only 20.3 per cent of coordinators saw the "development of the pupil and the learning environment" as their top priority. Coordinators were more focused on the area of "developing relationships and communicating". While the HSCL scheme targets the significant adults in the life of the pupil and community members, it is intended that its activities will impinge on pupils' lives over time. Four of the five aims of the HSCL scheme relate to pupil development (Department of Education: 1990 above 2.2). This lack of association with pupil learning on the part of coordinators could indicate some absence of clarity on their part in relation to their role. In addition, none of the coordinators mentioned whole-school discipline, school attendance by pupils or curriculum development as priority areas. However, it must be acknowledged that coordinators were asked about their priorities relating to the "school community".

On the other hand, the area of "developing relationships and communicating with parents, pupils, teachers, and community" obtained just over three quarters of coordinator responses, while in the same category the scores of principals and of teachers were very low. This finding could lead one to suspect a lack of understanding on the part of principals and teachers regarding the all-encompassing nature of learning. We have already noted in Chapter One that "from birth to sixteen years less than fifteen per cent of a child's waking life is spent in school...a great deal of learning – especially with regard to attitudes and motivation – happens outside school" (Macbeth, 1989: 3). Widlake speaks about education as a "lifelong" experience where participants are "actively and influentially involved" (Widlake, 1986: 48). Salole speaks of teaching being done "in conjunction with living – it is not isolated out of the context of being within a community" (Salole,

1992: 5). The data suggest that principals and teachers may not prioritise these wider contexts of learning (see also Atkinson, 1994a and 1994b; Seashore-Louis and Kruse, 1995; Clegg and Billington, 1997: 100-107).

There is a strong emphasis in contemporary literature that school should not exist in isolation, but should relate to the wider community (Irish Government, National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), 1997 and 1.4). Appendix 1, Table 1, shows that principals gave "involvement in community needs" (item 45) 3.8 per cent while for "school-community interdependence" (item 48), the figure for principals was 3.1 per cent, with 6.2 per cent from coordinators. These low percentages on the part of principals and coordinators may point to the fact that accepting the concept of the school as part of the community, and the community as part of the school, is still quite undeveloped. There was no response from teachers which gave priority to the community dimension. There is no evidence here that schools are making links between problems such as learning difficulties, behavioural misconduct and bullying which occur within the school with their possible root causes outside the school. The HSCL scheme recommends this link. This may lead to a lack of awareness of the need to enlist the help of the wider community in tackling such issues (Department of Education, 1991; Byrne, 1994: 65).

The "development of standards and organisation" was named by 18.8 per cent of principals and 22.2 per cent of teachers as a priority. There is a strong contrast with coordinators whose figure for standards and organisation was 1.1 per cent. In Table 4.1 it would appear that school personnel tend to be tightly focused within their own particular role. There seems to be little dovetailing or interaction between roles, or efforts at developing a "whole-school" approach. As indicated

by the Chi-square, the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant.

Some further findings from the detailed distribution provided in Appendix 1, Table 1 (items 5 and 6) are worth noting. The different perspectives of coordinators on the one hand and of principals and teachers on the other are noted in relation to "parent involvement." More than half of the coordinators, but just 17.5 per cent of principals, and 0.9 per cent of teachers gave "parent involvement" a priority figure. Similarly the development of "parent-teacher relationships" (item 17) was a priority for 28.8 per cent of coordinators, but just for 11.3 per cent of principals, and 1.9 per cent of teachers. These figures indicate that work with parents does not figure highly as a value for principals and even less for the class teacher. This finding suggests that coordinators need to give more attention to involving principals and staff with parents, "without undermining the individual sense of ownership with which teachers defend their classroom territory and professional autonomy" (MacBeath, 1998: 30). Indeed, the HSCL scheme may have to take up this matter and devise appropriate strategies. From the viewpoint of the Department of Education this could be the provision of targeted in-career development for principals and teachers. Falling in line with the action research nature of the role of the HSCL coordinator, as outlined in Chapter Two and in Chapter Three, coordinators have moved forward in the 1997-1998 school year with the inclusion of staff in policy making by bringing small groups of parents and teachers together to discuss such issues as homework, behaviour codes, and the expectations and concerns of both partners (2.4.1).

Since "disadvantaged and weak pupils" are the focus of the HSCL scheme the low priority given to them as indicated in Appendix 1, Table 1 is puzzling. The

development of "weak pupils" and the "targeting of the most disadvantaged" were listed infrequently as a priority by all respondents. "Weak pupils" (item 35) were offered as a priority interest by 4.4 per cent of principals, 0.6 per cent of coordinators, and 3.7 per cent of teachers. A small number of principals (3.1 per cent), coordinators (7.9 per cent), and 2.8 per cent of teachers gave "targeting the most disadvantaged pupils" (item 30) as one of their three top priorities. Since so many weak and disadvantaged pupils fall into these categories the low priority indicated here is anomalous.

Other interesting findings from Appendix 1, Table 1 relate to "clear targets" (item 24) and "accountability" (item 42) both of which were given as a priority by a very small number. Just 2.5 per cent principals and 1.9 per cent teachers and no coordinator named "clear targets" as a priority. "Accountability" figured at 1.3 per cent for principals and 0.9 per cent for teachers, and by no coordinator. The absence of "accountability" being a priority for coordinators may indicate some weakness in their training. Perhaps this could be addressed by regularly renewing the vision of the HSCL scheme and by clarifying the values (Chapter Two). The figures from principals and teachers relating to "clear targets" and "accountability" call for this process also. It must be noted that teachers gave a very low figure to their own on-going development, which was a high priority for other groups. Principals gave "staff development" (item 3) as their highest priority at 45.6 per cent, and coordinators gave this as 57.1 per cent, while the figure for teachers was 1.9 per cent.

### **Summary**

These findings show that:

- Developing the "pupil and the learning environment" was highlighted by principals and teachers.

- All respondents, principals, co-ordinators, and teachers tend to be tightly focused within their own role, having little interaction with others.
- "Clear targets" and the question of "accountability" have scarcely been mentioned as a priority.
- The valuing of parents and of community agencies was not highly esteemed among principals and teachers although a high proportion of coordinators appreciated parents and community agencies.
- "Developing relationships and community" was a high priority for coordinators. This is consistent with the findings during interviews (6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4).
- There is no evidence in these findings that the education of the young person should be well integrated within the wider community. This central concept of the HSCL scheme has widespread acceptance. A low percentage was given to "school-community interdependence".

The priorities of principals, coordinators, and teachers give us a glimpse of the environment within which coordinators work, a glimpse of school ethos (5.2.3). There would seem to be a need for principals and teachers to expand their thinking on the development of the pupil and the learning environment. The inclusion of parents and community members in the school should enhance learning outcomes. On the other hand, coordinators would need to be clearly focused on the fact that involving parents and community agencies is ultimately for the benefit of the pupil. The developing role of the coordinator would need to be further focused on the enhancement of the learning environment for pupils from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. The "priorities" selected have shown clear demarcation lines in relation to role, on the part of principals and teachers on the one hand and coordinators on the other. These lines need to merge. The role of principals as perceived by them seems very narrow in the light of present day educational needs and achievement. The priorities of principals, and teachers, and those of the coordinators themselves, create part of the backdrop against which the latter work.

#### **4.1.2 PERCEPTIONS ON HOW THE SCHOOL SHOWS THAT IT RESPECTS ITS PUPILS**

It can be argued that the role of the school is to identify, satisfy and protect the physical, mental, moral, social, cultural and religious development of pupils. In *Putting Children First*, Washington states that in creating an ideal world for children, caring relationships are the soul of productive human existence. It is through these relationships "that most individuals thrive, learn, and grow"



(Washington, 1996: 136). The quality of care of teachers, institutions and the local community is essential to the proper growth and development of the child (see Rodd 1994; David 1998). The main information with regard to this dimension of the research was to see if children were respected within the school population and to adduce what evidence of respect there might be.

Of the respondents, 90.1 per cent said they had ways of respecting pupils, 1.8 per cent stated they did not have methods, while 7.9 per cent were unsure. In total there were 1,116 separate responses listed by principals, coordinators and teachers. These responses fell into 51 categories (Appendix 1, Table 3). The 51 initial categories were collapsed and summarised into three categories (Appendix 1, Table 4) which show the patterning of *all* the responses. As with "priorities", the most important "top" ways in which the different groups perceived that their school showed respect were tested for significance in variation.

#### **Perceptions of the top way by which the school shows that it respects its pupils**

Table 4.2 presents the top ways listed by principals, coordinators, and teachers in which the school shows that it respects its pupils.

**Table 4.2 Perceptions of the Top Way, Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers by which the School Respects its Pupils**

<b>Top Way</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>By developing good relationships and by improving communication</b>	52.5	42.4	37.1	45.2
<b>By developing the pastoral care system</b>	36.7	48.1	48.3	43.7
<b>By creating a positive learning environment</b>	10.8	9.5	14.6	11.1
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>405</b>

**Chi-square = 7    DF = 4    P = .102**

"Developing good relationships and communicating" was highlighted by principals, but less emphasised by coordinators and by teachers. Coordinators and teachers put an equal emphasis on developing the "pastoral care system" while the principals placed less importance on this area. "Creating a positive learning environment" had the highest percentage from teachers. However, as shown by the Chi-square these variations among the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were not statistically significant.

In Appendix 1, Table 3, care for the "well-being and needs" of pupils (item 5) got first preference for 29.1 per cent of principals, 36.7 per cent of coordinators, and 28.1 per cent of teachers. Second and third preferences were: for principals, "listening to pupils" (item 16) 28.5 per cent, and "respecting pupils" (item 2) 25.3 per cent; for coordinators, "treating pupils as individuals" (item 28) 19.6 per cent and "listening to pupils" (item 16) 18.4 per cent; for teachers, "treating pupils as individuals" (item 28) 27.0 per cent and "respecting pupils" (item 2) 20.2 per cent.

As noted in Table 4.2 coordinators and teachers gave their highest percentages to "developing the pastoral care system". Included under the rubric of pastoral care was "choice making" by pupils, the development of pupil "self-esteem", the development of "talents", the provision of "extra-curricular activity" and "positive discipline codes" (Appendix 1, Table 3: items 9, 25, 34, 17, 15). While the groups varied somewhat in their answers, there was coherence across the groups in their thinking. An anomaly was the response "respect them" (item 2) to the question which asked precisely how the pupils were respected. "Respect them" got 25.3 per cent from principals; 14.6 per cent from coordinators; and 20.2 per cent from teachers. It would appear that a number of principals, coordinators, and

teachers had not unravelled for themselves the meaning of "respect" and its implications.

It is interesting to note that the provision of a "positive discipline code" (item 15) as a way of respecting pupils surfaced for 15.8 per cent of coordinators. This did not come up as an issue for coordinators in 5.1.1. Regarding the "positive discipline code" the figure for principals was 21.5 per cent with that of teachers at 21.3 per cent. The interesting point here is the widespread awareness that misbehaviour on the part of pupils is an ongoing issue for class teachers in all schools. Of particular interest is the rather low figure indicating some priority for the "weak", the "disturbed" and the "disadvantaged" (items 42, 43 and 44). Coordinators were highest at 9.5 per cent, principals next at 8.2 per cent, with teachers at 5.5 per cent. The result is all the more curious in that the scheme caters for a very high percentage of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. This finding parallels that of Appendix 1, Table 1 (items 30 and 35). Another interesting, but low figure from the three groups of respondents is 0.7 per cent given for "valuing parents" (item 29) as a way of respecting pupils.

### **Summary**

The data on perceptions showed that:

- All respondents, principals, coordinators and teachers, said that they sought to develop good relationships and to improve communication with pupils.
- The pastoral care system was given as a priority by a substantial proportion of principals, coordinators, and teachers.
- The development of a positive learning environment was important to all respondents.
- The marginalised pupils did not figure very highly, in Appendix 1, Table 3 (items 42,43 and 44). This was also the finding in Appendix 1, Table 1 (items 30 and 35).

- There was some ambiguity in relation to the concept of "respect" when the question was precisely put about how respect was shown.

From the information gleaned here it can be said that there is an emphasis on "developing good relationships" and "improving communication" with pupils on the part of all respondents. This should be of help and support to the coordinator in his/her work as link agent with families. The value placed on "developing the pastoral care system" shows some commitment to whole-school development on the part of staff. It must be noted however, that just over one-tenth of the respondents spoke of "creating a positive learning environment" as a way of "respecting" pupils. The "marginalised pupil" surfaced but without any serious commitment on the part of respondents. While good relationships and pastoral care are vital in the development of the pupil, they are parallel strands to the enhancement of the "learning environment" but should not supersede it.

#### **4.1.3 PERCEPTIONS ON HOW THE SCHOOL SHOWS THAT IT VALUES ITS PARENTS**

In addition to the background research in Chapter One we note here that four possible roles for parents have been identified (Vincent, 1997). The roles are the parent as supporter/learner, the parent as consumer, the parent as independent, and the parent as participant (Ibid., 45-57). She suggests: "that a sizeable proportion of parents reject the first two models and adopt the third, parent as independent...these parents have minimal contact with the school. The fourth model, parent as participant, is the least common, and also the only option to offer opportunities for the exercise of individual and collective voice" (Ibid., 57-58).

As outlined in Chapter One the role of the parent as prime educator is of paramount importance but "the degree to which this applies in individual cases and the kinds of support systems needed to enable the role to be discharged optimally" requires much attention (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1986: 11, see also Coleman, 1998). The family, however constituted, "is seen as the child's most important setting" for survival and for healthy "physical, affective and cognitive development" (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1988: 7). The main evidence sought by this question was to note the perceptions of principals, coordinators, and teachers,

in relation to valuing parents, and to adduce what confirmation there might be. The first part of the question was closed with only one of three answers possible: yes, no, unsure. The second part was open-ended and sought not only data, but also their priority.

To the first part of the question relating to valuing parents, 90.3 per cent answered "yes"; 2.8 per cent answered "no", while 6.8 per cent were "unsure". There were 455 valid cases with no missing case. For the second part of the question the 1,124 responses fell into 40 categories. Principals fell into 38 categories while coordinators and teachers fell into 33 and 25 categories respectively (Appendix 1, Table 5). The 40 categories were summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 6) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses. Again, the data on the most important ways of valuing parents as perceived by respondents were subjected to statistical testing.

#### **Perceptions of the top way by which the school shows that it values its parents**

Principals, coordinators, and teachers in the target population were asked to give their perceptions relating to how the school shows that it values its parents. We now analyse, in Table 4.3, the top perception of principals, coordinators, and teachers.

**Table 4.3 Perceptions of the Top Way, Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers by which the School Values its Parents**

<b>Top Way</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Involvement of parents</b>	40.6	38.5	32.6	38.0
<b>Respect for parents</b>	35.0	28.2	15.7	28.1
<b>Emotional support for parents</b>	16.9	21.2	39.3	23.5
<b>Practical support for parents</b>	7.5	12.2	12.4	10.4
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>405</b>

**Chi-square = 23.49    DF = 6    P < .001**

The "involvement of parents" figured for principals, coordinators, and teachers. Principals and coordinators were close in their emphasis on parental involvement while teachers were somewhat lower. It can be said that the practical "involvement of parents" with a figure of 38.0 per cent is probably quite high. This response would indicate a valuing of the role of the parent as "prime educator". Principals and coordinators had much higher percentages than teachers in the area of "respect for parents". Teachers, on the other hand, were much higher than principals and coordinators in the "emotional" and "practical" support they perceived being given to parents. As shown by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators and teachers were statistically significant.

A very positive feature was the fact that important and practical areas of parent involvement featured highly (Appendix 1, Table 5). "Regular contact with parents" (item 26) was named by 31.3 per cent principals, 32.9 per cent coordinators, and 35.1 per cent teachers. "Consulting parents" (item 21) was indicated by 19.4 per cent principals, 15.8 per cent coordinators, and 18.1 per cent teachers. However, when it came to "decision-making" (item 3) the corresponding figures were

only 1.3 per cent, 2.5 per cent and 3.2 per cent for principals, coordinators, and teachers respectively. The forming of "parent councils" (item 25) figured for 16.9 per cent of principals, 14.6 per cent of coordinators, and 10.6 per cent of teachers. Viewing the parent as "prime educator" (item 1) was named by 5.6 per cent of principals, 5.1 per cent of coordinators, and 8.5 per cent of teachers.

It appears then that the concept of parent involvement has entered the culture of a substantial proportion of these schools. In the previous sections, dealing with priorities (4.1.1) and valuing pupils (4.1.2) parent involvement had not emerged on the part of teachers. Later findings will give evidence from other perspectives on this matter. A recent innovation in Irish schools, viz. the involvement of parents in classroom activity (item 9) and paired reading (item 11) also surfaced. Principals noted this "parent involvement" in 3.2 per cent instances, coordinators 5.7 per cent, and teachers 9.5 per cent. The percentage on the part of coordinators is, however, rather low. "Fundraising" (item 10), which is negatively viewed by many theorists of education, had a combined figure of 1.8 per cent.

Respect for parents was shown in different ways. Unlike "respect for pupils" above, the answers were often specific: "Open door policy" (item 29) seemed highly valued among principals and coordinators at 35.6 per cent and 32.9 per cent, with teachers at 17.0 per cent. "Trust" and "openness" (items 17 and 18) featured at 18.8 per cent for principals and 8.3 per cent for coordinators; teachers did not figure in this area. Valuing parents through emotional support featured under the heading of "home visitation" (item 2), "welcoming parents to the school" (items 4 and 20) "availability to parents" (item 6), "encouragement" (item 12), and "understanding of parents" (item 13) and "involvement of parents through coordinator activities" (item 27). Teachers figured highest in their "avail-

ability" to parents (item 6), and in the appreciation of coordinator activities for parents (item 27), at 21.3 per cent and 37.2 per cent respectively. Principals gave "availability" a figure of 8.8 per cent and coordinators gave 6.3 per cent. The coordinator activities in the HSCL scheme was named by 14.4 per cent principals and 22.2 per cent coordinators.

There was a low figure given by all respondents to home visitation (item 2) which is surprising, given the fact that 30 – 40 per cent of the coordinator's work time should be devoted to this area. Principals gave a figure of 1.9 per cent to home visitation, and coordinators and teachers gave 3.2 per cent and 1.1 per cent respectively. It is difficult to understand these low percentages about such an important aspect of the coordinator's work.

Valuing parents through giving "practical support" was named by the three categories. Areas under practical support included: the provision of parents' room and crèche facilities; meetings with parents on individual and group basis and the giving of advice and information. The first of these, "parents' room and crèche", (items 7 and 33) figures highly in Department of Education priorities. It is difficult to be sure of the significance of the actual figures. Parents' room and crèche facilities featured for 10.6 per cent of principals, 15.2 per cent of coordinators and 11.7 per cent of teachers. A few comments are in order. It is well-known that teachers were apprehensive about such facilities, yet their figure here is quite reasonable; the fact that coordinators have at least their own room and often access to some other space for parents, may account for the rather low percentage here. The phrase "informing parents" (item 15) was used by 11.3 per cent of principals, 7.6 per cent of coordinators and 10.1 per cent of teachers. The choice of this ex-



pression may indicate a somewhat more formal, even authoritative style of leadership, than the language of consultation and communication used earlier.

In Appendix 1, Table 1 (items 5 and 6 combined) more than half of the coordinators, 17.5 per cent principals, and 0.9 per cent teachers named "parent involvement" as a priority. In Appendix 1, Table 5 (item 16) the figure for principals and teachers for "parent involvement" is much higher at 26.9 per cent and 9.6 per cent respectively. The percentage of coordinators drops to 22.2 per cent. The reason for the high figure given to "parent involvement" in Table 4.2 and in Appendix 1, Tables 5 and Table 6 may lie in the fact that respondents were asked their perceptions on valuing parents. On the other hand, Appendix 1, Table 1 related to priorities for school/community/class development and in response "parent involvement" got a high figure from coordinators only. The principals and teachers may have identified more, from their role point of view, with the brief relating to school development in 4.1.1.

### **Summary**

The foregoing illustrates that:

- The involvement of parents was valued by a high proportion of respondents.
- Teachers were higher than the other categories in their perception of the "emotional" and "practical" support given to parents. "Emotional" support covered such areas as "home visitation", "availability", and "understanding", while "practical" support referred to resources and meetings.
- The concept of parent involvement in a practical sense had become an integral part of these schools.
- Teachers showed more openness to parent involvement.
- Home visitation was not a value for any of the respondents.
- The provision of a parent's room and crèche facilities, despite the apprehension of teachers in the past, seemed valued.

- There may be a regression to the more authoritative style leadership as noted in the phrase "informing parents" (item 15) and in the very low figures given to "home visitation" (item 2) as opposed to "consultation" and "communication" used earlier.

The perceptions of principals, coordinators, and teachers regarding the ways by which parents were valued, seemed to give a favourable back drop against which the coordinator carried out his/her work. A figure of 38.0 per cent was given to the "involvement of parents" and this is probably a high figure by national standards. It must be remembered, however, that the question was focused directly on "valuing parents". Teachers showed more openness to parent involvement in 4.1.3 than they had in 4.1.1 and 4.1.2. Home visitation got little mention. It would seem that this area of work would need, support, encouragement and perhaps the provision of further training.

#### **4.1.4 PERCEPTIONS ON HOW SCHOOL PERSONNEL SOUND OUT THE FEELINGS OR OPINIONS OF PUPILS**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognised that we should provide direction to the child's right to freedom of thought "in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child," and to the child's freedom of expression "in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." The development of identity, self-image, social cooperation, communication, peer relationships, child-to-child learning, child-adult interactions, equality between boy/girl roles (while at the same time recognising and valuing individual differences and special needs) is vital. Hart holds that "the best opportunities for democratic experiences for children come from sustained involvement in a group" (Hart, 1997: 45). His goal was "not to encourage the development of 'children's power' or to see children operate as an entirely independent sector of their community" (Ibid.) but rather to foster "models of genuine participation" between children, teenagers and adults (Ibid., 42). Since post-primary schools are more inaccessible to parents than primary schools there is need to develop other channels to ascertain parent and pupil perspectives. This can be achieved through primary school visits when teacher and

pupil perspectives can be highlighted (Bagley, Woods and Glatter, 1996: 125-138). The main information sought here was:

- to learn if pupil opinions were sought, and if so to discover what, if any, use was made of this information;
- to learn if pupils were happy in school;
- to detect possible links with "respecting pupils" above.

In total there were 754 responses from principals, coordinators, and teachers which fell into 35 categories. Principals identified 33 categories, while coordinators and teachers identified 28, and 20 categories respectively (Appendix 1, Table 7). The 35 categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 8) which show the patterning of *all* the responses. Top responses were tested for statistical significance in the variations between groups.

#### **Perceptions of the top way through which school personnel sound out the feelings or opinions of pupils**

Principals, coordinators and teachers in the target population were asked to name their top three perceptions in relation to how school personnel seek to sound out the feelings or opinions of pupils. We now analyse, in Table 4.4, their perception of the top method used.

**Table 4.4 Perceptions of the Top Way in Identifying Feelings/Opinions of Pupils Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

Top Way	Principals	Coordinators	Teachers	Total
	%	%	%	%
<b>By formal listening</b>	78.1	81.3	78.8	79.4
<b>Sounding through the services of professionals and school structures</b>	10.9	15.0	8.2	11.6
<b>Through building relationships</b>	3.9	2.8	8.2	4.7
<b>By listening informally</b>	7.0	0.9	4.7	4.4
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>320</b>

**Chi-square = 10.23    DF = 6    P = .114**

All categories, principals, coordinators, and teachers, give a high figure to "formal listening" to pupils. "Formal listening" includes such areas as "discussion", "input to school rules" by pupils, and the "student council". When "formal listening" is combined with "informal listening", the overall total is very high. "Informal listening" covered what respondents might hear when on "yard duty" or from "past pupils" and "from parents". Soundings through the "services of professionals" and "school structures" got a high percentage from coordinators while teachers were higher than principals and coordinators in "building relationships". As shown by the Chi-square, the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were not statistically significant.

Included in "formal listening" (Appendix 1, Table 7) is sounding out the feelings and opinions of pupils at transfer stages (entering and leaving schools). This category (item 8) got the highest figure from principals at 47.7 per cent, from coordinators at 42.6 per cent, and from teachers at 44.7 per cent. In line with modern research, a high degree of emphasis was placed on transfer programmes within the HSCL Scheme. Other priorities for principals were: "class discus-

sion/group work" (item 1) at 32.8 per cent, and "listening/ identification of needs" (item 3) at 20.3 per cent. The other priorities for coordinators were "listening/identification of needs" (item 3) and "one-to-one meetings" (item 6) at 30.6 per cent and 25.9 per cent respectively. Teachers had the same further priorities with 30.6 per cent for both "listening/identification of needs" and "one-to-one meetings" (items 3 and 6).

In the area of "listening to pupils/identifying their needs" (item 3) and having "one-to-one meetings" with pupils (item 6) the teachers' answer is interesting with a figure of 30.6 per cent in each of these classes. This further highlights a role focus on the part of teachers. This individual focus was already noted on the part of all respondents in 4.1. Principals gave "listening to pupils" (item 3) 20.3 per cent and coordinators gave 30.6 per cent. For "meetings with pupils" (item 6) principals were 16.4 per cent with coordinators at 25.9 per cent. "Questionnaires to pupils" (item 7) provided an avenue for soundings and was named by 10.9 per cent of principals, 10.2 per cent of coordinators, and 3.5 per cent of teachers. Having a "student council/forum" (items 9 and 27) was another route named by 12.5 per cent of principals, 13.9 per cent of coordinators, and 3.5 per cent of teachers. Principals placed value on "formal discussion with pupils," (item 1) at 32.8 per cent, while that of coordinators was 21.3 per cent and of teachers was 10.6 per cent. Allowing an "input to school rules" by pupils (item 2) was named by 9.4 per cent of principals, 14.8 per cent of coordinators, and 1.2 per cent of teachers.

From the foregoing perceptions it would seem that efforts were made to sound out and use the opinions of pupils. Another form of sounding the feelings and opinions of pupils was by "listening to their parents," (item 4 and 16) named by

15.7 per cent of principals, 12.0 per cent of coordinators, and 9.4 per cent of teachers. This finding is in sharp contrast with Appendix 1, Table 2 (item 30) where a combined figure of 0.9 per cent was given for "valuing parents" by principals and coordinators as a way of respecting pupils. The "tutor system" (item 11) as a method for enlisting pupil opinion was given by 8.6 per cent of principals, 11.1 per cent of coordinators, and 4.7 per cent of teachers. Compare this with Appendix 1, Table 3 (item 27) where principals gave 1.3 per cent, coordinators 0.6 per cent and teachers 1.1 per cent to the "tutor system" as a way of respecting pupils. This gives more focus to the tutor system as an important structure in post-primary schools. Another valued structure was the "pastoral care system" (item 21), named by 7.8 per cent of principals, 5.6 per cent of coordinators, and 10.6 per cent of teachers. All groups saw the "teacher" (item 17) as a vehicle through which pupil feelings and opinions could be sounded: Principals 9.4 per cent, coordinators and teachers 3.7 per cent and 3.5 per cent respectively.

Kyriacou speaks of the "affective" issues, "the emotional and social factors which impinge upon pupils' learning...One of the most important affective issues related to pupil learning is the pupil's self-concept." (Kyriacou, 1997: 35 also 1995). In other words, how the pupil values himself/herself is hinged on the value the significant adults place on the young person. According to 24.7 per cent of the teachers the happiness of children is detected through "observation" (item 18).

### **Summary**

The evidence on the identification of pupil feelings and opinions suggests that:

- Formal listening to pupils was perceived as the most frequent method of identification of pupil feelings and opinions.
- Class discussion was perceived as high by principals while one-to-one meetings with pupils as high by coordinators and teachers.

- The tutor and pastoral care system is used to identify the feelings and opinions of pupils.
- It would seem that school personnel may be happiest in pursuing pupil-focused activity – the primary objective, after all, of schooling. This is quite acceptable provided schools are "centred on children and adults as learners" (Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham, 1997: 54). Education must be "based on the multiple ways in which children learn" (Ibid., 53) with "a dedication to maximising each person's learning" (Ibid., 58; Gardner, 1993 and McCarthy, 1980).
- As outlined in 4.1 there is a need to involve the wider school community. Having said that, an emphasis was placed by all groups on the parent as a vital element in working with schools for the happiness of the pupil. This finding links with the view expressed by the three groups of respondents in Appendix 1, Table 5 (item 1) that the parent is the "prime educator".

From the perceptions of respondents it can be said that the environment in which coordinators work is one where pupils are listened to. Listening in itself portrays an interest in pupils as does the valuing of the tutor and pastoral care system. This reality should make the link role of the coordinator easier with both families and staff. An emphasis was placed on the inclusion of parents in providing for the needs of pupils. There was talk of using the "student-council/forum" and of having "input to school rules" by pupils, all of this depends very much on the *quality* of the "listening" mentioned above. It is widely accepted in literature (Wehlage et al., 1989; Goldman and Newman, 1998) that many pupils who drop out of school do so because they lack a sense of belonging. It would seem that schools are making efforts to hear pupils. Work needs to be done in making at-risk pupils more engaged with learning which is responsive to their needs and abilities.

## 4.2 COMMUNICATION

The second theme which forms the environment within which coordinators work is "Communication" (4.2). Communication is another key element within the HSCL scheme and with "Valuing People" is the backdrop to the coordinators' work. There is much emphasis today, in theory and in practice, on the value of active listening leading to good communication. A recent poll of top managers in American corporations named "the ability to express oneself clearly and forcefully" as the main quality they looked for in young graduates (Lampikoski and Emden, 1996: 116).

Iacocca believed that management is about motivating other people and that "the only way you can motivate people is to communicate with them...you may know your subject, but you have to keep in mind that your audience is coming in cold...a good manager needs to listen at least as much as he needs to talk...real communication goes in both directions" (Iacocca, 1985: 53-54 see also Boyett and Conn, 1995: 36-38). Of the same opinion is Lagadec who says that "communicating does not simply mean being able to send messages, it also means being able to receive them" (Lagadec, 1993: 14). Cane, speaking about the traditional downward communication emphasises the need for "upward and cross-functional communication" (Cane, 1996: 43). She claims that effective communication presupposes an equality and respect between the parties to ensure clear reception in which it is "just as important to listen as to speak" (Ibid.). Implicit in the Kaizen method (a Japanese form of leadership, where there is "no such thing as perfection" or reaching "targets", as they are limiting, but rather outputs referred to as "standards") is the practice of "inter-departmental or cross-functional cooperation" (Ibid., 55). This method of inter-departmental cooperation, the readiness to work with other agencies and departments has been one of the Basic Principles of the HSCL scheme since its inception (2.2.1 - 2.2.12).

#### **4.2.1 COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY**

A good communication method calls for clarity on the part of the person delivering the message. It also requires that the deliverer has a clear understanding of his/her audience and their interests. Added to the foregoing requirements is the need to discern just what information the audience requires. Finally the deliverer needs to decide on the method he/she will use. Wellington encapsulates this in her eight purposes for communicating: "to inform, to reinforce understanding, to



engender openness, to promote involvement, to motivate, to enable, to reinforce personal identity with a work team, the company and its mission, and to maintain focus on customer satisfaction" (Wellington, 1995: 97).

In the communication process in schools, involving homes and the local community, it is important to remember that a frequent barrier to effective communication and to influencing people is overload. Hale and Whitlam hold "that the reason a person is selective in their listening is due to the sheer amount of information coming at them" (Hale and Whitlam, 1995: 118). Johnson and Scholes calling for "clarity of communication" and for delivery of "no more than three strategic messages" seem to hold the same viewpoint (Johnson and Scholes, 1993: 413).

The main information sought here was to note if principals and teachers communicated with parents individually and collectively and if so, the reasons why. It was presumed, because of the nature of the coordinators' role, that they communicated with parents but the reasons for and quality of such communication were also obtained.

All primary school principals, and those at post-primary level communicated with parents on an individual basis. The responses for whether principals communicated with parents collectively were as follows: 96.7 per cent of principals at primary level said "yes", and 3.3 per cent said "no". The corresponding outcomes for post-primary principals was 95.5 per cent said "yes" and 4.5 per cent said "no". There were no missing cases. Amongst the teachers, 94.7 per cent communicated with parents individually and stated "yes", and 5.3 per cent stated "no". The corresponding outcomes for communicating collectively were 38.9 per cent who said "yes" and 61.1 per cent who said "no". There were no missing cases.

#### **4.2.1.1 COMMUNICATION ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS**

There were 1,187 responses relating to communication on an individual basis which fell into 40 categories. Principals identified 31 categories while coordinators and teachers identified 30 and 21 categories respectively (Appendix 1, Table 9). The 40 categories were summarised into five categories (Appendix 1 Table 10) which show the patterning of *all* the responses. As before, the top reasons are subjected to statistical testing for variations between groups.

##### **Top reason for communication with parents on an individual basis**

People like and value individual attention. Such attention is required more often than people admit. "One-to-one attention... Recognition... Bonding... Influencing is communicating" (Mistéil: 1997: 89). Principals, coordinators, and teachers of the target population were asked to state their top three reasons for meeting parents on an individual basis. We now analyse, in Table 4.5, their top reason for communication with parents on an individual basis.

**Table 4.5 Top Reason for Communication with Parents on an Individual Basis Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

<b>Top Reason</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>To give negative information</b>	43.1	14.7	36.7	30.1
<b>To give positive information</b>	25.6	5.6	40.8	20.9
<b>To encourage parents to become involved in school life</b>	4.4	39.5	4.1	18.6
<b>To give organisational information</b>	24.4	14.1	14.3	17.9
<b>To listen, affirm and support parents</b>	2.5	26.0	4.1	12.4
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>435</b>

**Chi-square = 184.84      DF = 8      P < .001**

As noted in Table 4.5 almost one-third of the combined responses for meeting parents individually was to give them "negative information". More than 40.0 per cent of principals and over a third of teachers gave this as their main reason for contacting teachers. It cannot be overlooked that 14.7 per cent of coordinators gave "negative information" to parents. This is contrary to their job description and expectation. The pattern of giving parents "negative information", so obvious in the outcome from Table 4.5 may spring from:

- a discontinuity between home and school life;
- a lack of awareness, on the part of teachers, of the varieties of modern family life and of the nature and consequences of disadvantage;
- a view that "the family is the party that learns and the school is the party that teaches" (Yáñez, 1998: 37);
- an unwillingness to enlist the parents in a proactive way but a readiness to call on them "in eradicating undesirable behaviour or attitudes which adversely affected work" (HMI 1984 cited in Widlake, 1986: 16).

Meeting parents individually to give "positive information" was highlighted by 40.0 per cent of teachers, with principals registering much lower than teachers. However, the figure of 5.6 per cent for coordinators seems extremely low in the light of their role. Encouraging parents "to become involved in school life" was highlighted by coordinators and was very low for principals and teachers. The same pattern was found in relation to listening, affirming and supporting parents. It would seem that principals, coordinators and teachers are once again working out of a particular role focus. As indicated by the Chi-square, the difference in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant.

Further details are provided in Appendix 1, Table 9. For principals the reason for meeting with parents individually was "to discuss indiscipline" (item 2) at 70.6 per cent and "pupil progress" (item 10) at 54.5 per cent and to give "organisational information" (item 4) at 19.4 per cent. Teachers named "indiscipline" (item 2) and "pupil progress" (item 10) both at 66.3 per cent, "poor school attendance" (item 14) and the issue of "parent-teacher meetings" (item 18) at 15.4 per cent and the "attaining of parent hopes and fears" (item 5) at 11.5 per cent. Coordinators met parents "to support and encourage them" through HSCL activities (items 12 and 33) 49.7 per cent, "to support them on home visitation" (item 32) at 28.2 per cent and "to listen to them" (item 22) at 27.1 per cent. This was really the first recognition given by coordinators to "home visitation" which is considered such an important aspect of their work by the Department of Education. However, it is not mentioned by either principals or teachers.

"Behavioural problems" (item 2) presented as the highest reason for principals and teachers to meet parents at 70.6 per cent and 66.3 per cent respectively. The figure for coordinators was 15.3 per cent. Specific mention was made about bul-

lying (item 21) by 5.0 per cent of principals, 0.6 per cent of coordinators, and 2.9 per cent of teachers. It is worth recording here that 15.3 per cent of coordinator responses related to the indiscipline problem and to note throughout the analysis if their response is proactive rather than reactive, (in keeping with the preventative nature of the HSCL scheme).

A somewhat similar situation emerged regarding individual meetings on "pupil progress" (item 10) where 54.4 per cent of principals, and 66.3 per cent of teachers met parents for this reason. The figures are meagre for meeting parents to speak of "pupil improvement" (item 3): 2.5 per cent for principals, 0.6 per cent for coordinators, and 4.8 per cent for teachers. The issue of "poor attendance" (item 14) was named by 10.0 per cent of principals, 4.0 per cent of coordinators, and 15.4 per cent of teachers. The figures given for poor attendance seemed very low for all three groups but particularly for principals and class teachers/year heads who are supposed to make the first contact with families before offering the services of the coordinator as a support person; hence the lower figure from coordinators. The issue of poor attendance may need to be addressed by principals and staff in a proactive way through the HSCL scheme. However, we must bear in mind that respondents were only asked for their first three reasons.

It is worth noting that the highest figure for coordinators was that of supporting-encouraging parents through "HSCL activities" (items 12 and 33), at 39.0 per cent, "home visiting" (item 32), at 28.2 per cent and "listening to parent needs and opinions", (item 22) at 27.1 per cent. Principals and teachers gave 3.8 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively to "listening to parents" (item 22). In addition, principals (3.8 per cent) met parents "to affirm-support" them (item 6), and 3.8 per cent of teachers do likewise. This appears to portray the narrow focus again of

each individual doing his/her own job without overall recourse to wider school issues. This was further borne out by the figures encouraging-supporting HSCL activities (items 12 and 33): the outcome from principals was 4.4 per cent, from coordinators was 49.7 per cent, and from teachers was 1.0 per cent. For "home visitation" (item 32) the figure was 28.2 per cent for coordinators with no figure from principals or teachers.

Concern for those with particular "needs" and the "disadvantaged" seemed to be in evidence with the following items acknowledged: meeting individual parents to elicit their "hopes" and "fears-concerns", to give "placement advice" for pupils with particular needs, meetings in relation to "illness-malnutrition", the meeting of "marginalised parents" and parents with "specific family problems". In relation to eliciting "hopes" and "fears-concerns" (items 5 and 26), 11.3 per cent of principals, 7.3 per cent of coordinators, and 15.3 per cent of teachers met parents for this purpose. Regarding pupils "with specific learning needs" (item 25), 10.6 per cent of principals, 4.0 per cent of coordinators, and 5.8 per cent of teachers met parents because of this need while 11.3 per cent of principals, 0.6 per cent of coordinators, and 7.7 per cent of teachers met parents in relation to pupil "illness-malnutrition" (item 1). Meeting "marginalised parents" (item 36) figured for 6.8 per cent of coordinators and for neither of the other categories. Supporting families with "specific problems" other than schooling (item 19) was recorded by principals at 15.6, by coordinators at 24.3 per cent, and by teachers at 4.8 per cent. These findings display an interest in the all-round development of the pupil and are in sharp contrast with those relating to the "weak" (item 42), the "disturbed" (item 43), and the "disadvantaged" (item 44) in Appendix 1, Table 3. "Parent-teacher meetings" (item 18) figured for 8.8 per cent of principals, 1.7 per cent of

coordinators, and 15.4 per cent of teachers. Advice on the "placement of pupils" in mainstream schooling (item 8) was the reason, for principals at 10.0 per cent, coordinators at 2.3 per cent, and teachers at 7.7 per cent, to meet parents. Allied to this was the meeting of individual parents around "transfer needs" of pupils (item 9). Principals gave this 10.0 per cent, coordinators gave 13.6 per cent, and there was no acknowledgement from teachers. However, as noted in Appendix 1, Table 7 (item 8) transfer programmes were the highest priority for principals, coordinators and teachers and may be a group programme rather than one for individual contact with parents. The suggestions and opinions of parents in relation to "policies and school development" (item 7) were sought on an individual basis by 5.0 per cent of principals and 2.3 per cent of coordinators. This links in with the "consulting and co-operating" with parents outlined in Appendix 1, Table 5 (items 21 and 22). The lack of clear targets, (item 24) and accountability (item 42) were recorded in Appendix 1, Table 1. It is worth noting that "evaluation", (item 27), with regard to parents working in the classroom and with paired reading was named by only 1.3 per cent of principals and 1.9 per cent of teachers. This was not named by coordinators.

### **Summary**

The evidence suggests that:

- Meeting parents to give negative information was the most frequent reason for principals, and teachers, to communicate with parents.
- The highest percentages for principals related to the discussing of indiscipline, issues around pupil progress, and to the giving of information.
- Teachers gave high figures to "indiscipline" and "pupil progress", as they did to "poor attendance" issues and "parent-teacher meetings".
- Teachers also gave very high percentages to the passing on of positive information to parents.

- Meeting parents for support and encouragement purposes both at HSCL activities and on home visitation was important to coordinators.
- Principals and teachers did not mention home visitation as a priority.
- Many coordinators are seen to work with indiscipline issues. This type of activity is in conflict with the thrust of their role in the HSCL scheme.
- There is some concern shown for those with particular needs and for the disadvantaged.
- Again there is a role focus with each individual more centered in his/her own area of work.
- Suggestions and opinions of parents were sought infrequently, which linked with Appendix 1, Table 5 (items 21 and 22).
- Evaluation appears, with a very low figure, linking with the findings in Appendix 1, Table 1 (items 24 and 42).

The coordinator's work environment is one where there is a readiness to meet parents to give "negative information". Just under one third of the responses went to this area, coordinators being among the respondents (Table 4.5). This would seem to indicate lack of clarity among some coordinators regarding the nature of their work. However, meeting parents in order to give support and encouragement both to HSCL activities and on home visitation was important to coordinators. This is consistent with what parents and principals said about coordinators during the interviews. We shall see that it is also compatible with the coordinator's own evaluation of themselves during the interview part of the research. "Suggestions and opinions" of parents were sought at a minimal level. Perhaps the reason for this was that many parents were being met simply because of indiscipline and absenteeism issues. School personnel might see it as unlikely that these particular parents would have the energy or the insight to make "suggestions". On the other hand, it must be noted that 70.0 percent of the reasons for meeting parents were very positive.

#### 4.2.1.2 COMMUNICATION ON A COLLECTIVE BASIS

In this section the 954 responses relating to communication, on a collective basis, fell into 37 categories. Principals fell into 29 categories, coordinators into 31, and teachers into 21 categories (Appendix 1, Table 11). The 37 categories were summarised into three categories (Appendix 1, Table 12) which shows the patterning



of *all* the responses. Again, top reasons, with Chi-square values, are presented below.

**Top reason for communication with parents collectively**

When schools encourage communication by asking for help, being up-front and honest, parent reaction is likely to be positive. As a result: "the group will probably learn that the manager [BOM/school personnel] is willing to treat their problems seriously. And when a manager shows empathy, the team is likely to react by being willing to give suggestions for solving problems and taking responsibility for taking initiative" (Buchholz and Roth, 1987: 86).

Principals, coordinators, and teachers of the target population were asked to state their top three reasons for communicating with parents collectively. We now examine, in Table 4.6, their top reason for communication with parents on a collective basis.

**Table 4.6 Top Reason for Communication with Parents on a Collective Basis Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

Top Reasons	Principals	Coordinators	Teachers	Total
	%	%	%	%
To promote involvement in educational programmes	78.3	68.0	77.5	73.4
To promote consultation, communication, partnership	12.5	28.5	7.5	19.5
To foster partnership	9.2	3.5	15.0	7.1
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	152	172	40	364

Chi-square = 22.74      DF = 4      P < .001

By far the highest priority for all respondents was meeting parents collectively "to promote involvement in educational programmes". Principals and teachers were close in their percentages, while coordinators figured lower. Promoting "consul-

tation, communication, partnership" figured next and the "fostering of partnership" last. Coordinators were higher than principals and teachers in the "consulting and communicating" and lower in relation to "partnership". As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant.

We will further analyse these findings through Appendix 1, Table 11. The principal response to "the giving of information and advice" (item 3) was 45.1 per cent, to "curriculum/Religious Education" (item 2) was 38.6 per cent: while "transfer programmes" (item 13) tied with "class meetings" (item 14) at 20.3 per cent each. Coordinators gave courses in "parent education" (items 8 and 31) 50.0 per cent, "transfer programmes" (item 13) 27.9 per cent, and the "identification of needs" (item 21) 23.3 per cent. For teachers the giving of "information and advice" (item 3) got 47.5 per cent. The new "facilitated parent teacher meetings" (item 17) in which the parents expectations and concerns for their children are discussed, where their own needs are named, and where an opportunity to be involved in policy around homework and discipline is offered, was 25.0 per cent. "Class meetings for parents" (item 14) got 20.0 per cent from teachers. The response from coordinators for "parent training/development" (items 8 and 31) was 50.0 per cent. The response from principals was 5.9 per cent while that of teachers was 2.5 per cent. On the other hand the "giving of information and advice" to parents (item 3) got 45.1 per cent from principals, 22.1 per cent from coordinators, and 47.5 per cent from teachers.

As in Appendix 1, Table 9 the notion of "advice giving" (item 8) surfaced again, so too did the "health and welfare of pupils" (item 1). On this occasion the figure for "health and welfare" (item 9) was higher at 8.5 per cent for principals,

5.8 per cent for coordinators, and 5.0 per cent for teachers. While the finding in relation to pupil well-being had a low figure, it links with the positive finding about the pastoral care system in Appendix 1, Table 7 (item 21).

There were nine different types of meeting identified in order to give parents "information" and "help" in relation to their children at school. One of them, "information and advice" giving, has already been outlined. "Curriculum/ Religious Education" (item 2) was named by 38.6 per cent of principals, 9.3 per cent of coordinators and 10.0 per cent of teachers. "Transfer programmes" (item 13) surfaced here again in this question with a figure of 20.3 per cent for principals, with coordinators and teachers at 27.9 per cent and 7.5 per cent respectively. Two different types of class meeting were named: the general one (item 15), that schools are familiar with for years, at 19.0 per cent for principals, 6.4 per cent for coordinators, and 5.0 per cent for teachers. A new type of meeting (item 17) emerged in the first few years of the HSCL scheme, "facilitated" by the class teacher and coordinator or sometimes by the coordinator alone. The figure for this meeting was 13.7 per cent for principals, 12.8 per cent for coordinators, and 25.0 per cent for teachers. Principals, at 6.5 per cent, recorded holding meetings for parents relating to the Senior Cycle (item 16). "General school meetings" (item 15) open to all parents were included by 19.0 per cent of principals, 6.4 per cent of coordinators, and 5.0 per cent of teachers. Early Start pre-school units (item 12) were in six schools when the data was collected. These schools met parents collectively according to 3.3 per cent of principals, 5.2 per cent of coordinators, and 2.5 per cent of teachers. Principals (4.6 per cent) met parents at school assemblies (item 19). One can conclude from the foregoing that efforts seem to be made by school personnel to involve parents in the educational programmes of their children.

In the area of promoting "consultation - communication" some interesting points emerged. One was consultation around forming a code of good behaviour "discipline code" (item 1), to which principals gave a figure of 8.5 per cent, coordinators 1.2 per cent, and teachers 2.5 per cent. The second was "contributing to school policy" (item 6), from 11.8 per cent of principals, and 4.7 per cent of coordinators with nothing from teachers. It is encouraging to note this beginning in collaborative policy formation.

Linking into the area of communication is "needs identification" (item 21), a consultative process, carried out by coordinators as part of their role and named by them at 23.3 per cent. Principals gave "needs identification" (item 21) a figure of 0.7 per cent, and teachers gave 5.0 per cent. This process was named by 14.1 per cent of coordinators and 1.0 per cent of teachers in Appendix 1, Table 9 (item 37). Identifying needs through "local committee meetings" (item 35) was named by 7.6 per cent of coordinators. Coordinators seem to be clear on this vital aspect of their role. Meeting parents to promote their "involvement in HSCL activities" (item 24) was named by 6.5 per cent of principals, 21.5 per cent of coordinators, and 2.5 per cent of teachers.

"Fund-raising" (item 22) surfaced again, this time with the higher figure of 7.2 per cent of principals, and 1.2 per cent of coordinators, with nothing from teachers. "Fund-raising" Appendix 1, Table 5 (item 10) got a combined total of 2.2 per cent. "Evaluating HSCL activities" (item 33) was named by 4.7 per cent of coordinators as a reason for meeting parents collectively. This is an interesting fact from two points of view: firstly, the consultative process concerning parents and secondly, the notion of "evaluation" had been almost absent from coordinator work until now.

While most elements in this category "promoting consultation-communication" should lead to partnership, the "fostering of partnership" got a category of its own in Table 4.6. In this category, "fostering partnership" which got an overall total of 7.1 per cent in Table 4.6, was comprised of some practical classes most with low figures (Appendix 1, Table 11). The "training of parents as home visitors" (item 30) surfaced here from 2.3 per cent of coordinators. There seemed to be a limited delegation of this important work to parents on the part of some coordinators. Coordinators at 2.3 per cent also spoke of "spotting talent" (item 36) when meeting parents. Principals and teachers did not mention these categories. Developing the "core group" (item 29), a group of committed parents close to the coordinator and his/her work, often referring to the parents on the Local Committee, was a reason for 2.0 per cent of principals, and 4.1 per cent of coordinators meeting parents. The provision of "study skills training" for parents (item 18) was named by 2.6 per cent of principals, 7.6 per cent of coordinators, and 5.0 per cent of teachers as a way of fostering partnership.

We recall an alliance (Appendix 1, Table 9) between principals and teachers supporting a school focus, through prioritising the issues of "indiscipline" (item 2) and "poor school attendance" (item 14), "pupil progress" (item 10) and the giving of "information" (item 4), when meeting with parents on an individual basis. For meeting with parents collectively a similar pattern emerged as noted in Appendix 1, Table 11. "Information and advice giving" (item 3) surfaced for 45.1 per cent of principals and 47.5 per cent of teachers while the more formal type parent-teacher meeting (item 14) got a figure of 20.3 per cent from principals and 20.0 per cent from teachers. It was interesting to note that 25.0 per cent of teachers favoured the new style "facilitated" parent-teacher meeting (item 17) while prin-

cipals were lower at 13.7 per cent. An emphasis was placed by 38.6 per cent of principals on "curricular" (item 2) and on "transfer programmes" (item 13) at 20.3 per cent. Teacher figures in these two areas were 10.0 per cent and 7.5 per cent respectively. Teachers (17.5 per cent) saw the "pupil as central" (item 5) to all activities while the outcome for principals was 2.0 per cent and for coordinators was 0.6 per cent.

Coordinators, in their meetings with parents both individually and collectively seem to have struck a balance between pupil education-learning (items 2, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18 and 28) and parent training-development (items 6, 8, 10, 11, 20, 21, 24, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33, 35 and 36). In Appendix 1, Table 9 we noted that coordinators focused on "supporting-encouraging" parents (items 6 and 33), "home visitation" (item 32), and "listening to parent needs" (item 22). They balanced this through their involvement in "poor attendance" (item 14) and "indiscipline issues" (item 2), "pupil progress" (item 10), "placement advice" (item 8), "transfer needs" (item 9) and "specific learning needs" matters (item 25). Working with parents collectively (Appendix 1, Table 11) coordinators spoke of "identification of parent needs" (item 21) and courses in parent "training-development" (items 6, 8 and 24) but there was an equal emphasis on transfer programmes (item 13) and many types of "parent-teacher meetings" (items 12, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18).

The giving of "advice" surfaced in meetings with parents on an individual and collective basis and is remindful of "informing them" found in Appendix 1, Table 9. It is somewhat reminiscent of Freire's "false charity" which constrains the disadvantaged to "extend their trembling hands" rather than empowering individuals and groups to work together "[to] transform the world" (Freire, 1972: 21-22). The fact that parent suggestions and opinions are sought in the formation of school

policy, small as the percentages are, is interesting. There is a link here with the consultative process found in Appendix 1, Table 5. As in Appendix 1, Table 1 the lack of clear targets for evaluation and accountability must be noted.

### **Summary**

The data show that:

- By far the highest reason given by respondents was meeting parents "to promote involvement in educational programmes".
- "Consultation", "communication" leading to "partnership" came next while "partnership" itself came third.
- Pupil well-being surfaced again, as it did in Appendix 1, Table 7 (item 21).
- There has been an initial step made in collaborative policy formation. There was consultation about a "discipline code" (item 1) and "school policy" (item 6).
- Coordinators seemed to value the needs identification process as a vital aspect of their role.
- Evaluation, almost absent until now, procures a figure from coordinators.
- "Training parents as home visitors" and developing the "core group" surfaced.
- Once again there seemed to be very much a role focus in the outcome from all respondents (Appendix 1, Table 1; Appendix 1, Table 7; Appendix 1, Tables 9 and 11).
- The focus of principals and teachers was on pupil development through providing information-advice to parents.
- Coordinators seemed to have struck a balance between pupil education-learning and parent training-development.
- The lack of clear targets for evaluation and accountability were in evidence as in Appendix 1, Table 1.

The coordinators work in an environment where by far the highest reason for meeting parents collectively was "to promote involvement in educational programmes". This is a very positive finding and to some degree lessens the impact of the meeting of parents to give "negative information" (Table 4.5). "Consultation", "communication" in general, and in the form of a "discipline code" and "school policy" took place. It was not mentioned whether parents were actually part of the formulation of these policies. It cannot be overemphasised how much parents and community agencies need to be involved if there is to be a sense of ownership and belonging. Coordinators themselves have moved slightly towards delegation through the "training of parents as home visitors" and through developing the "core group". Coordinators seemed to have struck a balance between developing the pupil and the parent, while principals and teachers were focused on pupil development. On the one hand this is the nature of their roles, on the other these roles need to be extended (Webb and Vulliamy, 1996).

#### 4.2.2 COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE STAFF

On an individual basis communication is about paying attention, affirming, bonding, influencing and encouraging a sense of responsibility. Within teams and groups, communication meets a number of fundamental needs. In a number of both formal and informal ways, communication: "assists the process of getting...helps clarify the purpose and aims...is the means by which expectations and standards are established, strengthens group or team identity... strengthens individual identity and acceptance" (Mistéil, 1997: 90).

As leaders, parents and teachers carry the responsibility for ensuring that their communication efforts address these basic needs. Communication occurs when someone reacts to the communicator. Communication, however, seeks more, namely to influence a response. Information was sought from principals, coordinators, and teachers relating to communication within the staff in order

- to establish what were the effective methods of communication in schools;
- to establish what were the effective methods of communication in relation to the HSCL scheme;



- to identify how the communication was checked for clarity.

#### 4.2.2.1 WAYS TO ENSURE CLEAR COMMUNICATION WITH STAFF

The 950 responses to this topic of communication from principals and coordinators fell into 16 categories. Coordinators identified all the categories while principals identified 12 categories (Appendix 1, Table 13). The 16 categories were summarised into three categories (Appendix 1, Table 14) which show the patterning of *all* the responses. Top ways of ensuring clear communication which were subjected to statistical testing are presented.

##### Top way to ensure clear communication with teaching staff

We now analyse, in Table 4.7, the top way to ensure clear communication with staff listed by principals and coordinators.

**Table 4.7 Top Ways to Ensure Clear Communication with Teaching Staff Listed by Principals and Coordinators**

Top Way	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
Informal communication on a personal level	45.4	55.2	50.4
Formal communication through the school system	52.8	35.5	43.9
Including staff through involvement, delegation and working towards consensus	1.8	9.3	5.7
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	163	172	335

Chi-square = 15.52      DF = 2      P < .001

As noted from Table 4.7 half the combined totals of principals and coordinators went to "informal communication on the personal level" while "formal communication" came second. The inclusion of staff in a process leading to "consensus" figured low for principals and quite high for coordinators. The differences in the

responses of principals and coordinators are, as shown by the Chi-square statistically significant.

We shall get a closer look at the above three categories (Table 4.7) through Appendix 1, Table 13. In Appendix 1, Table 13 we find that 90.2 per cent of principals gave "staff meetings" (item 2) as their highest figure, with "personal communication" (item 1) at 81.0 per cent and "written communication" (item 5) at 60.7 per cent as their second and third choices. Coordinators (84.1 per cent) had "personal communication" as their highest, with "staff meetings" (item 2) at 83.5 per cent and "written communication" (item 5) at 31.3 per cent.

**Table 4.8 Ways for Communicating According to Teachers**

Category	With Colleagues	Category	With Principal
One-to-one	31.8	One-to-one	31.2
Staff meetings	19.3	Staff meetings	27.3
Informal	28.2	Informal	22.8
Noticeboard	9.5	Noticeboard	8.4
Social gathering	6.8	Social gathering	3.0
Committee work	3.0	Committee work	5.1
Other	1.5	Other	1.8
Phone	0.0	Phone	0.3

Regarding ways to ensure clear communication in their schools with their colleagues and with the principal, teachers responded as in Table 4.8. Teachers were given the categories and were asked to give their first, second and third choices (Appendix 1, Tables 15 and 16). It is obvious that teachers preferred personal and less formal methods of communication.

Returning to principals and coordinators (Appendix 1, Table 13) and to formal communication through the school system, comprising such issues as "staff

meetings" (item 2), the "intercom" (item 3), and "written communication" (item 5) were named. Principals (90.2 per cent) valued "staff meetings", "written communication" (60.7 per cent), and the "intercom" and the "vice-principal" (item 10) both at 3.7 per cent. In this category 83.5 per cent of coordinators valued "staff meetings", they valued "written communication" at 31.3 per cent, the "vice-principal" at 5.7 per cent and "the intercom" at 6.3 per cent. This valuing on the part of principals sounds reasonable as many of the schools have large numbers of pupils and principals may have to use the more formal methods of communication. Coordinators resort to the formal structures of "written communication" and the "intercom".

The second overall choice category for principals and coordinators also shows a strong link with personal and informal communication. In Appendix 1, Table 13 principals (81.0 per cent) gave "personal communication" (item 1) as a priority while 84.1 per cent of coordinators do likewise. "Break time" (item 9) was used by 17.8 per cent of principals and 19.9 per cent of coordinators and "socialising" (item 4) by 1.8 per cent of principals and 1.1 per cent of coordinators. These are the areas teachers refer to under "informal" (Appendix 1, Tables 15 and Table 16). Principals and coordinators speak of "listening-meeting needs-supporting" (item 12) at 5.5 per cent and 2.8 per cent respectively.

In the third category, "including staff through involvement, delegation and working towards consensus" comprised the "giving of information" (item 11), "delegation" (item 6), "visits to the classrooms" (item 13), "involving teachers" in parent room activities (item 14), having a teacher on the "Local Committee" (item 16), providing a "suggestion list" (item 8) and having "year group/class/team meetings" (item 7) for teachers. The "year group/class/team meeting" (item 7) is

distinct from the "formal staff meeting" and was named by 14.7 per cent of principals and 20.5 per cent of coordinators. This type of "committee work" figured for 3.0 per cent of teachers as a way of communicating with colleagues and by 5.1 per cent as a way of communicating with principals (Table 4.8).

### **Summary**

The evidence suggests that:

- Efforts are made in various ways to ensure clear communication with staff by principals.
- In relation to the HSCL scheme efforts at communication are also made by coordinators.
- Teachers have prioritised the personal and less formal methods as the best ways of communicating in their schools (Table 4.8).
- Principals favour formal methods of communication while coordinators fluctuate between formal and informal methods (Table 4.7 and Appendix 1, Table 14).

At this point it can be said that coordinators work in an environment where efforts are made to communicate within staffs. This should enable the school to function better and in turn the HSCL scheme. It should also make the role of the coordinators more fruitful.

#### **4.2.2.2 WAYS OF CHECKING COMMUNICATION**

Principals and coordinators were asked if they had a means of checking how staff felt about the nature of their communication. Almost 80.0 per cent in each case had a method of checking communication. The 547 responses from principals and coordinators fell into 16 categories. Principals and coordinators each identified 13 categories (Appendix 1, Table 17). The 16 categories were summarised into three categories (Appendix 1, Table 18) which show the patterning of *all* the responses. Again, top reasons, with Chi-square values, are presented below.

### Top way for checking communication

We now analyse, through Table 4.9, the top way for checking communication listed by principals and coordinators.

**Table 4.9 Top Way for Checking Communication Listed by Principals and Coordinators**

Top Way	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
Through appraisal of attitudes and relationships	52.7	67.1	60.2
Through a formal evaluation process	42.6	30.7	36.4
Through members of the school community	4.7	2.1	3.3
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	129	140	269

Chi-square = 6.2 DF = 2 P = .044

The "appraisal of attitudes and relationships" figured for principals and coordinators with a much higher percentage on the part of coordinators. The "formal evaluation process" was highlighted more by principals than by coordinators. It is interesting to note that almost 97.0 per cent of the combined totals for principals and for coordinators went to the area of "appraisal-evaluation". This is the first definite inclination towards evaluation. As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant.

In Appendix 1, Table 17 we will note more detail regarding ways of checking communication. The appraisal of "attitudes and relationships" (item 1) is the method which gets the highest figure from principals at 71.3 per cent and from coordinators at 80.0 per cent, regarding the quality of their communication. Another area named by them both is the "level of action" (item 5) at 17.1 per cent

and 15.7 per cent for principals and for coordinators respectively. Being "open to change" (item 7) spells how much people have heard and accepted what has been said and has been recorded by 5.4 per cent of principals and 1.4 per cent of coordinators. Attendance at "social events" (item 13) got 1.6 per cent from principals and 2.9 per cent from coordinators and "Summer Courses" (item 12) got 0.8 per cent from principals. Coordinators (4.3 per cent) spoke of a "valuing of the scheme" (item 16) as a sign that communication was heard. Another area used by the two groups, principals and coordinators, to check the quality of their communication was a formal evaluation process. In the area of formal evaluation the figures given to "teacher views" about the quality of communication (item 3) was 17.8 per cent from principals and 18.6 per cent from coordinators. Having an "open agenda" at staff meetings (item 2) allowed for this also, and was named by 57.4 per cent of principals and 30.0 per cent of coordinators. "Identifying staff views" (item 4) through brainstorming sessions was used by 13.2 per cent of principals and 15.7 per cent of coordinators. Having a "suggestion box" (item 11) enabled staff to express their views about the clarity of communication for 18.6 per cent of coordinators and 3.1 per cent of principals. Coordinators, (2.9 per cent), came up with "formal evaluation", (item 14), at the end of the year.

Members of the "school community" were also a vehicle through which the quality of communication could be checked. Among those named were the "school secretary" (item 8) by 1.6 per cent of principals; "the coordinator" (item 9) was named by 0.8 per cent of principals and 1.4 per cent of coordinators; and the "deputy-principal and middle management" (item 10) by 10.9 per cent of principals and 8.6 per cent of coordinators. The "union steward" (item 6) was named by

5.4 per cent of principals and members of the "Local Committee" (item 15) by 0.7 per cent of coordinators.

### Summary

The foregoing illustrates that:

- Efforts are made by principals and coordinators to ensure clear communication with staff.
- While the priority for principals is "staff meetings", the formal structure, the priority for coordinators is informal communication on a "one-to-one basis". Probably this is quite in line with their relevant roles.
- Teachers favoured the personal communication method, as we noted coordinators did, when working with colleagues and the principal.
- When it comes to assessing how staff felt about the nature of their communication, principals and coordinators gave the "attitudes" of staff and their "relationship" with them as very important ways to check on communication.
- Formal evaluation processes were in evidence in identifying the quality of communication. It is good to find the evaluation process named here. It had been missing in the foregoing sections.

It can be said that efforts to ensure clear communication are made. The building of good inter-personal relationships on an individual basis would seem a good method to use. The collation of "teachers views" through having an open agenda at staff meetings is useful on one hand, but could inhibit creative development through focused discussion on the other. The fact that respondents would be watchful with regard to the level of involvement of staff, the "level of action", is another named method and can be very useful to programme leaders or directors. The more structured approach to evaluation is found in this section, an approach that had been missing up to now. There were efforts to enlist the school community, albeit in a small way, as a vehicle of information regarding the nature of communication. However, it appears that there is more effort at consultation between staff members than there is with staff and the wider school community.

### 4.2.3 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Interpersonal communication is dealt with by Barnes. He speaks about "The Enablement Equation" in which there are five components "communication, training, motivation, empowerment and reward" (Barnes, 1996: 59). He speaks of Kaizen

leaders (4.2) who act as "communication gatekeepers" (Ibid.). In such organisations they are answerable for

the free flow of communication, responsible for originating, receiving, interpreting, presenting, channelling and managing information and the communication paths to and from their teams...information is openly shared...[is] the source of team and company efficiency...is transparent and fully two-way: feedback is an inseparable part of interpersonal and interteam communication, and no-one is immune from an appraisal of both their ability to communicate well and the information that they communicate (Ibid., 60).

Nanus speaks of communication as a "simple dialogue" where the leader listens "sympathetically" to the worker "sensing" the desire to help, putting "concerns into a larger context" while sending the worker off "to solve the problems" (Nanus, 1992: 136). During this "simple dialogue" process Senge et al. believe that "people learn how to think together" (Senge et al, 1997: 358). The sense of responsibility in solving ones own problems, referred to by Nanus above, "calls for highly developed communication and influence skills" according to Zuker (Zuker, 1992: 37, see also Blandford, 1997: 70-71 and 200-201).

Frequently, due to a limited flow of information people can hold a private interpretation of the other's intent which can lead to "a mutual undermining of relationship" (Ryan and Oestreich, 1991: 77). This conflict is an outcome of "distorted communication" and can influence many (Ibid.). Another factor which interferes with the communication process is the inability to keep abreast of changes and growth within groups, the inability to update communication methods. Benson claims: "that methods of communication which were acceptable at earlier stages of development need reworking...because the emergence of more sophisticated collaborative activity requires a corresponding evolution" (Benson, 1996: 131).



The main information sought in this section was to determine if methods/practices of communication had been established between principals and coordinators and between coordinators and teachers. In 92.5 per cent of cases ways of communicating had been established, while the remaining cases, 7.5 per cent, did not have a method. There were 872 priorities listed by principals, coordinators and teachers. These priorities fell into 33 categories (Appendix 1, Table 19). Principals identified 26 categories and coordinators and teachers 27 and 15 categories respectively. Principals and coordinators were asked about their methods of communication with each other while teachers were asked how they related to coordinators. Coordinators were not asked how they communicated with teachers here. The 33 categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 20) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses. Top categories were subjected to statistical testing and are presented below.

**Top method of communication between principals and coordinators and with coordinators by teachers**

We shall now examine, in Table 4.10, the top method of communication between principals and coordinators and with coordinators by teachers.

**Table 4.10 Top Method for Communication Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

<b>Top Priority</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Through formal methods</b>	57.2	54.6	18.1	49.0
<b>Informally, as part of a working relationship</b>	38.2	41.4	72.2	45.7
<b>Through a policy of inclusion and appreciation of roles</b>	4.6	4.0	9.7	5.3
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>398</b>

**Chi-square = 34.31    DF = 4    P < .001**

It seems from Table 4.10 that principals and coordinators chose "formal methods" of communication in their work together. In relating with coordinators, teachers seem to find the "informal method as part of a working relationship" preferable. As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators and teachers were statistically significant.

Further analysis of the issues will be dealt with through Appendix 1, Table 19. As already noted principals and coordinators communicated "through formal methods" as do teachers with coordinators. For 28.3 per cent of principals "frequent meetings" with the coordinator (item 21) was the method of communication most used. For 29.9 per cent of coordinators "written notices" to the principal (item 6) was the communication method most in use. There seemed to be a dichotomy between the verbal method of communication claimed to be pursued by principals and the written method as perceived by coordinators. Teachers (18.5 per cent) communicated with the coordinator through "written notices" (item 6) while 3.7 per cent claimed that they had "frequent meetings" (item 21). "Weekly

meetings" (item 8) and "frequent meetings" (item 21) tied for second place with the coordinators at 26.4 per cent. For 16.4 per cent of principals, and 5.2 per cent of coordinators "staff meetings" (item 11) figured as a method of communicating with each other. Among the teachers, almost 26.0 per cent, gave the "staff meeting" as a method of communicating with coordinators. "Planning together" (item 10) got 11.2 per cent from principals and 19.0 per cent from coordinators as a method of communicating.

Following a "cluster meeting" (item 27), 8.0 per cent of coordinators communicated with principals and 1.7 per cent communicated following meetings of the "policy committee" (item 28). Neither of these categories were named by principals. It is interesting to note that the "Local Committee meeting" (item 19) was named by 2.0 per cent of principals and 2.9 per cent of coordinators. Communication between the two categories took place at Board of Management meetings (item 2) by under 1.0 per cent of principals and coordinators. Only 1.1 per cent of coordinators communicated with the principal after a "home visit" (item 26). Home visitation, as a method of communication with the coordinator, is not mentioned by either principals or teachers. This low priority, given to home visitation, is in keeping with the findings in Appendix 1, Table 5 (item 2). Visiting the coordinator in his/her office for the purposes of "formal" communication was named by 16.0 per cent of teachers. This method was not used by principals. However, 4.9 per cent of teachers used the principal as a "formal method" of communication with the coordinator.

Meeting "informally as part of a working relationship" comprised meeting at a "parents class" (item 1), "informally" (item 3), "telephone" (item 7), "early morning meetings" (item 13), "lunchtime" (item 14), "after school" (item 15), and "in-

formal daily meetings" (item 16). Items 3 and 16 are worth noting. Teachers, (66.7 per cent) seemed to place a lot of value on meeting coordinators "informally". In the case of principals and coordinators the figure for communicating informally (item 3) was 44.1 per cent and 49.4 per cent respectively. "Informal daily meetings" (item 16) were also named by 21.1 per cent of principals and 19.5 per cent of coordinators while the figure for teachers communicating with coordinators was 2.5 per cent. So there was much emphasis on the "informal" method of communication.

In the third priority area (Table 4.10) "communicating through a policy of inclusion and appreciation of roles" attendance at an activity organised by the coordinator (item 5) has proved a useful method for 3.9 per cent of principals, 6.3 per cent of coordinators, and 2.5 per cent of teachers. "Supporting each other" (item 17) was named by 12.5 per cent of principals, 6.3 per cent of coordinators, and 1.2 per cent of teachers. Teachers, (12.3 per cent) met coordinators in "visits to the staffroom" (item 12). Communication took place for 2.6 per cent of principals when "giving advice" (item 23) to the coordinator, while "listening actively" (item 29) was named by 3.4 per cent of coordinators. The "management team" (item 20), usually referring to the deputy principal and senior post holders at second level, was named by 2.6 per cent of principals and 2.9 per cent of coordinators as a vehicle of communication with each other.

Almost half the total responses relating to the top priority go to "formal methods" of communication. There is stark variation between the ways that teachers communicated with coordinators, and the ways in which communication took place between principals and coordinators. It is obvious from Table 4.10 that teachers prefer informal methods when communicating with coordinators. The

following viewpoint from teachers, in relation to whether they had been consulted or not in the "past term" was interesting.

**Table 4.11 Responses from Teachers in Relation to Consultation in the Past Term**

	<b>By principal</b>	<b>By individual teachers</b>	<b>By individual parents</b>	<b>By individual pupils</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	85.8	71.7	65.5	61.1
<b>No</b>	14.2	28.3	34.5	38.9
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>

It is obvious from Table 4.11 that a sizeable minority of teachers were not consulted by the principal during the previous term. It would seem imperative that the teacher would be in consultation with the principal and with all pupils. It could be inferred that it is the role of the principal to ensure communication with teachers and of teachers to ensure communication/consultation with pupils.

### Summary

From the foregoing it can be seen that:

- Efforts were made by principals and coordinators to communicate with each other.
- Principals and coordinators both favoured the formal methods of communication.
- Informal methods were a high priority for teachers in their communication with coordinators.
- There was stark variation between the way that teachers communicated with coordinators and the way in which communication took place between principals and coordinators.
- There seemed to be a dichotomy between the views of principals, who claimed that they met coordinators frequently, and the views of coordinators who spoke of "written notices" to principals regularly.

Coordinators work in an environment where efforts are made to ensure clear communication with staff by principals. Coordinators also work to communicate. Principals and coordinators favour the formal methods of communication. Teachers prefer informal methods of communication. Principals and coordinators communicate on a "formal" basis with each other. Teachers prefer to communicate "informally as part of a working relationship" with the coordinator. The important issue here is that communication is taking place. However, there was a "gap" regarding the methods used, among principals who claimed to meet coordinators "frequently" and coordinators who referred to "written notices" to principals regularly. We will encounter this "gap" in communication methods again and also in "Attitudes to Partnership" devised from the Likert Scale. Inter-personal communication within the staff should be a support to the coordinator in their role as link agent.

### **4.3 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS WITHIN THE FIELD OF THE COORDINATOR**

The "Field of the Coordinator" incorporates the themes "Valuing People" and "Communication". Since the role of the coordinator is one of developing partnership in and between the home, the school and the community we shall summarise Chapter Four within this triple focus. Firstly we examine the outcomes relating to the home and parents within the framework of "valuing" and of "communicating".

#### **4.3.1 THE HOME**

In Chapters One and Two we noted the value placed on the home throughout the literature review, and by the Department of Education through its preventative and integrative programmes. So what conclusions can we make now about the home from the findings in 182 schools in this survey? Principals, coordinators, and teachers believed that the school "values its parents" by "involving" them. Practical areas of parent involvement such as "regular contact with parents", "consulting" them, forming "parent councils" and viewing the parent as "prime educator" featured. However, the different perspectives of coordinators on the one hand and of principals and teachers on the other in relation to "parent involvement" were noted. Coordinators were focused on "partnership" with parents, the

"involvement" of parents, in "getting to know" parents and with their "development". They were also keen on community involvement. Similarly, the development of "parent-teacher relationships" was a priority for coordinators but was less emphasised by principals and was barely mentioned by teachers.

The chief reason for communication with parents on an individual basis by principals and teachers was "to give negative information". We recorded the high percentage given to the issue of "indiscipline" by principals and teachers. While giving "negative information" was low for coordinators, in comparison with the two other groups, it was still a reason for over one eighth of them to communicate with parents. This is contrary to the philosophy of the HSCL scheme and to the Department's expectation of coordinators (Aim 3 and Basic Principles 2.2.5 and 2.2.7). It is worth noting, however, that many coordinators, in keeping with their role, met parents individually "to support" and "encourage" them through "HSCL activities". "Home visits" and "listening to parent needs and opinions" were also recorded. Coordinators could be viewed as balancing this focus with their involvement in "poor attendance" and "indiscipline" issues, "pupil progress", "placement advice", "transfer needs" and "special needs" matters. When communicating with parents collectively coordinators recorded the "identification of parent needs" and courses in parent "training-development" as key areas. This was balanced by an equal emphasis on "transfer" programmes and the various types of "parent-teacher meetings". Other findings showed principals and teachers with a clear role focus. For principals it was a focus on "indiscipline", "pupil progress" and "organisational information". The teacher focus was "indiscipline", "pupil progress", "poor attendance" and "parent-teacher" meetings".

At this point it is worth recalling the emphasis placed by principals, coordinators, and teachers on the "disadvantaged" or "marginalised". We noted that respondents met individual parents to elicit their "hopes" and "fears-concerns", to give "placement advice" for pupils "with specific learning needs", or for pupils with "specific family problems". While all the foregoing focus was on the disadvantaged, the "marginalised" as a group were named only by coordinators. While there is some mention of the "disadvantaged" this is not the case throughout the findings. In fact the "disadvantaged" or "weak" pupil-family only gets some mention and with very low percentages. This is a serious discovery in responses from personnel specifically targeting the disadvantaged.

A very significant finding is the fact that so little emphasis was placed on home visitation by coordinators. The writer was aware of this finding in relation to home visitation for the past few years and has sought to redress it during in-career development modules. From facilitated evaluation sessions during in-service and through observation on the ground it would appear that home visitation is not a priority for a considerable number of coordinators despite the fact that over one third of their time should be spent home visiting. Reasons given by coordinators included overload, inclement weather and involvement in meetings and courses. A more recent one was the difficulty of actually making contact with parents who were often absent through work. The work referred to here is generally temporary and low-paid. This inaccessibility of parents would seem to demand the promotion of training for parents as home visitors, a feature of the HSCL scheme being developed over the past three years. It should also serve to focus the coordinator ever more sharply on their role of working with the most marginalised who, most likely are not out on casual work.



A lot of change needs to take place in order to give the home its central place in the development of the young person. However, growth has happened.

#### **4.3.2 THE SCHOOL**

When examining the home we have noted a definite role focus on the part of principals and teachers in their work with parents. Coordinators seemed to have struck a balance between pupil education-learning and parent training-development. The school as a key aspect of the field in which the coordinator works will now be examined. We begin with the pupil.

When asked about their priorities for school, community and class development principals and teachers were clear in relation to "developing the pupil and the learning environment". This was not the case later in the questionnaire when the pattern was: that of developing relationships, a care system and a learning environment as their perception of how the school "respects its pupils". The sequence should be noted and prompts many questions which will be dealt with in Chapter Eight. The finding is again repeated where "active pupil-centred learning" only gets a small percentage of the total responses relating to "pupil development".

When it came to "sounding out" the feelings and opinions of pupils the principals, coordinators, and teachers followed a similar pattern. This pattern included "formal" and "informal" listening, the use of other school personnel and the "building of relationships". Much credit is due to schools for the amount of "listening", "discussion", "tutorwork", "observation", and "programmes" perceived to be followed. However, no particular mention was made of either the marginalised pupil or his/her family except through the acknowledgement of "home visits" by principals at 0.8 per cent.

We have recognised that a high proportion of principals and teachers made contact with the home, with the individual parent, in order to give "negative information" about the pupil. This took place in over 40.0 per cent of cases for both groups. When it came to meeting parents collectively almost 70.0 per cent of the responses went to promoting "involvement in educational programmes". Nine different types of meeting were identified in order to give parents "information" and "help" in relation to their child at school. "Transfer" meetings and the new "facilitated" parent-teacher meeting have proved both valuable and well attended when provided. It can be said that schools are making great efforts to meet and work with parents when there is a definite school related focus. This good practice calls for recognition.

In the area of "consultation-communication" an emerging practice in the HSCL scheme came to light, that of collaborative policy making. A small number of respondents spoke of consultation around forming a code of good behaviour, a "discipline code". A small number spoke of parents "contributing to school policy". It is interesting to note that by the Spring of 1998, a total of 94.0 per cent of schools in the HSCL scheme had completed a policy making process with parents (2.4.1). This practice needs wider dissemination.

While dealing with school another area that calls for attention is that of communication within the staff of the school. Principals gave a high value to ensuring clear communication through a "formal" channel. For coordinators, including staff through "involvement, delegation and working towards consensus" got a high percentage. Teachers valued "one-on-one" contact, "staff meetings" and "informal" methods, and in that order. Later, teachers clearly showed that informal methods "as part of a working relationship" were very important to them. However, it

must be acknowledged that good relationships do not necessarily yield results. There must be a balance between getting the job done and maintaining relationships, in short between task and maintenance issues. Schools need structures for action to take place. Schools also require planning, monitoring, and evaluating procedures. There was little attention given to planning in the "priority" area sought in 4.1.1. Development for staff was an issue for principals and coordinators. These topics will be very much under consideration when dealing with the research findings from Chapter Five.

### **4.3.3 THE COMMUNITY**

The third area that forms the field in which coordinators work is the local community. Apart for community as in the acronym HSCL there was little acknowledgement of the reality of community. There was some mention on the part of principals and coordinators, more so among the latter, in relation to "priorities for development". Suffice it to say, at this point, that serious thought needs to be given to the place and power of the community in the development of the young person. The community is a vehicle of life long learning for children and adults alike.

One can conclude this chapter on the field of the coordinator by noting that there is in general a positive attitude on the part of all to both valuing people and communicating. But there is quite significant slippage when it comes to practical implementation.

We now turn to an examination of the coordinators' activity in Chapter Five and to perceptions by themselves and others in Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE COORDINATOR IN ACTION

In Chapter Four we examined the school situation or the field of the coordinator through the themes "Valuing People" (4.1) and "Communication" (4.2). With these themes as backdrop we now portray the coordinator in action through Chapter Five. This will be achieved through a detailed analysis of "Structures" (5.1), "Development" (5.2), "Partnership" (5.3), and "Outcomes" (5.4).

#### 5.1 STRUCTURES

Firstly we turn to the theory of Structures (5.1) and then to their analysis (5.1.1 - 5.1.6). In modern times structures that are human, focused, and task driven enable people to perform well in the workplace and to be more content at work. Groups committed to change and transformation need to build "supportive structures and patterns of working with people that are consistent with their overall aims" (Hope, Timmel, and Hodzi, 1984: 69 Bk 3). There are three aspects to an organisation: "the formal structure, which can be shown on an organization chart; there are policies and procedures; and, more important than these two, there is people's behaviour within the organization" (Stewart, 1985: 93).

While the foregoing comments refer to any group or organisation they also hold true for schools. *In Changing Teachers, Changing Times*, Hargreaves tells us that in any talk about schooling, corporate analogies are common, yet they are also contested:

Schools are not businesses. Children are not products. Educators aren't usually out to make a profit. Schools and corporations, however, are not absolutely unlike. Larger secondary schools...[have] large numbers of staff, delineated hierarchies of command, divisions of specialised responsibility, de-

marcation of tasks and roles, and challenges to achieve consistency and coordination. When the corporate world encounters major crises and undergoes profound transitions, human service organizations like hospitals and schools should pay close attention, for similar crises may soon affect them (Hargreaves, 1994: 22).

Department of Education policy, which is reflected in *Charting our Education Future*, presents the argument that

Schools, in common with most organisations, can derive many benefits from engaging in a systematic planning process. Putting in place a formal planning and reporting procedure can greatly assist schools to implement and manage change and improve the quality of education being offered to students. This process of planning offers an excellent opportunity for engaging the board of management, the principal, staff and parents in a collaborative exercise aimed at defining the school's mission and putting in place policies which will determine the activities of the school (Department of Education, 1995: 157).

It is widely held in literature on education today, and it is the belief of the present writer, that *structures* are required which will provide the school community with:

- a clear sense of *purpose*, why the school exists;
- a *value* system, what the school believes in;
- a *vision statement*, what the school could become;
- a *mission statement*, the path the school follows;
- named *goals*, clearly stated, time related and achievable;
- defined *objectives*, statements based on end results — not activities;
- *role identification* procedures, clarification of roles with their inherent rights and responsibilities;
- a high level of *organisation*, who will do **what, why, when, where, how, by when**;
- an *implementation* stage, focus on task, targets, and monitoring;
- on-going *feedback, evaluation, delegation*;
- a deep sense of the *value of people* both as participants and beneficiaries.

The last point referring to mutual respect is coloured very much by the *ethos-school culture* and this *ethos-school culture* is enhanced by the level of respect

people have for one another. The framework on *structures*, outlined above, will be covered throughout Chapter Five.

We shall examine the term *structure*.

The structure of an organisation, of a school, defines the shape of the organisation and the roles within it...the rules, procedures and policies the group adopts for its operations are also laid down in the organisational structure...without structures it is often unclear who does what, and without a structured approach to participation, many voices can go unheard (Flanagan, Haase, and Walsh, 1995: 14, see also Belbin, 1998).

In addition to a structured approach to planning and evaluation, that is the task completion aspect, there is need also for structures that are human and caring. A human-caring structure draws on the innate goodness in every human person and allows that goodness to flourish and grow for the benefit of all in the school. Blanchard and O'Connor put it succinctly: "there's something good in people that is brought out when they pool their energies to serve something bigger" (Blanchard and O'Connor, 1997: 55, see also Civil, 1997).

Structures within the school community should enable individuals and the group as a whole:

- to develop their strengths;
- to reduce the negative consequences of personal limitation;
- to build a system of accountability;
- to maintain commitment;
- to support one another;
- to fulfil their role as effectively as possible.

### 5.1.1 EVALUATION METHODS: HOW PRINCIPALS AND COORDINATORS EVALUATE

Feedback and *evaluation* are intertwined and interdependent. Feedback, when graciously received, enables the individual and the team "to step back and look at how they are reaching their goals...and redesign their ways of working...[it is] a continuous process...a great discovery of the quality programme is often that the people who are doing a task are the best people to redesign it" (Scott and Jaffe, 1991: 39 and Moss-Kanter, 1989). According to Finney evaluation is "also a matter of dreaming dreams, of using imagination, of inspiration and insight" (Finney, 1989: 127). The opposite may hold when organisations and individuals "refuse to recognize the reality of their present situation" (Lorriman, Young, and Kalinauckas, 1995: 37). Kotter believed that "Even in a rapidly changing world, someone has to make the current system perform to expectation...if short-term wins don't demonstrate that you're on the right path, you will rarely get the chance to fully implement your vision" (Kotter, 1996: 168). Dobson and Starkey held a similar view and stated "When vigilance and evaluation suggest that the objectives of the business or the major plans and policies are no longer appropriate, or that the results of implementing the strategy do not confirm their cultural assumptions, then it is time to change" (Dobson and Starkey, 1993: 120-121, see also Chetley, 1990).

The information required here on evaluation was firstly to note what, if any, areas within school life were evaluated. Secondly, whether evaluation methods were formal or informal? Thirdly, who were involved in the process? In the case of coordinators key aspects of the HSCL scheme were named and methods of evaluation were sought. The type of evaluation used was also noted. Principals

and co-ordinators were each asked to state the evaluation methods used in sixteen aspects of their responsibility.

### Evaluation by school principals

In Table 5.1, which follows, we note the responses to evaluation by primary school principals.

**Table 5.1. Methods of Evaluation Used by Primary School Principals**

Primary Level	No Evaluation	Std. Tests	Displays	Discussion	Teacher tests	Experts	Written Records	Inspector	Enjoyment	Total %	N
Sports and P.E.	51.2	0.8	24.8	8.3	9.1	2.5	1.7	0.8	0.8	100	121
Music: Singing	52.9	0.0	27.3	6.6	9.9	0.0	1.7	0.8	0.8	100	121
Music: Instrumental	75.2	0.8	13.2	4.1	4.1	0.0	1.7	0.8	0.0	100	121
Art and Craft	42.1	0.8	37.2	5.0	11.6	0.8	1.7	0.8	0.0	100	121
Irish	47.1	4.1	4.1	8.3	33.9	0.0	1.7	0.8	0.0	100	121
English	23.1	43.8	3.3	5.8	22.3	0.0	0.8	0.8	0.0	100	121
Religious Education	59.5	0.0	6.6	15.7	15.7	0.0	0.8	1.7	0.0	100	121
Mathematics	25.6	40.5	2.5	5.8	24.0	0.0	0.8	0.8	0.0	100	121
History	52.9	0.8	3.3	5.0	35.5	0.0	1.7	0.8	0.0	100	121
Geography	54.5	0.0	3.3	5.0	34.7	0.0	1.7	0.8	0.0	100	121
Nature Study	52.1	0.0	10.7	5.8	28.1	0.0	1.7	0.8	0.8	100	121
Civics	70.2	0.0	5.8	4.1	18.2	0.0	0.8	0.8	0.0	100	121
Drama	65.3	0.0	20.7	3.3	7.4	0.0	1.7	0.8	0.8	100	121
Health Education	75.2	0.8	7.4	5.0	9.9	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0	100	121
Science	86.8	0.0	0.8	3.3	8.3	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	100	121
Computer Studies	83.5	0.0	3.3	4.1	7.4	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.8	100	121

Among the primary school principals there were 42.7 per cent who carried out some form of evaluation in their schools. In the areas of Sports, PE and Music,



primary school principals used "display methods" as their most popular means of evaluation.

In the case of English and Mathematics, again at primary level, "standardised tests" were the favoured method. "Tests given by the class teachers" came in second place. In the following subjects: Irish, History, Geography, Nature Study, Civics, Health Education, Science and Computer Studies, "tests given by the class teacher" were the most popular method of evaluation (Table 5.1).

Among the principals, at primary level, who have evaluation structures in place, the chosen methods used in their schools were "displays" and "teacher tests". In the areas of English and Mathematics the most popular methods were "standardised testing" (Table 5.1). The absence of evaluation structures, inferred from the very low rating given to Instrumental Music, Civics, Drama, Science and Computer Studies could indicate that these curricular areas are neither widely used nor valued at primary school level. Of particular interest is Religious Education, taught to most children and evaluated in only 40.5 per cent of cases at primary level.

So far we have examined what has been evaluated. The finding in Table 5.1, in the column "no evaluation" must have definite implications for the school and for its outcomes. Among the primary school principals, 47.1 per cent do not carry out evaluation in relation to "Irish", 23.1 per cent do not evaluate in relation to "English" and 25.6 per cent fail to do so in "Mathematics". As well as having implications for the pupils and the whole school there are implications also for the outside evaluators of schools, the Department of Education Inspectorate. Only 0.8 per cent of primary school principals have involved school inspectors in evaluation processes. Perhaps the inspection of schools carried out by the inspectorate,

at primary level, on a reasonably regular basis is the reason why principals do not approach the inspector regarding evaluation. This matter needs to be taken into consideration by the Department of Education Inspectorate and the development of whole-school evaluation (WSE). In Table 5.2, which follows, we note the responses to evaluation by post-primary principals.

**Table 5.2 Methods of Evaluation Used by Post-Primary Principals**

<b>POST-PRIMARY LEVEL</b>	<b>No Evaluation</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Observation</b>	<b>Results Analysed</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>Std Tests</b>	<b>Teacher Tests</b>	<b>By Asking</b>	<b>Inspector</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>JUNIOR CYCLE</b>												
<b>Grouping by Ability</b>	34.1	2.3	6.8	2.3	2.3	22.7	11.4	13.6	4.5	0.0	100	44
<b>Mixed Ability</b>	50.0	2.3	9.1	0.0	0.0	31.8	0.0	4.5	2.3	0.0	100	44
<b>Time-Tabling</b>	36.4	4.5	2.3	0.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	2.3	4.5	0.0	100	44
<b>Teacher Allocation</b>	47.7	2.3	4.5	2.3	0.0	36.4	0.0	2.3	4.5	0.0	100	44
<b>Subject Options</b>	36.4	2.3	2.3	0.0	20.5	27.3	0.0	2.3	9.1	0.0	100	44
<b>Results Jun. Cert.</b>	45.5	0.0	0.0	36.4	0.0	13.6	0.0	2.3	2.3	0.0	100	44
<b>TRANSITION YEAR</b>	40.9	15.9	0.0	2.3	6.8	22.7	0.0	0.0	11.4	0.0	100	44
<b>SENIOR CYCLE</b>												
<b>Grouping by Ability</b>	40.9	2.3	6.8	6.8	0.0	29.5	2.3	6.8	4.5	0.0	100	44
<b>Mixed Ability</b>	50.0	0.0	9.1	2.3	0.0	29.5	0.0	6.8	2.3	0.0	100	44
<b>Time-Tabling</b>	38.6	2.3	4.5	0.0	0.0	47.7	0.0	2.3	4.5	0.0	100	44
<b>Teacher Allocation</b>	47.7	2.3	6.8	2.3	0.0	34.1	0.0	2.3	4.5	0.0	100	44
<b>Subject Options</b>	36.4	2.3	4.5	0.0	20.5	22.7	2.3	2.3	9.1	0.0	100	44
<b>Results Leaving Cert.</b>	40.9	0.0	2.3	43.2	2.3	6.8	0.0	2.3	2.3	0.0	100	44
<b>Religious Education</b>	40.9	2.3	2.3	0.0	0.0	34.1	0.0	2.3	4.5	13.6	100	44
<b>Life Skills</b>	63.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.3	0.0	2.3	4.5	2.3	100	44
<b>Sport</b>	40.9	2.3	18.2	0.0	4.5	27.3	0.0	2.3	2.3	2.3	100	44

For principals within the post-primary sector "discussion" came out as the most accepted method of evaluation in fourteen of the sixteen aspects of responsibility. On meeting principals later, and on asking them about the term "discussion" no criteria in relation to outcomes or performance indicators emerged as having been established. In relation to the Junior Certificate just one third of the principals stated that the results were "analysed" while for the Leaving Certificate the figure was higher. On further questioning of a number of post-primary principals, their interpretation of results "analysis" was one of the following:

- comparison with national average made by principal and senior post holders;
- comparison with teacher tests given to pupils in second and third year at school;
- comparison between teachers in relation to subjects;
- an additional criterion referred to the Leaving Certificate i.e. comparison of results with the pupils' performance some years earlier at the Junior Certificate.

The State examinations at the end of the third and sixth years may be the reason for the absence of standardised testing in the post-primary sector. "Monitoring" as a method of evaluation had very low outcomes with the exception of Transition Year where the figure was somewhat higher. In relation to the evaluation of "mixed ability" groups, through "observation" in the Junior and Senior Cycles, the figure was 9.1 per cent. "Observation" was used in the evaluation of "mixed ability" groups and "grouping by ability" at both Junior and Senior Cycles. Evaluation through the Inspectorate surfaced in the case of Religious Education in the Senior Cycle. Life Skills and Sport were also evaluated through the Inspectorate.

Again, we must note the column marked "no evaluation", that is, the proportion of post-primary principals who did not evaluate the various areas. In this category over one third do not evaluate their methods in relation to "subject-

options" at Junior Certificate and Senior Certificate level. This would seem a grave neglect in a vital area. The percentages are even higher relating to the non-evaluation of Junior Certificate results and of Leaving Certificate results. Post-primary principals do not call on the Inspectorate at all except, as already mentioned in relation to life skills and to sport. The lack of evaluation by post-primary principals seems to present as a matter for concern and will, most likely be addressed through whole-school evaluation (WSE). It certainly indicates a marked lack of any culture of evaluation in the schools.

#### **Evaluation by coordinators**

The coordinators were given sixteen aspects of their work areas and were asked to state the method used for evaluation. Each area is a vital feature of the HSCL scheme. In Table 5.3, which follows, we note the responses to evaluation by primary and post-primary coordinators.

**Table 5.3 Methods of Evaluation Used by Coordinators**

<b>Primary And Post-Primary</b>	<b>No Evaluation</b>	<b>Personal Evaluation</b>	<b>Observation</b>	<b>Listening</b>	<b>Formal-group</b>	<b>Change-improvement</b>	<b>Enjoyment</b>	<b>Prevention</b>	<b>Influence</b>	<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>PARENT MEETINGS</b>												
<b>Individual</b>	28.8	7.3	1.7	7.3	16.4	16.9	0.0	0.0	1.1	20.3	100	177
<b>Group</b>	20.3	1.1	1.1	6.8	39.5	6.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	24.9	100	177
<b>Home Visits</b>	21.5	6.2	2.3	5.6	27.1	22.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	14.7	100	177
<b>COURSES</b>												
<b>Leisure</b>	14.7	0.0	2.8	2.3	37.9	21.5	5.6	0.0	0.6	14.7	100	177
<b>Parenting</b>	14.7	0.0	0.0	2.8	52.5	12.4	2.3	0.0	0.6	14.7	100	177
<b>Curricular</b>	19.2	0.0	0.0	5.1	43.5	14.7	2.3	0.0	0.6	14.7	100	177
<b>Self-development</b>	25.4	0.0	1.1	3.4	43.5	12.4	1.7	0.0	0.6	11.9	100	177
<b>PARENT AS RESOURCE</b>												
<b>To own child</b>	45.8	0.0	5.6	13.6	13.6	5.1	0.0	0.6	3.4	12.4	100	177
<b>In Classroom</b>	53.7	0.0	0.6	18.6	11.9	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	10.7	100	177
<b>To Other Children</b>	61.6	0.0	3.4	11.3	6.2	8.5	1.7	0.0	1.1	6.2	100	177
<b>As Facilitator</b>	62.1	0.0	4.0	3.4	15.8	4.5	1.1	0.0	0.0	9.0	100	177
<b>TRANSFER PROGRAMS</b>	34.5	0.6	0.6	6.8	36.7	3.4	0.6	0.0	1.1	15.8	100	177
<b>CLUSTER GROUP</b>	27.7	4.0	5.6	2.8	53.7	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.1	100	177
<b>LOCAL COMMITTEE</b>	68.9	0.0	0.6	2.8	22.6	3.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	100	177
<b>PREVENTATIVE MEASURES</b>	54.2	1.1	0.0	3.4	22.0	7.3	0.6	1.1	0.6	9.6	100	177
<b>IDENTIFICATION OF NEEDS</b>	30.5	0.0	1.1	5.6	50.3	7.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.1	100	177

Meetings for/with parents were evaluated under three categories. The chief methods of evaluation used for "individual" meetings were "informal evaluation-feedback" and noticing a "change-improvement". "Group" meetings with parents were evaluated by more than three-quarters of the coordinators. The leading methods were "formal group evaluation procedures" and "informal methods-feedback". Meeting parents on "home visits" was evaluated by a high percentage of coordinators. Again the "formal group evaluation procedures" were used as

was "noticing a change-improvement" in parent responses. "Noticing a change-improvement" ran right through the sixteen aspects evaluated by coordinators. "Noticing a change-improvement" included procedures such as "outcomes", the "uptake of activities", a "response" and "change in behaviour". This method of discernment seems both an interesting and practical way to evaluate attitude change, which is difficult to categorise and measure.

Courses for parents were evaluated under four categories. "Leisure time" courses, courses in "parenting methods", and "curricular" courses for parents were all evaluated by over 80.0 per cent of coordinators. Evaluation of "self-development" programmes also figured. For all these courses, evaluation by "formal group evaluation procedures" was the highest. Detecting "change-improvement" was also noted.

Parents acted as a resource in various ways within the HSCL scheme and coordinators evaluated these activities. The evaluation of parents as a resource: "to their own child", "in the classroom", "to other children", and in "facilitation" all figured. The chief methods used by coordinators in evaluating parents as a resource "to their own child" are "listening" and "formal group evaluation procedures". "Listening" to parents, teachers, and children got the highest outcome from coordinators for evaluating the work of parents "in the classroom" while "informal methods-feedback" was also named. For the work of parents with other children "listening", "noticing a change-improvement" in children, and "formal group evaluation procedures" were named. For parents as "facilitators" of courses and activities for their peers "formal group evaluation procedures" figured, as did "informal methods-feedback". Noticing a "change-improvement", "observation", and "listening" all had similar percentage figures. It appears from the foregoing

that coordinators used evaluation methods, with formal procedures, informal methods, and listening figuring most frequently. Observation methods had a slightly lower figure.

Transfer programmes were evaluated by a high percentage of coordinators. "Formal group evaluation procedures" were the most popular method used, while "informal evaluation-feedback" took second place. Coordinators evaluated transfer programmes by "listening" to parents and school personnel.

Group meetings of coordinators, serving the same geographical area, known as a "Cluster Group" are an important structure in supporting the coordinator (2.3.6 and 2.3.6.1). Cluster meetings were highlighted in the evaluation by coordinators. Evaluation through "formal group evaluation procedures" took place according to more than half of the coordinators while "informal methods-feedback" took place in a small number of cases. "Observation" was used by some of coordinators while a small percentage evaluated their own contribution on a personal basis.

Local Committees, the membership of which is divided equally between parents and representatives of voluntary and statutory agencies in the community, functioned in exactly one-third of the schools (2.3.7). The work of the Local Committee was evaluated by just under one third of the coordinators. Evaluation took place chiefly through "formal group evaluation procedures".

The HSCL Scheme is a preventative strategy which is targeted at pupils who are "at risk" of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of background characteristics and school retention. According to almost half of the coordinators strategies used to prevent school failure were evaluated. "Formal group evaluation procedures" were used as were "informal methods-feedback".

Noticing a "change-improvement" was cited by a small number of coordinators while "listening" was also named by a small percentage.

There is a systematic approach to the identification of parents' needs in relation to their children's learning and the organisation of suitable responses to these needs. Many coordinators evaluated the process they used in the various methods of needs identification. Just over half of the coordinators gave their highest figure to "formal group evaluation procedures" when evaluating processes relating to the "identification of needs". Lower figures related to noticing a "change-improvement", "listening", and "informal methods-feedback". None of the coordinators cited the Inspectorate as a method of evaluation within the HSCL scheme.

Again it must be stated that the column labelled "no evaluation", that is the proportion of coordinators who did not evaluate the various areas, may have important consequences in the on-going development of the HSCL scheme. Of particular importance is the absence of evaluation in the area of "parent as a resource", the "Local Committee", and "preventative measures" despite the emphasis of this in the HSCL scheme and despite the training provided. Since 1993, coordinators have had very focused training on the evaluation process.

### **Summary**

The foregoing demonstrates that:

- Standardised testing was used by less than half of the primary school principals, and almost exclusively in English and Mathematics.
- Standardised tests were used by a small percentage of principals to evaluate grouping by ability within the Junior Cycle and at Senior Cycle level. This type of testing was used for subject option choice at Senior Cycle by a very small number of principals.



- The absence of standardised testing at both levels was obvious, but particularly at post-primary level. Perhaps the State Examinations at post-primary level fulfilled this need.
- There is need to question the type, quality and frequency of "discussion" as an evaluation tool used across all sixteen categories by post-primary principals.
- Though one has to take the findings as submitted, the high percentage for "discussion" as a method of evaluation with its inherent lack of control or objectivity must give rise for concern when put alongside the "no evaluation" column.
- The "analysis" of Junior and Leaving Certificate results were generally a comparison with the national average, or in-school comparisons.
- On the part of principals, an evaluation structure seemed to be lacking at both levels. This shortcoming on the part of principals at primary and at post-primary levels may have consequences at staff level and ultimately for the child (see Harris, Jamieson and Russ, 1996).
- Coordinators used many methods of evaluation: formal group evaluation procedures, informal methods including feedback, listening, observation and noticing a "change-improvement". The methods were both interesting and practical in evaluating development work with people.

Coordinators work in an environment where 57.3 per cent of primary school principals did not carry out any evaluation. The figure for post-primary principals was 43.1 per cent while that of coordinators themselves was 36.4 per cent. This lack of evaluation on the part of school leaders could account for the difficulty experienced in encouraging coordinators to become involved in an action-reflection-action type framework. Where evaluation did take place there was more emphasis on subjective type evaluation, "displays", "discussion", "teacher tests" than on the more objective as in "standardised tests". Undoubtedly there is need for both types. Involvement of the Inspectorate as an objective body of evaluators had extremely low percentages. This fact calls for attention from the Department of Education and needs to be considered as part of whole school evaluation (WSE) now being piloted by the Inspectorate. Evaluation by the Inspectorate at post-primary level related to Religious Education, Life Skills, and Sport. Almost two-thirds of coordinators evaluated their work in both an interesting and practical way.

### **5.1.2 CONSULTATION METHODS: SEEKING THE VIEWS OF INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AGENCIES, AND THE PERCEIVED VIEWS OF PARENTS**

Consulting people involves two way communication, inviting people to share their views and to ask questions. There may or may not be an intention to act on

the opinions expressed "two-way communication involves more than consultation. It includes encouraging people to make suggestions" (Johnson and Redmond, 1998: 96). Business companies and school staffs need to invest in developing the expertise of their people (5.2). They need to establish "the tools, processes and relationships" necessary to encourage and support "horizontal flows of information" and the "lateral sharing of knowledge" (Ghoshal and Bartlett 1998: 77). The outcome from a communication-consultation process can be the building of a "strong sense of trust, both among colleagues and between superiors and subordinates" (Ibid.).

The information sought here was to determine if, and to what degree, principals and coordinators sought the views of individuals, groups, and agencies within the local community in the previous academic year.

#### **5.1.2.1 INDIVIDUALS**

Principals and coordinators sought the views of "individuals" to varying degrees. Table 5.4 shows the outcomes from principals and coordinators in relation to seeking the views of the named "individuals" three times or more in the previous academic year.

**Table 5.4 Similarities and Differences between Principals and Coordinators in Relation to Individuals Who Were Consulted**

"Individual" whose view was sought three times or more by Principals and Coordinators	Principals %	Coordinators %	Chi-Square	DF	P
<b>Chairperson of BOM</b>	91.5	46.3	80.30	1	<.001
N	165	177			
<b>Teachers</b>	98.8	98.9	0.0041	1	.944
N	165	177			
<b>Pupils</b>	72.7	n/a			
N	165	n/a			
<b>Principal</b>	n/a	100.0			
N	n/a	177			
<b>Parents</b>	89.1	97.7	10.61	1	.001
N	165	177			
<b>Adult Education Organiser</b>	29.7	59.3	30.27	1	<.001
N	165	177			
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>			

From Table 5.4 we note that for principals the most frequent point of contact was individual teachers, secondly the chairperson BOM, and thirdly individual parents. All coordinators contacted principals. The second highest point of contact for coordinators was the individual teacher, and thirdly individual parents. As indicated by the Chi-square (with the exception of teachers) the differences in the responses of principals and coordinators, in relation to "individuals" they both consulted, were statistically significant.

#### 5.1.2.1 GROUPS

All the principals and almost all coordinators sought the views of "groups" to varying degrees. Table 5.5 shows the percentages of principals and coordinators in rela-

tion to seeking the views of the named "groups" three times or more in the previous academic year.

**Table 5.5 Similarities and Differences between Principals and Coordinators in Relation to Groups Who Were Consulted**

"Group" whose view was sought three times or more by principals and coordinators	Principals	Coordinators	Chi-Square	DF	P
	%	%			
<b>Board of Management</b>	87.3	34.5	97.77	1	<.001
N	165	177			
<b>Department of Education</b>	72.7	26.5	71.67	1	<.001
N	165	173			
<b>Parents' Council</b>	46.7	43.4	0.37	1	.540
N	165	173			
<b>Other principals/other coordinators</b>	93.9	58.9	57.11	1	<.001
N	165	175			
<b>Early Start</b>	26.7	33.5	1.87	1	.171
N	165	170			
<b>Unions</b>	50.3	11.6	59.82	1	<.001
N	165	173			
<b>National Parents Council</b>	9.1	14.8	2.57	1	.109
N	165	169			
<b>Local Committee</b>	27.3	30.4	0.40	1	.526
N	165	171			

From Table 5.5 we note that a high percentage of principals sought the views of groups of principals while a slightly lower percentage sought the views of the Board of Management. The third figure from principals was given to the Department of Education. Coordinators differed from principals in that their frequency of consultation with other groups was much lower, on the whole. Coordinators gave seeking the views of other coordinator colleagues their highest figure. However, their level of consultation with other coordinators was considerably lower

than that of principals with principals. The difference was statistically significant. Given the freedom to consult with each other that coordinators have and the encouragement through the different levels of cluster meetings to do so (2.3.6 and 2.3.6.1) there should be evidence of consultation. A higher level of consultation is found in Table 5.16. The next highest level of consultation was with the Parents' Council while their third was with the Board of Management. The figure of 43.4 per cent to the Parents' Council was a high one for coordinators. Parents' Council would not necessarily be a body with whom the coordinators work as their officers tend to come from middle class backgrounds and this income group are not part of the coordinator's brief. Apart from the "Parent's Council" and the "Local Committee" and "Early Start" the differences in the responses of principals and coordinators were statistically significant (Chi-square, Table 5.5).

#### **5.1.2.3 AGENCIES**

Almost all the principals and coordinators sought the views of "agencies" to varying degrees. Table 5.6 shows the outcomes from principals and coordinators in relation to seeking the views of the named "agencies" three times or more in the previous academic year.

**Table 5.6 Similarities and Differences between Principals and Coordinators in Relation to Agencies Who Were Consulted**

"Agencies whose views were sought three times or more by principals and coordinators"	Principals	Coordinators	Chi-square	DF	P
	%	%			
<b>Social Workers</b>	79.9	75.3	1.02	1	.312
N	164	174			
<b>Psychological Services</b>	91.5	63.0	38.32	1	<.001
N	164	173			
<b>Public Health Nurse</b>	61.2	75.6	8.15	1	.004
N	165	176			
<b>Community Gardaí</b>	77.6	69.4	2.91	1	.088
N	165	173			
<b>Junior Liaison Officer</b>	58.8	56.5	.1841	1	.668
N	165	170			
<b>Director of Community Care</b>	29.7	14.7	10.93	1	.001
N	165	170			
<b>St. Vincent de Paul</b>	23.6	28.8	1.16	1	.281
N	165	170			
<b>Family Resource Centre</b>	26.7	51.8	22.08	1	<.001
N	165	170			

From Table 5.6 we note that a high percentage of principals sought the views of the psychological services while a lower sought the views of social workers. In third place from principals were the community gardaí (police). When one adds in the Junior Liaison Officer one must note the high profile the gardaí (police) have in the schools. Coordinators sought the views of the following "agencies": the public health nurse was highest for coordinators, in second place came social workers while the community gardaí (police) were in third place. As indicated by the Chi-square, in the case of the Psychological Services, the Public Health Nurse,

the Director of Community Care and the Family Resource Centre, the differences in the responses of principals and coordinators were statistically significant.

It can be inferred that less than half of the schools have a structure at local level for seeking the views of parents and very few are affiliated to national structures. This must make the role of the coordinator as a link agent more difficult. Among the agencies, those whose views were sought frequently by the principals were the Psychological Services, Social Workers, and the Gardaí. The Public Health Nurse, Social Workers and the Gardaí had their views sought by coordinators. The fact that these links are being made with key agencies must make the role of the coordinator more productive.

#### **5.1.2.4 PARENTS**

Principals, coordinators, and teachers were asked very directly about how often parents had been consulted, in the previous academic year, in relation to uniform, homework and discipline. The following categories were given: "not at all", "once", "2-4 times" and "more than 4 times". We shall view the responses relating to "uniform", firstly, in Table 5.7.

**Table 5.7 Perceptions of Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers about How Often Parents Have Been Consulted Regarding "Uniform"**

	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	31.1	44.1	55.4	42.2
<b>Once</b>	31.7	26.5	34.8	30.5
<b>2 - 4 times</b>	29.3	21.5	5.3	20.3
<b>More than 4 times</b>	7.9	7.9	4.5	7.0
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>453</b>

**Chi-square = 31.56      DF = 6      P = .002**

From Table 5.7 it is obvious that 42.2 per cent of the respondents felt that parents had not been consulted in the previous academic year about the school uniform. Teachers had the highest figure at 55.4 per cent. Consultation took place "once" for 31.7 per cent of principals, 26.5 per cent of coordinators and 34.8 per cent of teachers. Teachers were more likely to have a perception of little or no contact than the other two groups. From the Chi-square we can see that the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant. Perhaps teachers were unaware that these consultations had taken place. If this is the case it brings the communication system within the schools into question.

Next we look at the perceptions in relation to "homework", which are summed up in Table 5.8.



**Table 5.8 Perceptions of Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers About How Often Parents Have Been Consulted Regarding "Home-work"**

Frequency	Principals	Coordinators	Teachers	Total
	%	%	%	%
Not at all	14.0	26.0	39.6	25.0
Once	20.1	20.3	29.7	22.6
2 - 4 times	39.6	36.7	15.3	32.5
More than 4 times	26.2	16.9	15.3	19.9
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	164	177	111	452

Chi-square = 39.68      DF = 6      P < .001

In Table 5.8 we note that almost one third of the respondents felt that parents had been consulted 2-4 times. The lowest percentage was from teachers while principals and coordinators were much higher. An overall percentage of 22.6 per cent went to consulting parents "once". Again teachers perceived little or no consultation in comparison with principals and coordinators. As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators and teachers were statistically significant.

Finally, "discipline" comes under review in Table 5.9 which follows.

**Table 5.9 Perceptions of Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers About How Often Parents Have Been Consulted Regarding "Discipline"**

	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	11.0	24.3	33.0	21.6
<b>Once</b>	23.2	19.2	35.7	24.7
<b>2-4 times</b>	34.8	35.6	14.3	30.0
<b>More than 4 times</b>	31.1	20.9	17.0	23.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>453</b>

**Chi-square = 42.55      DF = 6      P < .001**

Regarding consultation in the area of discipline the highest overall percentage was allocated to the "2-4 times" frequency. Once more teachers perceived little contact. The highest figure given by teachers was given to the frequency "once". Again in the "not at all" bracket we find over one third of the responses from teachers, while principals figured much lower. Over half of the coordinators perceived that parents were consulted "2-4 times" or "more than 4 times". This could spring from the fact that they are so much in contact with parents and probably see parents in the school frequently. It must be acknowledged that the perceptions of teachers are those of people confined to the classroom setting. As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses from principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant. There is quite a gap in the perceptions of principals and coordinators on the one hand and teachers on the other. There is obviously a communication problem.

## Summary

At this point, in relation to uniform, homework and discipline the data show that:

- Some 42.2 per cent of the respondents had the perception that parents were not consulted in relation to "uniform".
- Some 25.0 per cent of the respondents felt that parents were not consulted regarding "homework".
- Just over a fifth, 21.6 per cent, felt that parents were not consulted regarding "discipline" issues.
- Teachers were more likely than either of the other two groups to have the perception that there is little or no consultation with parents. This finding could portray a lack of communication at staff level, a withholding of information, an unclear view of the situation as it is or a desire for the system that could be or should be, on the part of principals in particular.
- As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers in each case, in relation to uniform, homework, and discipline, were statistically significant.

Coordinators work in an environment where principals think that there is a high level of consultation with parents on matters of "homework" and "discipline". Their perception is somewhat lower in relation to "uniform". Teachers are strong in their disagreement regarding consultation on "homework", "discipline", and "uniform" while coordinators take a middle of the road position. There is no doubt that a communication need exists within these schools. The three issues of homework, discipline and uniforms represent areas about which parents and many teachers have strong feelings. The diverging perceptions and the evidence of rather poor consultation on those matters gives rise for some concern. If consultation is somewhat remiss in such areas, other matters can be expected to be poor also.

### 5.1.3 FEEDBACK METHODS: PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS AND COORDINATORS REGARDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEEDBACK

We have seen earlier that "feedback", both individual and group, formed an important element of evaluation for coordinators (Table 5.3). Through constructive *feedback* people learn about themselves and the effect they have on others. "Constructive feedback can increase self-awareness and offers ideas to encourage development" (Horne and Pierce, 1996: 117). Constructive feedback can be either

positive or negative. However, "negative feedback, if given sensitively and skilfully, is just as important to self-development" (Ibid.). Modern literature on management emphasises the importance of listing people's strengths firstly, and secondly, looking at what could be improved. Feedback is an "inseparable part of interpersonal and interteam communication" (Barnes, 1996: 60). Work groups with this type of rapport have "open, empathic, solution-oriented communication". Group members talk openly with one another and with their managers and are open to giving and receiving feedback" (Buchholz and Roth, 1987: 89). Pasmore believed that "people want to know how they have done individually, as a team, as a unit, as an organization "and that "when feedback was improved, it never caused performance to decline" (Pasmore, 1994: 211-212). MacBeath proposes the "critical friend" as the "successful marrying of unconditional support and unconditional critique" (MacBeath, 1998: 118).

Feedback processes, according to Halsall, "are the mechanisms by which culture and values are maintained and challenged" (Halsall, 1998: 57, see also Whittaker, 1997). Good communication - consultation - feedback lead to team reviews and more formal evaluation structures. According to Leigh and Maynard team reviews:

- Identify blocks to team working
- Resolve interpersonal problems
- Give the team fresh momentum
- Provide new direction
- Keep the team fresh
- Inspire people
- Improve commitment
- Help understand what is happening
- Revise a thirst for growth and change
- Restimulate a hunger for the next big target
- Refocus attention on the big (strategic) picture (Leigh and Maynard, 1995: 99, see also Nolan, 1987 and Maginn, 1994).

Feedback should be: "Specific...Factual...Not emotional...directly work related...Constructive...Relevant to behaviour not personality" (Eggert, 1996: 68). For Russell a definite feedback formula should be used. A formula where people "can see what they have done...the effect of their behaviour [and] 'agree' a change" (Russell, 1994: 62).

When feedback is genuinely given it is usually well received and it makes the evaluation process much more achievable. The trust that is built in the process creates the possibility for delegation. Feedback processes enable the hearing of the views of others and the hearing of the response. They are also the means whereby the ethos, value system and vision of the school can be "maintained and challenged" (Halsall, 1998: 57). Bearing in mind the importance of feedback structures, principals and coordinators were asked if there were opportunities for individuals, groups, and agencies to give feedback about the school.

**Table 5.10 The Perceptions of Principals and Coordinators Regarding Whether Opportunities for Feedback Existed Within the School**

Opportunities for Feedback from	Principals		Coordinators		Chi-Square	DF	P
	Yes	No	Yes	No			
	%	%	%	%			
Individuals	86.7	13.3	88.1	11.9	.1673	1	.682
Groups	79.4	20.6	77.4	22.6	.2000	1	.654
Agencies	65.5	34.5	71.8	28.2	1.57	1	.209
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>		<b>100.0</b>				
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>165</b>		<b>177</b>				

A majority of principals and coordinators, (86.7 per cent and 88.1 per cent respectively), felt that individuals had possibilities for feedback. The opportunities for feedback to groups and agencies was identified as somewhat lower by both groups. As indicated by the Chi-square, for individuals, for groups and for agencies the differences among the respondents were not statistically significant.

Principals and coordinators were then asked to specify how individuals, groups and agencies could give feedback to the school.

### 5.1.3.1 INDIVIDUALS

Principals and coordinators were asked their perceptions as to how "individuals" gave feedback about the school. There were 670 responses which fell into 25 categories (Appendix 1, Table 21). Principals identified 22 categories and coordinators 18 categories. The initial 25 categories were collapsed and summarised into three categories (Appendix 1, Table 22) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses. The data on the main method for obtaining "individual" feedback were subjected to statistical testing.

#### Main Method for obtaining "Individual" Feedback

We now examine, in Table 5.11, the main method for "Individual" feedback as perceived by principals and coordinators.

**Table 5.11 Main Method for Obtaining "Individual" Feedback**

Main Method	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
People/groups	65.5	69.3	67.5
Meetings	21.6	22.9	22.3
Phone/letter	12.9	7.8	10.3
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	139	153	292

Chi-square = 2.06      DF = 2      P = .356

It can be seen from Table 5.11 that there was very little difference between principals and coordinators in their responses. As indicated by the Chi-square such differences, as there were, in the responses of principals and coordinators were not statistically significant.

A more detailed breakdown can be found in Appendix 1, Table 21. Principals sought feedback on a "one-to-one basis" (item 1) at 61.2 per cent. The second highest method used by principals, in getting feedback, was through individuals at "meetings", (item 2), at 28.8 per cent. In third place for principals was feedback from individuals on the "staff" (item 8) with a figure of 21.6 per cent. Coordinators (49.0 per cent) gave their own role as the chief vehicle through which feedback was sought from individuals (item 5). Holding second place for coordinators, at 39.0 per cent, was the role of the principal (item 23), while feedback about the school from individual staff members was at 36.6 per cent (item 8). Feedback from "individual parents" (item 6) had a very low figure from principals and coordinators at 7.9 per cent and 5.2 per cent respectively. However feedback "through parent involvement" (item 9) was 17.3 per cent for principals and 16.3 per cent for coordinators. "Parent-teacher meetings" (item 13) were used to get individual feedback by 4.3 per cent of principals and 13.1 per cent of coordinators. Feedback, through "home visitation" (item 24) was named by 5.2 per cent of coordinators. This low figure given to home visitation is in keeping with the findings to date. Among the coordinators 2.0 per cent seek feedback on the school through the "parents' room" (item 25). For principals neither home visitation nor the parents' room surfaced as a means of obtaining feedback.

Community structures or community agents did not seem important for respondents. "Community representatives" (item 10) featured for 2.2 per cent of

principals, and for 2.0 per cent of coordinators. The "Local Committee" (item 22) had a similar figure from principals and the slightly higher figure of 3.3 per cent from coordinators. "Linking with other schools" (item 11)) was named by one principal. There seems to be quite a lack, on the part of principals and coordinators, in involving community members in feedback processes about the school. As already noted linking in with other schools was scarcely mentioned. Early Start pre-schools, linking with junior primary, the junior primary linking with the senior primary, and the latter linking with the post-primary could prove a productive sequence in relation to feedback. Feedback through a member of the BOM (item 7) was named by 12.9 per cent of principals and 9.8 per cent of coordinators. Feedback through the process of evaluation (item 17) was 3.6 per cent for principals and 2.6 per cent for coordinators.

### **Summary**

At this point, in relation to "individuals", the data showed that:

- By far the highest combined percentage from principals and coordinators was obtained for feedback from individual people on their own or from individuals within a group.
- For principals the most frequent method of obtaining feedback both in the top three main methods and in the main method, was on a "one-to-one basis", feedback from individuals "at meetings" and feedback from "individual staff members".
- Many coordinators viewed their own role as the vehicle through which individuals gave feedback about the school. Coordinators then valued the supportive role of the principal, while in third place was the role of individual "staff members".
- Feedback "through parent involvement", and different ways of meeting parents were named. Home visitation did not feature highly among coordinators as a way of obtaining feedback. This was in keeping with the findings to date.
- Community structures or community agencies did not seem important for respondents.



- Linking with other schools was scarcely mentioned.
- Feedback through a BOM member was named by some principals and coordinators and feedback through an evaluation process was named by a small number of principals and coordinators.

It is noted how much feedback from "individuals" is valued. This must help to enhance working relationships and could prove to be a preliminary step towards further discussion and partnership. It would appear that the lack of emphasis on home visitation is a definite trend in the coordinator's role. The absence of community structures and links with other schools was obvious.

### 5.1.3.2 Groups

Principals and coordinators were asked their perceptions relating to how "groups" gave feedback about the school. There were 521 responses which fell into 31 categories (Appendix 1, Table 23). Principals identified 28 categories and coordinators 24 categories. The initial 31 categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories, (Appendix 1, Table 24), which shows the patterning of *all* the responses. The main methods for obtaining feedback for individuals were tested for significance in the variations between groups.

#### Main Method for Obtaining "Group" Feedback

We now examine, in Table 5.12, the main method for "Group" feedback as perceived by principals and coordinators.

**Table 5.12 Main Method for Obtaining "Group" Feedback**

Main Method	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
Meetings	64.3	37.7	50.8
Good relationship with school-related groups	24.6	54.6	39.8
Phone/letter	11.1	6.2	8.6
Informal methods	0.0	1.5	0.8
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	126	130	256

Chi-square = 27.14      DF = 3      P < .001

Overall the highest percentage was that given to feedback through "meetings". Following closely in second place is feedback through having a "good relationship with school-related groups". Feedback through the "phone/letter" came second last. It is interesting to note the variation in the outcomes of principals and coordinators in the above named categories. Principals were much higher than coordinators with regard to feedback through "meetings" and by means of the phone/letter", while coordinators value the development of a "good relationship with school-related groups". As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals and coordinators were statistically significant.

In Appendix 1, Table 23 we find more detailed information. Feedback through "meetings" was composed of feedback from the "board of management" (item 1) which figured at 30.2 per cent from principals, and 20.8 per cent from coordinators. Also included was feedback from groups at "meetings" (item 2) at 44.4 per cent and 19.2 per cent from principals and coordinators respectively. Meeting with "middle management" (item 7) was given 4.0 per cent by principals and at 2.3 per cent by coordinators. "One-to-one meetings" (item 16) of principals with groups got 25.4 per cent and the same venture got 29.2 per cent from coordinators. "Written methods" (item 3) received 23.8 per cent from principals and 6.2 per cent from coordinators while "phone contact" (item 4) received 16.7 per cent from principals and 2.3 per cent from coordinators. As noted above, Table 5.12 the methods used by principals were less personal, and included feedback "at meetings", by "phone" and in "written form" while coordinators worked on the building of "good relationships with school-related groups". This can be inferred also from the following outcomes. Both respondents seemed to have a role focus also. In relation to feedback from groups involved in a "HSCL context" (item 8)

principals gave feedback (7.1 per cent) while that of coordinators was 40.0 per cent. The figure given to feedback from "parents" (item 9) were quite similar at 20.6 per cent for principals and 22.3 per cent for coordinators as was feedback from "community groups" (item 11) at 6.3 per cent and 5.4 per cent for principals and coordinators respectively. A more marked variation is noted in feedback through the "Local Committee" (item 13), with a 4.0 per cent figure from principals and a 12.3 per cent figure from coordinators. Feedback from "school helpers" (item 22) was 2.3 per cent for coordinators, with no outcome from principals.

### **Summary**

As regards obtaining feedback from "groups" the data showed that:

- Principals got feedback through "meetings - phone/letter" while coordinators valued the development of a "good relationship with school-related groups".
- Feedback through HSCL activities and the Local Committee were much higher for coordinators.
- The percentage getting feedback from "parents" and "community groups" was quite similar for principals and coordinators.
- Given the fact that people are not all equally forthcoming at meetings and that there can be various forms of subtle pressure on individuals, the heavy reliance by principals on meetings as a primary tool for obtaining feedback may need to be reviewed by them.

It might be more productive if principals placed more emphasis on building one-to-one relationships. The literature would point this out as an essential element in inter-personal relationships. Increased value could be placed on the Local Committee as a vehicle for feedback.

### **5.1.3.3 AGENCIES**

Principals and coordinators were asked their perception relating to how "agencies" gave feedback about the school. There were 449 responses which fell into 22 categories (Appendix 1, Table 25). Principals identified 20 categories and coordinators 21 categories. The initial 22 categories were collapsed and summarised

into three categories (Appendix 1, Table 26) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses. For the purposes of statistical testing the distribution of the main method for obtaining "agency" feedback is presented.

### Main Method for Obtaining "Agency" Feedback

We now examine, in Table 5.13, the main method for "Agency" feedback as perceived by principals and coordinators.

**Table 5.13 Main Method for Obtaining "Agency" Feedback**

Main Method	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
Formal basis	42.3	67.8	56.0
Systems/structures	48.1	26.4	36.4
Phone/letter	9.6	5.8	7.6
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	104	121	225

Chi-square = 14.74      DF = 2      P = .006

By far the highest percentage was that given to feedback on a "formal basis through meetings" where coordinators were much higher than principals. In second place was feedback through "systems and structures already in place" and highlighted by principals as was the "phone/letter" which figured in third place. It is interesting to note that coordinators give a high percentage to feedback on a "formal basis through meetings" when referring to agencies. This varies from the approach they used when dealing with feedback from individuals and groups where they preferred the more personal approach. As we shall see in Appendix 1, Table 25, feedback from psychologists, social workers, attendance officers, employers, case conferences and resource centres figured higher for principals than

for coordinators. As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals and coordinators were statistically significant.

We shall now examine feedback on a "formal basis", in more detail through Appendix 1, Table 25. Feedback on a "one-to-one basis" (item 1) between principals and the agency was 30.5 per cent, while for coordinators this was 9.1 per cent. Feedback through "meetings" with agencies (item 4) was at 27.6 per cent and 19.8 per cent for principals and coordinators respectively. Agencies representing "parents" had percentages of 5.7 per cent from principals and 8.3 per cent from coordinators. Feedback from agencies through the "coordinator" (item 8) was 5.7 per cent from principals and 40.5 per cent from coordinators. It can be inferred that this high figure from coordinators may be the reason why feedback "through meetings" has taken first place for coordinators in Appendix 1, Table 26.

Feedback about the school from agencies to the "Board of Management" (item 12) received 1.9 per cent and 5.0 per cent from principals and coordinators respectively. Assessing the "fears and opinions" of agencies (item 16) about the school, figured at 1.0 per cent for principals and 3.3 per cent for coordinators. Feedback from agencies at "Local Committee" meetings (item 19) was 1.0 per cent from principals and 9.1 per cent from coordinators while feedback to "staff meetings" (item 20) figured at 1.9 per cent and 17.4 per cent respectively for principals and coordinators. Feedback from agencies through the "principal" (item 22) received 27.3 per cent from coordinators. Principals did not give a figure for their own role here (item 22), while coordinators gave their own role earlier on (item 8). Included in "systems and structures" are "written feedback" (item 3) given 34.3 per cent by principals and 5.8 per cent by coordinators; "reports from psychologists" (item 5) given 17.1 per cent by principals and 9.1 per cent by co-

ordinators and "reports from social workers" (item 6) given 13.3 per cent by principals and 7.4 per cent by coordinators. In the foregoing areas the percentages of principals were higher than that of coordinators. This may portray a role focus, again, on the part of principals and coordinators. In relation to feedback about the school from the "gardai"/police (item 9) the figure from principals was 8.6 per cent and from coordinators 9.1 per cent. Feedback from "attendance officers" (item 10) was 2.9 per cent for principals and 2.5 per cent for coordinators. Since coordinators work very closely with "resource centres" (item 15) it is surprising to note the low figure (7.4 per cent) they gave to feedback through this agency. Principals gave a percentage of 12.4 per cent. In relation to the "phone/letter" the former (item 2), as a method of receiving feedback from agencies was named by 19.0 per cent of principals and 11.6 per cent of coordinators.

### **Summary**

At this point, in relation to agencies, the findings show that:

- The most frequent method of obtaining feedback from agencies was on a "formal basis through meetings".
- Feedback from agencies through "systems and structures already in place" came second.
- Coordinators changed from the more personal focus outlined in "individuals" and "groups" to a more "formal" structure "through meetings".
- A high number of coordinators valued their own role as a mechanism for agencies to give feedback, while principals gave no figure to their own role.
- Coordinators worked closely with resource centres, yet they gave a very low figure to them as a vehicle for feedback.

Coordinators work in an environment where a high percentage of principals and coordinators (average = 87.4 per cent) perceived that "individuals" have opportunities to give feedback about the school. The average from principals and coordinators for feedback from "groups" was 78.4 per cent with the average for "agencies" at 68.6 per cent. It would seem useful if a greater effort was made on the part of principals to build inter-personal relations in the receipt of feedback. Coordinators would be advised to give greater use to the home visitation process as a vital part of their work in all its aspects.

#### **5.1.4 INVOLVEMENT METHODS: PERCEPTIONS ON DEVELOPING AND REVISING THE SCHOOL PLAN/VISION - MISSION STATEMENT**

Harvey-Jones speaks of *vision* as the creation of a "better world", a creation by the leader

a dream for the business - and more particularly for the people in it...it has to be owned by others and so it must be capable of the sorts of embellishments and refinements which go with co-ownership, and be qualitative rather than quantitative...The creation of the vision comprises both a mental target, a long way ahead of where the business wants to be, and an indication of the sort of company that is going to achieve it (Harvey-Jones, 1993: 27).

The words of Harvey-Jones can easily be applied to the school situation. Reluctance to articulate a vision can stem from fear of change, a lack of hope, or a hesitancy to take responsibility for our own lives. A vision statement "is an expression of hope, and if we have no hope, it is hard to create a vision" (Block, 1987: 107). The challenge is to pursue our vision with "as much courage and intensity as we can generate. Change takes place slowly inside each of us and by the choices we think through" (Ibid., 189). Change means abandoning the security and predictability of the present which we have learned to adjust to. It means acquiring new skills, forming new relationships and devising new patterns of working with which we are unfamiliar.

"The greatest risk of all is making no change, because it is inevitable that others will overtake you" (Harvey-Jones, 1993: 24). Part of the vision-change-vision

movement is "to know how to learn from the future" (Burkan, 1996: 78). This sense of future vision which permeates the writing of Frankl is probably one of the most needed qualities as we enter the twenty first century (Frankl, 1974). Teachers who can make the shift from being teacher to being educator will inevitably move from being expert to agent. This vision of their role will also enable them to be "counsellor and facilitator, manager of learning situations, coordinator of projects, team leader or network resource" (Handy and Aitken, 1990: 125). Teachers often place limitations on what they allow themselves to imagine. This curtails the range of possibilities available, and curtails the turning of dreams into visions, "far fewer still will persevere through the drudgery of sustaining the vision" (Stoltz, 1997: 287). A value system guides the behaviour people should use to achieve change. Schools that "excel at change work hard at the values level" (Jackson, 1997: 164 and Haydon, 1997).

We sum up this section on vision in the words of Leith and Maynard who provide an implementation and development process for vision:

- express the vision;
- behave in ways, which advance the goal of making it happen;
- explain the vision so people know what is required in terms of specific action;
- extend the vision, applying it to various situations;
- expand the vision, using it in many different ways, in a wide range of circumstances (Leigh and Maynard, 1995: 56).

The above process presumes that the vision has been shared and owned by the entire group, school, or organisation. When employees have a sense of ownership of the vision they will feel "more confident and more 'empowered' to take decisions which are consistent with the organisation's overall purpose, aims and objectives" (Wootton and Horne, 1997: 64). The vision is the distant picture of the place we are heading for. We need to believe in it, communicate it, live by it, and feel for it with real passion.



The *mission* of the school guides staff in their work in the present; it is not a vision of the future although it contains the vision within it. The mission of the school is the path the school follows, a path which will add value to the school. This path defines the "purpose, the business, the philosophy, the culture... people's values and beliefs, their enthusiasm and pride" (Clayton, 1997: 24). As an additive, Dobson and Starkey hold, that a mission statement defines "the code of conduct that tells employees how to behave" (Dobson and Starkey, 1993: 11).

The literature on management both for business and for school, is strong in its emphasis on the involvement of people in designing the plans and processes for use in their establishment. It is equally strong in the sense of "ownership" required before plans will be implemented. According to Bell "giving more responsibility, a more interesting activity, freedom to plan and implement...providing more opportunity to express a particular talent" supplies opportunities to manage a team "to obtain the best effect" while also "achieving team objectives" (Bell, 1997: 127-128).

Principals, coordinators, and teachers were asked if teachers had been involved during the previous academic year:

- in *developing* the School Plan/Vision - Mission Statement;
- in *revising* the School Plan/Vision - Mission Statement.

In this section one must be aware of the fact that the idea of respondents of Vision or Mission Statement will not be uniform. Some management theorists use Vision Statement as indicating "what we plan to do" whereas Mission Statement is "what we are out to do". For the purposes of the thesis we note that both share the notion of imagining a better future that is realisable and valued. The possible divergence of understanding of "Vision" and "Mission" Statement will not invali-

date the findings. To cover various views we shall regard them in this case as largely interchangeable.

In Table 5.14, which follows we shall see the outcome from the respondents in relation to *developing* the School Plan/Vision - Mission Statement.

**Table 5.14 Perceptions of Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers of the Involvement of Teachers in *Developing* the School Plan/Vision - Mission Statement in the Previous Academic Year**

Category	Principals	Coordinators	Teachers	Total
	%	%	%	%
Not at all	16.0	40.7	44.6	32.7
Once	11.0	8.5	19.6	12.2
2 - 4	36.2	26.6	24.1	29.4
> 4 times	36.8	24.3	11.6	25.7
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>452</b>

**Chi-square = 50.33      DF = 6      P < .001**

Taking all three groups together, the highest number (32.7 per cent) felt that teachers were not at all involved in planning in the previous school year. However, there was considerable variation between the groups. Almost three-quarters of the principals believed that teachers were involved two or more times. There is a big gap between the perceptions of principals and the perceived reality for teachers. We cannot presume the reason for this difference. It could be that teachers are not in touch with school issues because of responsibilities within the classroom. On the other hand it could be that principals perceive their school as they would like it to be. One thing is certain, that is, that there is a communication problem. Teachers and coordinators were much less likely to feel that teachers were involved in developing the school plan than were principals. Just over one

third of the teachers felt that teachers were involved in developing the school plan. These differences were statistically significant. Table 5.15 examines the perceptions of the three groups in relation to *revising* the plan.

**Table 5.15 Perceptions of Principals, Coordinators and Teachers of the Involvement of Teachers in *Revising* the School Plan/Vision - Mission Statement in the Previous Academic Year**

Category	Principals	Coordinators	Teachers	Total
	%	%	%	%
Not at all	29.3	51.4	56.3	44.6
Once	14.6	9.0	18.8	13.5
2 - 4 times	28.7	16.9	18.8	21.6
> 4 times	27.4	22.6	6.3	20.3
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	164	177	112	453

Chi-square = 40.38      DF = 6      P < .001

Once again, principals were much more inclined than either coordinators or teachers to feel that teachers were involved. More than half of both coordinators and teachers felt that teachers were not involved. The differences were statistically significant at the <.001 level.

These findings, in relation to developing and revising the School Plan, have implications for schools. Principals, who seemed to have an unrealistic perception of the situation as it is, may need to become more aware of whole school planning and evaluating. This might best be achieved through the involvement of an outside facilitator in the process.

## Summary

From the perceptions on the development and revision of the School Plan/Vision - Mission Statement the evidence shows that:

- There is a notable difference of perception once again between principals on the one hand and that of coordinators and teachers on the other on the involvement of teachers in *developing* and *revising* the school plan.

Coordinators work in a situation where the gap between the perceptions of principals and coordinators/teachers will not contribute to an ease in working relationships. Here again we have evidence of different perceptions of principals on the one hand and coordinators and teachers on the other on an issue of consultation and involvement over which principals have a large measure of control. We cannot infer whose judgement is most correct that of the principal or that of the teacher. We can conclude, however, that there is a communication problem in a large percentage of these schools.

### 5.1.5 SUPPORT STRUCTURES: PERSONAL AND SYSTEMIC SUPPORT

To be in a position to implement the vision, goal and objectives of the school, teachers require "systematic and carefully considered support" (Ungoed-Thomas, 1997: 131). Fullan and Hargreaves call for "a particular culture of teaching", a set of working relationships which bind teachers together "in a supportive, inquiring community...in schools which value, develop and support the judgement and expertise of all their teachers" (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992: 50).

Buchanan and Huczynski debate the values of both the human and the structural approaches. They hold that social scientists see the individual as playing a minor role and that behaviour is determined by the organisational structure. It is their belief that those coming from a management perspective tend to focus on individual and group characteristics (Buchanan and Huczynski, 1997: 299). No doubt the truth, the reality, lies in blending both approaches. Too many groups fail to maximise potential "because they consider their business strategy in isolation. It is therefore essential that an organization's overall strategy is linked from

the very beginning to its human resource strategy" (Cane, 1996 26-27). Handy is aligned with Cane in his view that while the trend in organisations had been "to play down the importance of the individual and the group leader" in favour of "structure, control systems and climate" the tide has now turned to favour "once again the importance of the individual" (Handy, 1993: 118). McIntyre claims that social activities, "having fun as a group is an important part of team maintenance" (McIntyre, 1998: 180). Humour helps "to build relationships, improve communication and reduce tensions" (Ibid.).

#### 5.1.5.1 PERSONAL SUPPORT

Coordinators were asked to name the three most significant support persons for them in their role. There were 506 responses which fell into 15 categories (Appendix 1, Table 27). These categories were summarised and collapsed into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 28) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses made by coordinators.

#### Most Significant Support Person

We shall examine, in Table 5.16, the most significant support person listed by coordinators.

**Table 5.16 Most Significant Support "Person" Named by Coordinators**

<b>Most Significant Support Person</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>
	<b>%</b>
<b>From within the school</b>	60.3
<b>From within the scheme</b>	37.4
<b>From individuals</b>	1.7
<b>From within the community</b>	0.6
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>174</b>

Over half of the coordinator outcomes went to "support within the school". In second place was "support within the scheme". These were the areas where coordinators found most support. We shall find further detail in Appendix 1, Table 27. The highest percentage for coordinators (22.7 per cent) went to the "principal" (item 5) as the most significant support person. The "cluster" (item 2) was next at 20.8 per cent with individual "staff members" (item 3) at 19.8 per cent. "Parents" (item 6) got 12.8 per cent. The coordinator in the parallel primary or post-primary school, the "parallel coordinator" (item 12) got 5.3 per cent. As a support persons the National and Assistant Coordinators (item 8) received 6.5 per cent. Support from the principal and staff members came under the heading of "support within the school".

All the categories under "support within the scheme" had high outcomes. Of particular interest is "cluster" support (item 2) to which coordinators gave 20.8 per cent. The cluster group the group of coordinators serving schools in the same geographic area, met on a monthly basis between 1990 and 1997. Since then these groups have met once per term. There are many purposes for "cluster meetings" (2.3.6 and 2.3.6.1) but the relevant one here is that of "mutual support" for the coordinators themselves.

### **Summary**

The foregoing illustrates that:

- The principal is the most significant support person named by coordinators.
- The "cluster group" comes in second place.
- Staff members and parents are valued support persons.
- The parallel coordinator is valued by coordinators.

Almost two thirds of the coordinators valued support from their principal and staff. It can be said that presumably this number of coordinators feel supported by their principal and staff within the HSCL scheme. This valuing of the principal and staff points to their key role within the scheme and to the importance of maintaining and developing their expertise through in-service training. It must be noted that while the "cluster meeting" was named by one-fifth, support from parallel coordinators, in nearby schools, needs to be developed.

### 5.1.5.2 SYSTEMIC SUPPORT

Coordinators were asked to name the three most significant structures that support them as coordinators. There were 473 responses which fell into 23 categories (Appendix 1, Table 29). These categories were summarised and collapsed into three categories (Appendix 1, Table 30) which showed the patterning of *all* the responses made by coordinators.

#### Most Significant Support Structure

We shall now examine, in Table 5.17, the most significant Support Structure named by coordinators.

**Table 5.17 Most Significant Support "Structure" Named by Coordinators**

<b>Most Significant "Structure"</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>
	<b>%</b>
<b>HSCL scheme structures</b>	<b>67.3</b>
<b>Parent and community structures</b>	<b>18.1</b>
<b>School structures and self motivation</b>	<b>14.6</b>
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>171</b>

From Table 5.17 we note that "HSCL scheme structures" provided the highest level of support according to a high percentage of coordinators. In second place was "parent and community structures" while "school structures and self motivation" figured last.

We shall get further insights from Appendix 1, Table 29. Under "HSCL scheme structures" coordinators named the "cluster group" structure (item 1) at 26.6 per cent, the "local cluster" (item 6) at 12.1 per cent, "in-career development" for coordinators (item 8) at 10.4 per cent, the "Department of Education" (item 11) at 1.5 per cent, the "National Coordinator service" (item 12) at 3.4 per cent and "parallel coordinators" (item 15) at 0.6 per cent. As already outlined in Chapter Two all the above named structures are important elements of the HSCL scheme. Coordinators gave the "core group of involved parents" (item 2) 12.3 per cent and the "local committee" (item 5) 5.1 per cent. In many instances at least some of the membership of these two groups is the same. It would seem that parent structures act as important support to coordinators. The "public health nurse" (item 3) and "youth services" (item 4) got 0.6 per cent and 0.4 per cent respectively. Since the public health nurse is a key community person and has easy access to homes this seems a very low percentage. The figure given to youth services above, to "community" (item 17) at 1.9 per cent and to the "gardaí" (item 21) at 0.2 per cent seem to be saying that community structures are not valued much by coordinators. Among "school structures and self motivation" are "staff and school" structures (item 7) at 11.0 per cent, the "Board of Management" (item 9) at 2.5 per cent "principal" (item 10) at 2.7 per cent, and "self motivation" (item 19) at 0.2 per cent.



## Summary

From the foregoing it is evident that:

- The "cluster group" is the most significant support structure for coordinators.
- The "local cluster group" is also highly valued.
- The "core group of involved parents" and the "local committee" is a valued structure.
- "Staff and school" structures support the coordinator.

Coordinators work in school communities where the most important support "persons" are firstly school related and secondly scheme related. Regarding "structures" as a support mechanism, those of the the HSCL scheme get by far the highest percentage. Structures are called for within schools in order to facilitate both the growth and on-going development of the HSCL scheme. This can really happen only through in-career development for the entire staff, promoting a whole school approach. It would be obvious to the writer from visiting schools that training for Boards of Management would also be vital to enable them to manage schools in a management-leadership fashion.

### 5.1.6 THE DELEGATION PROCESS: THE PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS, COORDINATORS, AND TEACHERS

The delegation process provides "new challenges" for those who have reached the "team" level and enables those who have "too much to do" to seek different "challenges" (Taylor and Thornton, 1995: 45). Some criteria are essential in order to delegate effectively:

- analysing your own job - "which things must you personally do?" (Ibid.);
- correctly identifying "the person to whom work is being delegated - are they capable? Are they willing?" (Taylor and Thackwray, 1997: 64);
- creating "a common purpose that people can share and ensure that they understand this clearly" (Johnson and Redmond, 1998: 129);
- briefing and coaching of personnel;
- monitoring how personnel are getting on while learning to trust them;
- being available if required;

- reviewing what has been learned.

The delegation process promotes a sense of being valued. Delegation means giving people more control. "People are allowed more freedom of action within specified limits...holding them accountable for the results" (Johnson and Redmond, 1998: 96).

Principals and coordinators were asked if there were matters within the school/within their role that they found helpful and effective to delegate. Teachers were asked if matters within the school had been delegated to them. The overall reaction of the principals, coordinators and teachers to delegation was "yes" at 85.9 per cent. The principals had a high percentage (97.6 per cent). The overall total "no" response was 14.1 per cent, with teachers recording 35.4 per cent.

The principals and coordinators were then asked to state their perception of the matters, that they had delegated while teachers were asked about matters that had been delegated to them, in order of importance. In total there were 910 responses which fell into 57 categories (Appendix 1, Table 31). Principals identified with 33 categories, coordinators with 36 categories, and teachers with 25 categories. The initial 57 categories were collapsed and summarised into five categories (Appendix 1, Table 32) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses. The data on the most frequently delegated matters were subjected to statistical testing.

### **Most Frequently Delegated Matters**

We will now examine, in Table 5.18, the most frequently delegated matters as perceived by principals, coordinators and teachers in relation to matters they delegated or matters that had been delegated to them in the case of the teachers.

**Table 5.18 Most Frequently Delegated Matters, as Perceived by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

<b>Most Frequently Delegated</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Administration matters</b>	75.0	11.1	53.5	44.3
<b>Parent contact</b>	6.3	80.4	2.8	36.4
<b>Issues of a pastoral/social nature</b>	12.5	3.3	33.8	12.8
<b>Planning/ monitoring/ evaluating</b>	4.2	4.6	8.5	5.2
<b>Agency contact</b>	2.1	0.7	1.4	1.4
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>368</b>

**Chi-square = 247.70**

**DF = 8**

**P < .001**

Three quarters of the principals claimed that they delegated "administration matters" while just over half of the teachers perceived this to be the case. A high percentage (80.4 per cent) of coordinators delegated matters to parents. This is very much in keeping with the role of the coordinator. According to teachers issues of a "pastoral/social nature" were delegated to them. It must be noted that in relation to "administration matters" principals and teachers do not tally. However, it could be the case that principals delegated these matters to other members of staff who were not part of this survey. With regard to issues of a "pastoral social nature" there is some discrepancy unless someone other than the principal delegated pastoral care to the teachers. The differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant.

We shall find further detail in Appendix 1, Table 31. The "day to day administration" (item 1) had an overall total of 7.8 per cent. Principal findings in relation to daily administration were high at 16.0 per cent. "Supervision" of pupils (item 2) has an overall of 10.8 per cent with the figure of principals at 23.6 per

cent. "Discipline" issues (item 4) were delegated according to 28.5 per cent of principals while 9.5 per cent of teachers claimed that "discipline" issues were delegated to them. Duties of posts of responsibility (item 6), without any details, were delegated according to 5.6 per cent of principals, while 1.4 per cent of teachers stated that post work was delegated to them. "Paperwork" (item 8) was delegated according to 32.6 per cent of principals while 20.3 per cent of teachers had "paper work" delegated to them. Principals (25.7 per cent) delegated responsibility for "subject areas" (item 13) while 24.3 per cent of teachers claimed that this curricular area was delegated to them. An overall total of 3.5 per cent was given by the respondents to "fundraising" (item 16). The result from principals was quite high at 6.9 per cent. "Light maintenance" (item 17) was delegated by 22.9 per cent of principals and delegated according to 13.5 per cent of teachers. "Attendance" issues (item 24), "substitution" matters (item 25), "staff development" (item 29), and decision-making" (item 30) all had percentages ranging from 0.8 per cent to 3.0 per cent. "Peripheral matters" (item 26) got an overall of 4.8 per cent. Finally in this category the "dissemination of information" (item 40) got a figure of 27.3 per cent from coordinators.

The category dealing with the delegation of "parent contact" had a few items where the principal was part of the process and we will look at these first. Parent "courses" (item 11) and parent "contact" (item 28) were named by principals at 1.4 per cent and 9.7 per cent respectively. "Classroom work" (item 33) was delegated by 0.7 per cent of principals and 12.3 per cent of coordinators. To have an understanding of how important the delegation process is to coordinators it is necessary to state the following data. Coordinators delegated:

- the process of parents and teachers "working together" in small groups to facilitate their own growth in understanding together and that of policy formulation (item 34) at 4.5 per cent;
- the "recruiting of parents" (item 35) at 23.4 per cent;
- the "training" of parents as facilitators (item 36) at 13.0 per cent;
- the "running of the crèche" (item 37) at 5.2 per cent;
- "leadership training" (item 39) at 0.6 per cent;
- the maintenance of the "parents' room" (item 41) at 2.6 per cent;
- the training of parents "as home visitors" (item 46) at 7.8 per cent;
- the "facilitation" of Local Committee meetings (item 48) at 3.2 per cent;
- the giving of "parent-to-parent input" at meetings (item 53) at 7.1 per cent;
- the management of HSCL "funds" (item 54) at 1.3 per cent;
- the work of the "parent council" (item 55) at 1.9 per cent.

It can be said that coordinators seem to have an understanding of delegation as an empowering process rather than as one of balancing the work load. "Delegation" is a key element of the HSCL scheme which is being implemented by a small number of coordinators.

In the areas of the "pastoral" and the "social" we can note the following. "Social events" (item 5) were delegated by an overall total of 3.0 per cent, "projects" (item 12) with a total of 1.6 per cent and "health and safety" issues (item 14) at 4.6 per cent. In the latter the principals have a percentage of 8.3 which is quite high. "Recording pupil progress" (item 21) had an overall total of 9.4 per cent. Teachers gave a very high percentage (31.3 per cent) for their "recording of pupil progress". The overall total regarding "pastoral care" (item 23) and delegation was 3.2 per cent. Principals figured at 6.9 per cent.

In the area of planning, monitoring and evaluating the area of "curriculum planning" (item 10) got an overall total of 6.2 per cent, principals were high at 11.8 per cent. "Evaluation by year heads" (item 27) and "evaluation by coordinators" (item 47) got 0.8 per cent and 0.3 per cent respectively and is in keeping with the lack of evaluation inferred throughout the data. Coordinators, (58.4 per cent), delegated the "organisation of classes" (item 38) and 7.1 per cent delegated the "management of a parent group"(item 42) to teachers. This is an interesting finding since teachers have no record of it.

### **Summary**

From the foregoing relating to perceptions about the delegation process it can be said that:

- "Administration matters" got a high percentage of the responses from principals in relation to their perception of matters they delegated, while 57.5 per cent of teachers perceived that they had "administration matters" delegated to them. (The principals and coordinators were asked to record matters which they delegated, while teachers were asked about matters delegated to them).
- Coordinators perceived that they delegated "administration matters". It is a requirement of the HSCL scheme that coordinators become involved in delegating to parents.
- A high number of coordinators delegated issues relating to parent contact. The percentage for principals and teachers in this area was low.
- Only an overall total of 4.6 per cent delegated matters or had matters delegated to them in relation to "planning/monitoring/evaluating".
- "Agency contact" was low for all three categories.

Coordinators work in an environment where a high percentage of principals (69.0 per cent) felt that they delegated "administration matters". Teachers (57.5 per cent) perceived that administration matters were delegated to them. This type of delegation process would seem to be more a balancing of the work load than a motivational mechanism. Coordinators (79.4 per cent) delegated some parent-to-parent contact/support to the parents themselves. It would seem that coordinators have an understanding of delegation as an empowering process for parents and as a key element of their role as coordinators, as link agents. Again as in 5.1.3 on "Feedback", principals seem to have a more positive evaluation of their delegation process than is the perception of coordinators and teachers.

In Theme Three on "Structures" we have examined:

- evaluation of the HSCL scheme against the backdrop of evaluation in the school generally;
- the consultation process through eliciting the views of individuals, groups and agencies;
- the feedback procedures in relation to individuals, groups, and agencies;
- the involvement of teachers in the development and revision of the school plan;
- support structures on the personal and systemic levels;
- the delegation process.

## **5.2 DEVELOPMENT**

Development of parents and teachers has been an important aspect of the HSCL scheme since its inception. The belief of the Department of Education has been one of influencing the significant adults in the life of the child/young person. Through enlightened adults the young person could, in turn, have optimal opportunity for growth and development. Effective work starts with a clear purpose which in some way incorporates the hoped-for outcome. Blanchard et al. believe that it is through "empowerment, relationships and communication, flexibility and recognition and appreciation" that the hoped-for outcome is reached (Blanchard,

Carew, and Parisi-Carew, 1993: 27). These authors relate a simple story of two workers hammering on a piece of granite. When asked what they were doing, one worker said, "I'm trying to crack this granite" the other responded "I'm part of a team building a cathedral" (Ibid.). In the school context Pugh speaks of partnerships between home and school as a working relationship characterised by "a shared sense of purpose" (Pugh and De'Ath, 1989: 33, see also Creese, 1995). With Clayton we can say that "purpose is the passion that drives people and organizations forward" (Clayton, 1997: 22). Statements of purpose can be understood in terms of values and values can be expressed in the language of purpose.

At the heart of a school, or indeed any organization, lies a set of values which school personnel may or may not subscribe to. Clayton states that "when the majority of the people fully subscribe to these values...then the organisation has a growing heart. People feel good because they can be authentic. People are able to learn and take risks. Creativity and innovation permeate the culture...The open hearted organisation will carry a collective sense of purpose" (Ibid., 28). So schools must enunciate and encourage commitment to core values, concerned with the quality of life and relationships within the school community. A value system provides "a sense of direction, shared values can help people to see beyond immediate clashes of interest and act on behalf of a larger, long-term, mutual interest" (The Report on the Commission on Global Governance, 1995: 49).

Adair believes that values are "essentially what you think is worthwhile and deserving of effort" (Adair, 1988: 39). He acknowledges "a reverse effect ... by choosing an object and devoting ourselves to it, we create value" (Ibid.). Covey et al. hold that "to value something is to esteem it to be of worth... critically important" but they also state that valuing something "does not necessarily mean it will



create quality-of-life results" (Covey and Merrill, 1994: 26). Hence, there is a need to take time to clarify the values, and to work towards consensus where possible, while recognising differences. In this way "shared values can become the basis for decision-making" (Blanchard and O'Connor, 1997: 55). These authors also hold that "the real 'boss' is the company's adopted values" (Ibid.). The value system, they believe, is "the authority we must serve" (Ibid.). This notion of service being a value in itself is found in modern literature. In *Stewardship*, Block, has *Choosing Service Over Self-Interest* as the sub title. He defines partnership as the willingness "to give more choice to the people we choose to serve" (Block, 1993: 32). The authors of *Managing by Values* believe that, "success...is all about service...and service means people...As a result of aligning with and living by ones values, we've seen decreases in legal costs...complaints...wage disputes...in locations where there's been a significant recession" (Blanchard and O'Connor, 1997: 47-48).

One of Maister's views is that "schools and firms should find ways to teach more about what it is to serve" (Maister, 1997: 19). Later on he links the notion of service and value. He speaks of asking people "how to serve them better", he speaks of listening to them, "demonstrating an interest" in them, and offering "something of value" to them (Ibid., 168-169). So we can conclude that values are at the centre of our actions individually and collectively and underpin the work of the school. "Schools need to devote both time and preparation to this, as the aim is to end with a set of core values that everyone in the school understands and can support...At the very least all the staff should play an active part, and at best all the children and their parents will also be involved" (Lang, 1995: 163). The education of the whole-child within the context of a whole-school approach

requires an integrated value system where faith, truth, respect, love, justice, learning, freedom and tolerance abound (Dorr, 1984, 1990, 1991; Ungeod-Thomas, 1997; Siraj-Blatchford, 1995; Erwin, 1996; Best, 1996; Weisinger, 1998; Collins, ca. 1996.) The value system underpins the work and the culture of the school.

### **5.2.1 PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

In the presence of groups of teachers one will note how action-orientated they are and how much they seek practical ideas. Teachers are faced with many pressures, new curricula and approaches to evaluation, pupils who bring a diversity of backgrounds, who have different learning needs, abilities and attitudes to learning and demands from parents and the wider community. It is often "easier to do what you have always done...than develop new strategies or evaluate current ones" (Stoll and Fink, 1996: 155). Classroom and school evaluation "is a meaningful activity that engages teachers in a process of refinement, helps create autonomy in professional judgement and enhances practice" (Ibid.). When teachers are involved in classroom and school improvement they become part of a "learning community" (Ibid., 160). In this way teachers contribute to their own learning and the learning of others (Clark, 1996).

The teacher as "career-long learner" is central to the growth and development of the pupils (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992: 108). Block encourages people to "learn as much as you can about what you're doing. Learning and performance are intimately related" (Block, 1987: 86). Teacher development and pupil development are closely linked as Fullan and Hargreaves point out "the value of teacher development and teacher collaboration must ultimately be judged by whether these changes make teachers better for their students in ways that teachers them-

selves can see" (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992: 110-111 and Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1994).

We shall now explore what the perceptions of principals, coordinators, and teachers themselves are, in relation to their own growth and development. In total there were 1,089 responses listed by principals, coordinators, and teachers to the question on teacher development. These perceptions fell into 30 categories and can be seen in Appendix 1, Table 33. Principals identified 24 categories, coordinators 22 categories and teachers 20 categories. The initial 30 categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 34) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers. For the purposes of statistical testing the distribution of the most helpful way to promote "teacher development" is presented.

#### **The Most Helpful way to promote Teacher Development**

We will now examine, in Table 5.19, the perceptions of the most helpful way to promote teacher development according to principals, coordinators and teachers.

**Table 5.19 Perceptions of the Most Helpful Way to Promote "Teacher Development" Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

<b>Most Helpful Way</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Through in-career development</b>	70.7	57.1	67.3	64.5
<b>Through staff nurturing and good communication</b>	17.8	31.2	21.2	23.9
<b>Through a culture of affirmation</b>	11.5	11.2	11.5	11.4
<b>Through parents and community</b>	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.2
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>431</b>

**Chi-square = 10.57      DF = 6      P = .102**

The highest overall total from principals, coordinators, and teachers went to the "in-career development" of teachers. This figure would seem to indicate an approach focused on teacher growth. We shall examine this concept later and make comparisons with earlier findings. Linked with the above finding was teacher development "through staff nurturing and good communication" with a similar emphasis from respondents. Teacher development "through a culture of affirmation" was named by principals, coordinators, and teachers with almost similar percentages. As indicated by the Chi-square such differences as there were in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were not statistically significant.

In Appendix 1, Table 33, we have further detail relating to the above findings. As already noted the provision of "in-career development" for teachers got more than half the outcomes from the respondents in Table 5.19. Teachers had a figure of 67.3 per cent for "in-career development" as opposed to 1.9 per cent in Appendix 1, Table 1 for "staff development" (item 3). The corresponding figure for principals and coordinators (Appendix 1, Table 1) were 45.6 per cent and 57.1 per cent respectively. Perhaps the direct focus of the issue under consideration: "what are the most helpful ways, in your experience, to promote teacher development?" was the reason for the difference. Teacher "courses" (item 1) were named by 70.7 per cent of principals, 55.9 per cent of coordinators, and 81.7 per cent of teachers. "Personal development" training (item 4) was named by 25.5 per cent of principals and 29.4 per cent and 5.8 per cent of coordinators and of teachers respectively. The combination of these two aspects, the curricular and the personal shows an advance in the thinking of the groups concerned. "Quality training", (item 21) as a method of teacher development, with 1.3 per cent from principals and 0.6 per cent from coordinators was also named.

The use of "staff meetings" (item 2) as a means of teacher development had a similar figure of just over 37.0 per cent for principals and coordinators. Teachers gave "staff meetings" 14.4 per cent. This would seem to indicate a lack of value on their part for this particular structure as a learning-development mechanism. However, "committee work" (item 15), which at primary level generally referred to teachers with the same class grouping and at second level to subject areas, got 20.4 per cent, 12.4 per cent, and 13.5 per cent from principals, coordinators, and teachers respectively.

"Linking with other schools" (item 16) got 1.9 per cent from principals and 1.2 per cent and 3.8 per cent from coordinators and teachers respectively. This finding is in keeping with that of Appendix 1, Table 21 (item 11) where 0.7 per cent of principals sought feedback from "individuals" in other schools and of Appendix 1, Table 23 (item 14) where only 1.6 per cent of principals sought feedback from "feeder schools". Coordinators had no percentage in either table. Returning to Appendix 1, Table 33, principals, (0.6 per cent), named "career breaks" (item 19) as a form of teacher development, while 3.8 per cent of principals and 1.9 per cent of teachers viewed "financial support" (item 20) as important for teacher growth.

We now examine "staff nurturing and good communication" as a method of "teacher development". Principals gave "consultation" with teachers (item 13) 13.4 per cent, while the figures of coordinators and teachers were 23.5 per cent and 18.3 per cent respectively. The "involvement" of teachers in school-related matters (item 10) was given 14.6 per cent by principals, with coordinators at 11.8 per cent and teachers at 5.8 per cent. Principals would seem to favour "involvement" of teachers while coordinators and teachers seemed to prefer "consultation". This pattern is noted again in "one-to-one relationship-communication"

with staff (item 3) where the outcomes were 4.5 per cent, 15.9 per cent, and 5.8 per cent for principals, coordinators and teachers respectively. "Listening" (item 12) was perceived to be most valued by coordinators with a figure of 13.5 per cent, while that of principals and teachers was 4.5 per cent and 4.8 per cent respectively. The percentage given to "listening" by coordinators could stem from the emphasis placed on this skill in theory and in fact, during their training.

Leading by "example" (item 7) was named by 1.9 per cent of principals and teachers and 6.5 per cent of coordinators. A number of teachers (5.8 per cent) held that teacher development comes from good "leadership" (item 28). The giving of responsibility to teachers (item 11) as a means towards their development was given 12.7 per cent by principals, 5.3 per cent by coordinators and 2.9 per cent by teachers. This percentage seems low on the part of teachers and coordinators. One would imagine that development would call for experience which could be gathered through the acceptance of responsibility. "Evaluation" (item 17) with a figure from principals of 4.5 per cent and from co-ordinators and from teachers of 0.6 per cent and 3.8 per cent respectively, is in keeping with the general trend throughout the questionnaire towards evaluation. The "union" (item 30) was named by 1.0 per cent of teachers as an avenue of development for teachers. There was no response to this item from principals or coordinators. "Challenging" teachers (item 18) was viewed as a mechanism for teacher development by 2.5 per cent of principals and 3.8 per cent of teachers. Finally "social outings" (item 22) were raised by all groups as a growth device. The results for principals, coordinators and teachers were 1.3 per cent, 2.4 per cent and 7.7 per cent respectively.

The "affirmation" of teachers (item 8) was considered important in teacher development by 31.2 per cent of principals 34.7 per cent of coordinators, and 26.9

per cent of teachers. Other outcomes in this category were teacher's "own efforts" (item 23) named by 0.6 per cent of principals, 1.2 per cent of coordinators, and 3.8 per cent of teachers. "Teacher mobility" (item 24) was named by 1.3 per cent of principals and 1.8 per cent of coordinators. Principals (2.5 per cent) saw "Board of Management advice" (item 6) as important while 1.3 per cent of principals and 1.2 per cent of coordinators saw "attitude change" (item 5) on the part of teachers as being growth productive. In relation to "parents and the community" which got an overall total of 1.2 per cent in Appendix 1, Table 34 the following details are interesting. Coordinators, the only respondents, gave of 5.3 per cent to "parent-teacher meetings" (item 26) and 1.8 per cent to "home visits" (item 27). Teachers (1.0 per cent) claimed that involvement with "statutory bodies" (item 29) was helpful in their development.

### **Summary**

The foregoing findings illustrate that:

- Much emphasis is placed on teacher development. Teachers also seem to value their own development through in-service. Teachers gave a very low percentage to their own development in Appendix 1, Table 1 (item 3).
- Teachers gave a lower figure to "staff meetings" than that of principals and coordinators. Teachers did not seem to value the staff meeting, the reason for this may lie in the fact that they were not well run, that teacher views were neither sought nor valued or that staff came to meetings at the end of a demanding day.
- Links with other schools were not considered important by many of the respondents. This may stem from a fear of losing numbers or an isolation that seems characteristic of schools. The attitude here was consistent with earlier responses Appendix 1, Table 21, (item 11) and Appendix 1, Table 23, (item 14).
- Principals seemed to favour the "involvement" of teachers in school-related matters while coordinators and teachers seemed to prefer "consultation".
- The higher percentage given to "listening" by coordinators may have stemmed from the emphasis placed on this skill during their training.

- Coordinators and teachers gave a low percentage to "responsibility" as a means towards teacher development.
- Principals, coordinators, and teachers considered teacher "affirmation" vital to teacher development.
- Home visitation got a very low percentage (1.8 per cent) and from coordinators only.

Coordinators work in an environment where, theoretically speaking, teacher development is valued. Almost two-thirds of the respondents feel that development can happen through in-service, while almost one-quarter speak of "nurturing" and "good communication". However, the author is aware of the fact that schools will, on the whole, only take part in in-service if it is provided during school hours. It seems a pity that links with other schools, and with the community did not surface and that the low percentage given to "evaluation" was once again in keeping with the trend throughout the findings.

### 5.2.2 PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT DEVELOPMENT

In any conversation with parents, parents indeed of all classes, a constantly recurring theme is that of parenting, of nurturing the child's growth and of leading the young person into adulthood. Whitehead and Eaton-Whitehead put it succinctly "good parents encourage their children's first steps and support their later leaps" (Whitehead and Eaton-Whitehead, 1991: 27). The following excerpt puts parent development in perspective:

the really important goal...is parents, actual parents, parents-to-be in a few years and embryonic parents. No matter how widely our efforts in the education of small children or adolescents; no matter how effective we are in rehabilitating prisoners or inculcating genuine attitudes towards work and self-help; all these achievements are minor victories if we fail to create new, aware, sensitised parents for the children of the next generation (Work Plan for National and Caribbean Adolescent and Early Childhood Programmes Servol, Port of Spain, 1990 cited in Cohen, 1991: 72).

This could be a valuable contribution to all work with parents and the vision of them as prime educators.

We now examine the perceptions of principals, coordinators, and teachers regarding parent development. In total there were 1,061 responses listed by princi-



pals, coordinators, and teachers on parent development. These priorities fell into 26 categories (Appendix 1, Table 35). Principals and teachers identified 21 categories, and coordinators 22 categories. The initial 26 categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 36) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses from principals, coordinators, and teachers. Again, the data on the most helpful way to promote parent development as perceived by respondents, were subjected to statistical testing.

### The Most helpful way to promote Parent Development

We will examine, in Table 5.20, the most helpful way to promote parent development according to principals, coordinators and teachers.

**Table 5.20 Perceptions of the Most Helpful Way to Promote "Parent Development" Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

Most helpful Way	Principals	Coordinators	Teachers	Total
	%	%	%	%
Through intervention of the HSCL scheme	63.2	60.0	64.9	62.3
Through good communication	12.9	12.9	24.7	15.6
Through involving parents and using their skills	18.1	15.9	10.3	15.4
Through a culture of affirmation	5.8	11.2	0.0	6.6
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>422</b>

Chi-square = 21.20

DF = 6

P = .001

More than 60.0 per cent of the responses went to the development of parents "through intervention of the HSCL scheme". The responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers seemed to portray that all parties valued the contribution made by the HSCL scheme. "Good communication" had a value for principals, coordinators, and teachers but was particularly highlighted by the teachers. "In-

volving parents and using their skills" was highlighted by principals, while a "culture of affirmation" was important for coordinators. As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant.

In Appendix 1, Table 35 we find additional detail relating to the above findings. As already noted in Table 5.20 the highest response (62.3 per cent) went to "intervention of the HSCL scheme" in the development of parents. "Courses" for parents (item 3) figured at 54.2 per cent, 77.6 per cent, and 73.2 per cent from principals, coordinators, and teachers respectively. Courses on the curriculum, parenting and personal development courses and courses to enable parents to act as a resource to their own child and the wider school community were included in this category. Involvement in "HSCL activities" (item 1) got 42.6 per cent from principals, 12.4 per cent from coordinators, and 17.5 per cent from teachers. All leisure time courses and activities came under the classification of "HSCL activities" and on the whole would not be valued by teachers although in this case they gave 17.5 per cent to leisure time activities. We note, however, that the more formal type of course (item 3) got a figure of 73.2 per cent from teachers.

In keeping with the thrust of their role, to respond to the named needs of parents, the coordinators gave 24.7 per cent to the "identification of needs" (item 8), while that of principals and teachers was 8.4 per cent and 5.2 per cent respectively. The value of the "parents' room" (item 2) as an avenue towards parent development was named by 11.0 per cent of principals, 8.2 per cent of coordinators and 12.4 per cent of teachers. The same idea was noted in Appendix 1, Table 5 where the "parents' room and crèche facilities" (items 7 and 33) featured for 10.6 per cent of principals, 15.2 per cent of coordinators, and 11.7 per cent of teachers.

Again, this is a change of attitude on the part of teachers who were apprehensive about parent facilities.

Back to Appendix 1, Table 35, we find that parent development can be enhanced by parents meeting in "small groups" (item 6) according to 11.6 per cent of principals, 10.6 per cent of coordinators, and 2.1 per cent of teachers. Bearing in mind that many of the parents may have had bad experiences of school themselves and as a result may have a poor self image, the "small group" situation could prove initially less threatening. The value of "home visits" (item 13) as a process of development for parents was held by 1.3 per cent of principals and 15.9 per cent of coordinators. There was no response from teachers. It is good to find this emphasis placed on home visitation by coordinators. Apart from of 28.2 per cent given to "home visitation" (item 32) in Appendix 1, Table 9 there is little value placed on this vital aspect of the HSCL scheme. Again in Appendix 1, Table 35 the value of the "Local Committee" (item 20) was named by 1.3 per cent of principals, 3.5 per cent of coordinators, and 1.0 per cent of teachers. In addition coordinators gave the "core group" (item 22) 3.5 per cent. There is an emphasis in the HSCL scheme on the development of leader parents, the "multiplier effect", but the figure given to "parent driven help" (item 21) is low all round. The response from principals was 0.6 per cent, from coordinators 3.5 per cent and surprisingly from teachers 6.2 per cent.

It is interesting to note how the respondents viewed "involving parents and using their skills". By far the highest percentage in this category went to "encouraging the participation of parents" (item 9) as a mechanism of development. The responses were 34.2 per cent, 39.4 per cent, and 18.6 per cent for principals, coordinators, and teachers respectively. This outcome links with some of the findings

in Appendix 1, Table 1 (items 5,6,and 34), in Appendix 1, Table 3 (items 10 and 29), Appendix 1, Table 5 (items 16, 22, and 28), and Appendix 1, Table 7, (item 16). There are references to parent involvement in Appendix 1, Table 9, and Table 11. Again we note the "involvement of parents" in Appendix 1, Table 21 (items 6, 9, 13, 24, and 25) and in Appendix 1, Table 23 (items 8, 9, and 22). The Board of Management and the Local Committee were mentioned on a number of occasions but are not included in the above references.

Another aspect named by all respondents was "to invite and to encourage partnership/real decision-making" between parents and teachers (item 15). Principals gave "partnership" a figure of 11.0 per cent while that of coordinators and teachers was 9.4 per cent and 7.2 per cent respectively. A "strong supportive Parents Association" (item 16) was viewed as a vehicle of parent development by 9.7 per cent of principals, 1.8 per cent of coordinators, and 7.2 per cent of teachers. Membership of the "Board of Management" (item 17) had a low figure of 0.6 per cent from principals. "Policy involvement" (item 24) got 1.8 per cent from coordinators as contributing to parent development while "fundraising" (item 25) and "employment opportunities" (item 26) both got 1.0 per cent from teachers. Finally, sharing parent skills through their involvement "in the classroom" (item 4) was named by 7.1 per cent of principals, 3.5 per cent of coordinators and 2.1 per cent of teachers.

"Good communication" included "parent-teacher meetings", (item 10), at 14.2 per cent, 4.1 per cent, and 22.7 per cent from principals, coordinators, and teachers respectively. Also included was "listening to parents - reflecting their question back" (item 11). This was cited by 9.0 per cent of principals, 17.6 per cent of coordinators, and 5.2 per cent of teachers. The giving of "information" to parents

(item 12) was valued by 10.3 per cent of principals, and 5.9 per cent, and 21.6 per cent of coordinators and of teachers respectively, as a means of promoting parent development. A culture of "affirmation" (item 5) was considered important in parent development and was given 19.4 per cent by principals, 24.1 per cent by coordinators, and 5.2 per cent by teachers.

### **Summary**

From the foregoing perceptions it can be seen that:

- All respondents valued courses for parents as a vital aspect of their development.
- In keeping with their role, coordinators gave a higher percentage than principals or teachers to the "identification of needs" processes.
- In keeping with the findings in Appendix 1, Table 5, teachers were generous in their valuing of the "parents' room" despite apprehension on their part regarding parent facilities.
- For the second time "home visits" got a figure as high as 15.9 per cent from coordinators. There was a very low percentage from principals with none from teachers.
- The figure given to the "Local Committee", to the "core group" and to "parent driven help", seemed low all round. Surprisingly teachers gave a 6.2 per cent figure to the latter.
- By far the highest percentage went to "encouraging the participation of parents" as an avenue towards their development. Even at this stage, while in some cases figures were low, we can conclude that parent "participation/involvement/development" and "facilities" for parents seemed to be promoted by some of the respondents.
- There were efforts towards "partnership/real decision-making" by all respondents.
- There was also an effort to benefit from parent skills through their involvement "in the classroom".
- "Good communication" seemed valuable in the eyes of the respondents in leading towards parent development. Included in this category were "parent-teacher meetings", "listening" and the "giving of information".

- A culture of "affirmation" seemed important to all respondents in the development of parents.

The coordinator works in an environment where all respondents valued the provision of courses for parents. "Leisure time" activities for parents were not valued in the same way by teachers who would prefer to see parents staying close to children's learning. However, the latter is an outcome rather than an initial activity. Home visitation was named by over one sixth of the coordinators as a valuable mechanism in promoting parent development. While this shows some clarity around their role it is still a very low figure and is further evidence that the area of home visitation needs to be addressed. The training on parent-to-parent support, the multiplier effect, which could be an outcome of Local Committees and the "core group" does not seem to be recognised by the respondents despite the fact that these are a key aspect of the HSCL scheme. "Good communication", "listening", the "giving of information" and "affirmation" are all proactive ways to develop parents.

### 5.2.3 PERCEPTIONS OF PUPIL DEVELOPMENT

The child-pupil is central to education and schooling is part of the education process. Indeed schools and structures are in place because of children, while other members of the wider community are increasingly becoming a part of the school. The purpose of education is to enable young people to manage themselves and their lives effectively and to make the world a better and happier place and in so doing move towards "new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively" (Freire, 1972: 12). If we are proponents of "whole-child" development then the physical, mental, moral, social, cultural and religious development of the child - pupil will be of paramount importance (see Mc Carthy, 1980; Prentice, 1996; Lealman, 1996).

In the context of schools and schooling it is important to remember that children "are part of the culture in which they grow up. They are also deeply connected with the people they live with and meet" (Bruce, 1997: 58). Life within the school, as well as work methods should feed into and reflect the experience of the child "him/herself and the family and socio-cultural setting" (Ibid., 203). This

does not always happen, particularly in the case of socio-economic disadvantaged pupils. What often arises in these settings is, what the literature refers to as, a discontinuity between the home life and the school life of the child (Widlake, 1986; Comer, 1988; McAllisterSwap, 1990a). Whitaker advises teachers "to be careful to create opportunities for variety to be celebrated and learned about" (Whitaker, 1995: 94, see also Goldman and Newman, 1998: 1-24 and 113-168).

In the following section we shall examine the perceptions of principals, coordinators and teachers on how, from their experience, they have promoted pupil development. In total there were 1,047 perceptions given by principals, coordinators, and teachers to the issue of significant factors in pupil development. The priorities fell into 33 categories (Appendix 1, Table 37). Principals identified 29 categories and coordinators and teachers 26 categories each. The initial 33 categories were summarised and collapsed into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 38) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers relating to pupil development. For purposes of statistical testing the most helpful way to promote pupil development for each group is presented.

### **The Most Helpful way to promote Pupil Development**

We now examine, in Table 5.21, the perceptions of the most helpful way to promote pupil development according to principals, coordinators, and teachers.

**Table 5.21 Perceptions of the Most Helpful Way to Promote "Pupil Development" Listed by Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

<b>Most Helpful Way</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Affective development</b>	43.4	44.2	39.1	42.8
<b>Good communication and staff relationships</b>	20.4	34.4	22.8	26.5
<b>Professionalism of the staff in working with pupils</b>	25.7	16.0	20.7	20.6
<b>Active pupil-centred learning</b>	10.5	5.5	17.4	10.1
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>407</b>

**Chi-square = 18.63      DF = 6      P = .004**

According to the respondents the perceptions were that pupil growth is enhanced through "affective development". Following in second place is the building of "good communication and staff relationships" which was highlighted by coordinators. It is interesting to note that school personnel recognised the importance of their behaviour in promoting the development of their pupils. Linked very much with the latter is the "professionalism of the staff in working with pupils" where principals were highest. "Active pupil-centred learning" could be viewed as a consequence of the three preceding categories and was highlighted by teachers.

In Appendix 1, Table 37, we shall find an elaboration of the above categories. Principals, coordinators, and teachers placed emphasis on "encouragement - affirmation - building of self image" of pupils (item 4) at 29.6 per cent, 31.9 per cent, and 30.5 per cent respectively. The respondents also held that "to challenge the limitless possibilities for pupils" (item 6) was an important aspect of pupil development. This category was named by 21.7 per cent of principals, 33.1 per cent



of coordinators, and 17.9 per cent of teachers. It was the view of principals (23.7 per cent), coordinators (12.9 per cent) and teachers (23.2 per cent) that the creation of a "happy, relaxed environment" (item 11), where "care" and "belonging" were very much in evidence, leads to pupil development.

Respondents believed that "mutual respect" (item 13) between all members of the school community was important to pupil development. Best tells us that "for all schools, whatever their nature, the challenge is to create communities with the knowledge and confidence to enable students truly to learn to respect persons" (Best, 1996: 137). The percentages from respondents relating to "mutual respect" were as follows: principals 13.8 per cent, coordinators 17.2 per cent, and teachers 7.4 per cent. Developing the "ethos and value system" (item 20) had a very low outcome with a percentage of 2.0 from principals and 1.1 from teachers. This low percentage given to the "ethos and value system" does not present as a matter for concern since the preceding categories, "encouragement - affirmation - building self-image", "challenging the limitless possibilities of pupils", "mutual respect" and providing a "happy, relaxed environment" where "care" and "belonging" are in evidence, all constitute part of a positive school culture. The low response given to "moral development" (item 29) is more problematic, with 0.7 per cent from principals and 0.6 per cent from coordinators. There was no response from teachers. If we are considering the holistic development of the pupil, then "moral development" should be an integral part.

"Good communication and staff relationships", according to respondents, develops the potential of pupils. Where there is a strong sense of collegiality, school personnel "give responsibility" to pupils (item 10) according to 17.1 per cent of principal, 16.0 per cent of coordinators, and 17.9 per cent of teachers. The giving

of "responsibility" also links with "building self-image" (item 4) and "challenging pupils" (item 6) above. "Parent education and training" (item 27) is viewed by the respondents as important to pupil development and is named by 8.6 per cent of principals, 29.4 per cent of coordinators, and 6.3 per cent of teachers. "Listening - consulting pupils" (item 17) had an overall total from respondents of 14.4 per cent.

Acknowledging the "student council" (item 18) was given 2.0 per cent by principals, 1.8 per cent by coordinators, and 5.3 per cent by teachers as a mechanism for pupil development. "Pupil involvement in leadership" (item 21) got 3.3 per cent from principals and 6.1 per cent and 2.1 per cent from coordinators and teachers respectively. "Accountability" by pupils (item 26) for their behaviour and learning was noted by one principal. At this point it seems that schools have an ethos of care and support, where communication, respect, and challenge are equally valued.

We now view the more academic aspect through the following categories: "professionalism of the staff in working with pupils" and "active pupil-centred learning". In the first category, "professionalism of the staff in working with pupils" we find the provision of a "comprehensive school programme" (item 8) was valued by principals (34.9 per cent), by coordinators (29.4 per cent), and by teachers (26.3 per cent) as an aid to pupil development. Where "teachers understand the needs of pupils" (item 19), growth takes place according to 13.2 per cent of principals, 17.8 per cent of coordinators, and 12.6 per cent of teachers. "Professional advice/counselling" (item 7) as a means of promoting pupil development was named by 5.3 per cent of principals and 1.8 per cent and 1.1 per cent of coordinators and teachers respectively. "Target setting and evaluation" (item 16) got

an overall total from all the respondents of 3.7 per cent. This low figure is in keeping with the findings relating to evaluation in the questionnaire generally. So too is the finding regarding "home visits" (item 9) which got 1.3 per cent from principals and 0.6 per cent from coordinators. Teachers did not mention this category. The "early detection" of difficulties and "remediation" (item 5) got 1.3 per cent from principals and 1.1 per cent from teachers. This is not mentioned by coordinators, and is surprising when one considers that their role is based on the principle and practice of preventative measures. Promoting pupil development through the teacher keeping "up-to-date" (item 22) got a low overall total of 1.5 per cent.

"Active pupil-centred learning" was promoted by principals, coordinators and teachers as a means towards pupil development. The provision of "extra curricular activities" for pupils (item 14) received the highest percentage at 25.7 per cent from principals, 19.6 per cent from coordinators, and 27.4 per cent from teachers. Involvement in the arts" (item 15) got 1.3 per cent from principals, so too did a "competitive approach" (item 28). The giving of "awards" (item 30) and a reduced "pupil-teacher ratio" (item 31) both got 1.2 per cent from coordinators and 1.1 per cent from teachers. A low figure of 0.6 per cent was given by coordinators to "school attendance" by pupils (item 32). This seeming lack of concern about school attendance is disturbing evidence in areas of designated disadvantage.

## Summary

From the foregoing perceptions, relating to pupil development, there is evidence that:

- Emphasis was placed on "encouragement - affirmation - building of self image" by all the respondents. This denoted an interest in the value of the holistic development of pupils.
- Challenging the "limitless possibilities of pupils" was also important to respondents.
- The creation of a "happy relaxed environment" was highlighted.
- "Mutual respect" was part of the value system.
- Holistic development of pupils which includes "moral development seems very poorly attested.
- "Listening-consulting" with pupils had an average of 14.4 per cent.
- Pupil "accountability", that is responsibility on the part of the pupil for behaviour and learning was mentioned by one principal.
- "Target setting and evaluation" got the low overall of 3.7 per cent from all the respondents. This was in keeping with the findings to date and can be presented as a matter for concern.
- The outcomes relating to "home visits" got 1.3 per cent from principals and 0.6 per cent from coordinators with no mention from teachers.
- The "early detection" of difficulties and "remediation" were scarcely mentioned by principals and teachers, with no reference to this topic by coordinators.
- "Extra curricular activities" were named by all groups, the highest being teachers. One must wonder if the "marginalised" were included here.
- The promotion of "school attendance" got an overall total of 0.6 per cent. This appears as disturbing evidence in areas of designated disadvantage.

Since the holistic development of pupils was named by all respondents it can be said that at least one aspect of a whole-school approach is in evidence. Challenging pupils' ability and creativity were named. However pupil "accountability" for their own behaviour and learning got only one mention. This is an area that would need further examination in the future to see if there is a widespread disinterest in, or lack of emphasis on, pupil accountability which must have implications for school development plans. There is need to focus on the "early detection" of difficulties for pupils for whom the HSCL scheme was established and this is not the case. This is a disturbing outcome. There were similar findings in Appendix 1, Table 1 relating to the "weak"(item 35) and "most disadvantaged pupils" (item 30). It would seem that schools need to become more focused on the "marginalised" pupils.

#### **5.2.4 PERCEPTIONS OF COORDINATOR DEVELOPMENT**

As already noted, in Chapter Two, it is part of the philosophy of the HSCL scheme to provide on-going professional development for coordinators. Cane puts the valuing of people succinctly when she says "only organizations that place as much priority on their human resource strategy as their business strategy will have the strength to become or remain first class" (Cane, 1996: 25). Leadership is about demonstrating belief in people, providing support and challenging them, it is "giving people the capability to inspire themselves - not creating followers, but other leaders throughout the organization" (Whiteley and Hessian, 1996: 197). Ohmae believes that "when companies talk about ensuring employee participation and contributing to their people's well-being, there is strong evidence that their value systems and whole management processes are really built around people" (Ohmae, 1982: 209). He continues to speak about the value of "people who can think strategically" people who possess "sensitivity, insight and an inquisitive mind", in short, people who challenge the "status quo". (Ibid., 210).

Successful people share the profound urge to strive, to make progress, to achieve their goals and to fulfil the vision of the organisation, of the school. Stoltz puts it this way "Climbers embrace challenges and they live with a sense of

urgency. They are self-motivated, highly driven, and strive to get the utmost out of life...are dedicated to growth and lifelong learning...Climbers work with vision...They thrive on the challenge...you can count on [them] to help make change happen" (Stoltz, 1997: 20-23).

The self-motivated, highly enthusiastic and happy worker outlined by Stoltz, more than likely belongs to a learning organisation where "school-based studies" are "part of a never-ending extension of the professionalism of the people concerned", and where development is "embedded in the value system of the institution" (Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham, 1997: 149 and Lumby, 1999). Burkan would add that this type of institution has not just a past and present focus but an ability to "learn from the future" (Burkan, 1996: 78). Handy "is more and more sure that those who are in love with learning are in love with life" (Handy, 1990: 63). In developing the quality of the professional, Maister urges that organisations should

Backup the professional with investments in shared tools, methodologies, templates, research...Facilitate access to the skills of others in different disciplines...Provide superior support staff and systems...Instil a system of supportive, but challenging, coaching to bring out the best in each professional... Create an emotionally supportive 'collegial environment' (Maister, 1997: 99).

Through a helpful and constructive approach people learn to believe in themselves and can become much more successful and happy at work. This proactive approach can lead to better job performance for the individual concerned and frequently "other members of the organization operate differently" (Swieringa and Wierdsma 1992: 33). Dubrin says that "Success stories are a natural way of inspiring others to extend themselves" (Dubrin, 1997: 64).

#### 5.2.4.1 AREAS OF IN-CAREER DEVELOPMENT (ICD)

Professional development included personal, skills, and scheme development issues and the ability to transfer learning. With this in mind coordinators were asked to state the degree to which they had been helped through the provision of in-service training. Coordinators were given four areas of development and were asked to rate them on a scale of 5 to 1, with five being the most helpful and 1 being the least helpful. The outcome showing the mean score for each area of ICD, follows in Table 5.22.

**Table 5.22 The Mean Score Given by Coordinators to Different Areas of In-career Development.**

<b>In-career Development Areas</b>	<b>On-going development of the HSCL scheme</b>	<b>Self-confidence as a coordinator</b>	<b>Skills development</b>	<b>Personal development</b>
<b>Mean Score</b>	4.03	4.01	3.94	3.88

Note: The higher the mean score, the more positive the outcome

The on-going development of the HSCL scheme got a mean score of 4.03. It would seem from this that in-career development in relation to the HSCL scheme activity is very much valued by coordinators. It had the highest mean figure. Next came self-confidence as a coordinator with a mean of 4.01 which would seem to point to their personal sense of security around ability to meet the demands of HSCL activities. Skills development and personal development followed with 3.94 and 3.88 respectively.

### 5.2.4.2 PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROCESSES USED DURING IN-CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Coordinators were then asked to state the degree to which they had been helped through the processes used at in-career development sessions. Four models of delivery were named and coordinators were asked to rate them on a scale of 5 to 1, with five being the most helpful and 1 being the least helpful. The outcome, showing the mean score for each process used at ICD, follows in Table 5.23.

**Table 5.23 The Mean Score Given by Coordinators to Different Processes Used During In-career Development Sessions**

Processes used in the delivery of In-career Development sessions	Informal interaction with the group	Input/lecture	Formal group work	Informal interaction with the facilitator
Score	4.06	4.03	4.01	3.53

Note: The higher the mean score, the more positive the outcome

Coordinators valued "informal interaction with the group" which had a mean score of 4.06 while "formal group work" got a mean score of 4.01. There is almost a balance between the formal and informal levels of interaction. It must be borne in mind that "informal interaction" has great value when taking place among colleagues who have a good understanding of their role and its necessary practices. However, it is the view of this writer that this balance has to be maintained. Informal interaction is valuable when it comes from an informed mind-set. "Informal interaction with the facilitator" had the lowest mean score (3.53). This could be predicted within the in-career development context, where sixty



participants are present at any given time. Group size can prohibit ease of contact with the facilitator.

#### **5.2.4.3 PERCEPTIONS OF COORDINATORS RELATING TO THE ACTUAL CONTENT OF IN-CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

Coordinators were asked to name three actual elements of in-career development which had supported them in practice. The three areas of development most valued by coordinators are named in descending order in Table 5.24 which follows. Table 5.24 was drawn from the material in Appendix 1, Tables 39, 40 and 41. The complete listing of areas valued by coordinators is found in Appendix 1, Table 42.

**Table 5.24 Elements of the In-Career Development Programme Reflecting the Number of Coordinators Who Found it Helpful**

<b>Element of ICD</b>	<b>Number of Coordinators who found the element helpful.</b>
Rationale and practices of HSCL scheme	90
Internalised oppression and its consequences	79
Leadership skills	55

The elements of in-career development most valued by coordinators are, firstly, training in the rationale and practices of the HSCL scheme. This, of course is fundamental to their work. Secondly, coordinators look to their own needs and to the management of oppression which in some way affects all people. Coordinators regularly speak of understanding themselves better, their own feelings, strengths, challenges and oppression and of being more able to help others. Thirdly, coordinators list leadership skills which incorporates many aspects of their training and indeed many of the other elements named in Appendix 1, Table 42.

## **Summary**

From the foregoing data it is obvious:

- coordinators valued their in-career development both on the levels of material and processes used.

It can be said that in this section on coordinator development there were two interest areas for coordinators, firstly, the development of the scheme and secondly, their own development. This writer would hold that this is an accurate perception from her knowledge of coordinators.

## **5.3 PARTNERSHIP**

As already stated, this dissertation centres on partnership and traces it in attitudes, activities and perceptions of the various key personnel involved in the HSCL scheme. In 1.7 we noted the theoretical grounding for partnership. In 5.3 we will examine outcomes specifically relating to partnership in practice in the 182 schools that formed the research sample.

### **5.3.1 ATTITUDES TO PARTNERSHIP**

As already outlined in Chapter Three, a Likert Scale was devised so that the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents towards partnership could be measured (Henerson, Lyons and Fitz-Gibbon, 1987). The scale was composed of nineteen positive statements and nineteen negative statements relating to various aspects of partnership. The response rate to the full scale "Perceptions of Partnership" was 99.96 per cent. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, a measure of internal consistency, yielded a result of 0.9033 on the thirty-eight item scale. The Likert Scale, as sent to the sample population, can be found in Appendix 2, Table 1. The mean, standard deviation, and the results of the analyses of variance comparing the three groups for each item on the Likert scale can be found in Appendix 2, Table 2.

There were significant differences between the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers in relation to thirty-three of the thirty-eight individual

statements on the scale "Perceptions of Partnership" (Appendix 2, Table 2). In the analysis of variance on the entire scale the principals have, in general, the most positive attitude to partnership as is obvious from Table 5.25 which follows.

**Table 5.25 The Mean, Standard Deviation and Analysis of Variance for the Scale "Perceptions of Partnership" (38 items)**

	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Mean</b>	140.269	129.943	125.848	31.52	<.001
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	14.03	17.97	14.93		
<b>N</b>	163	177	112		

Note: The higher the mean score the more positive the attitude to partnership

As already stated there was a significant difference in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers on thirty-three of the scale items. In the overall scale principals were the most positive towards partnership with coordinators next while teachers were in third place (Table 5.25). However, on some individual items this pattern varied. On two occasions teachers rated highest, firstly, in relation to the involvement of parents in fundraising etc. (item g) principals were marginally above the "undecided" while coordinators and teachers were moving towards "disagree". Secondly, in relation to delegation being "a way of balancing the work-load (item t) principals were in the "strongly agree/agree" rating, and marginally lower than coordinators and teachers.

There is an inclination on the part of principals to have a positive perception of the reality within their schools. It cannot be stated who is the most accurate but it can be said that there is a gap in the way principals, coordinators, and teachers perceive matters within their schools. Perhaps principals view their schools as they think they should be or would like them to be. It could be that teachers are

out of tune with the reality within their schools. It could also be that the coordinators have the most accurate perception.

Areas where the mean score for principals was over 4.0 (that is in the "agree/strongly agree" category) were that:

- the school was "better for having a School Plan/Vision-Mission Statement" (item d);
- "most parents feel that teachers really listen to them" (item e);
- the teachers "work as a team" (item o);
- "parents are encouraged to share their knowledge of their children with the staff" (item r);
- "flexibility" (item ff), "pupil behaviour" (item gg) and the "decisions" of management (item ii) hold a place of importance in the school.

In all the foregoing cases, except perceptions relating to "flexibility on the part of teachers", principals are the most positive. Apart from this statement dealing with "flexibility" coordinators and teachers are quite close in their mean scores. In the following statements, (c, f, q, s, jj and ll), all of which are negative, principals are highest (with the exception of ll) in defence of their school situations. In this particular group or statements there is a wider gap between coordinators and teachers.

Five items did not show a significant difference in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers. These items follow in Table 5.26.

**Table 5.26 Items Which Did Not Show a Significant Difference According to Principals, Coordinators and Teachers**

Items	Mean Score				Sig
	Principals	Coordinators	Teachers	Total	
<b>g. Parents in our school are mainly involved in extra-curricular activities (e.g. fund raising, helping with tours and sports, etc.)</b>	3.02	3.11	3.24	3.11	.347
<b>i. Parents receive reports mainly on the academic needs /successes of their children.</b>	2.84	2.60	2.55	2.68	.062
<b>t. Delegation is a way of balancing the work-load</b>	1.77	1.79	1.81	1.79	.895
<b>y. In our school the principal delegates a lot of responsibility to teachers</b>	3.59	3.46	3.34	3.48	.068
<b>aa. Parent associations promote partnership</b>	3.81	3.81	3.69	3.78	.287

In the interpretation of this table one should note that the higher the mean score the more positive the outcome towards the particular item. The items "g" and "i" show agreement on factual matters. The approval of delegation "t" is confirmed by "y" which states how delegation takes place. The value judgement on parent associations shows that there is some serious implementation of partnership.

Within the overall "Perceptions of Partnership" scale, a subscale of fourteen items relating to "Attitudes to Partnership" was extracted (Appendix 2, Table 3). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient yielded a result of 0.7857 for this subscale, "Attitudes to Partnership". An analysis of variance was carried out to determine if there was a significant difference in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers. As indicated in Table 5.27, which follows, there is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of principals, coordinators, and teachers to partnership where  $P < .001$ .

**Table 5.27 The Mean, Standard Deviation and Analysis of Variance for the Subscale "Attitudes to Partnership" (14 items)**

	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Coordinators</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Mean</b>	54.96	53.96	49.78	27.58	<.001
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	4.98	6.54	5.74		
<b>N</b>	165	177	112		

Note: The higher the mean score the more positive the attitude to partnership

Inspection of Table 5.27 shows that the principals scored higher than the coordinators in the subscale and the coordinators scored higher than the teachers. Scoring "higher" reflects the individuals positive attitude to partnership. Analysis of variance indicated the difference in the mean scores between the three groups (principals, coordinators, and teachers) and was significant.

It has generally been the case throughout this dissertation that the perceptions of principals have been more positive when reflecting the reality of their school situation. There is a gap between the views of principals and that of the teachers, this gap being less wide between principals and coordinators. As already stated, it is impossible to determine who is accurate, but it can be said that there is a communication problem (Tables 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.14 and 5.15) and an issue around perceptions (Tables 5.25 and 5.26).

### **5.3.2 PERCEPTIONS OF THE TASKS PERFORMED BY PARENTS**

Principals and coordinators were asked their perceptions about the "tasks" parents had performed in the previous academic year. The tasks fell into 49 categories (Appendix 1, Table 43). Principals identified 42 categories and coordinators 44 categories. The initial 49 categories were collapsed and summarised into three

categories. The data on the most frequent task performed by parents were subjected to statistical testing.

**The most frequent task performed by parents**

We now examine in Table 5.28 the most frequent task performed by parents according to principals and coordinators.

**Table 5.28 Most Frequent Tasks Performed by Parents According to Principals and Coordinators**

Task	Principals	Coordinators	Total
Child related	70.5	62.4	66.2
School related	20.5	17.6	19.0
Parents/Community	8.9	20.0	14.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	146	165	311

**Chi-square = 7.58      DF = 2      P = .023**

"Child related" tasks were named most frequently by principals and coordinators with the former having a higher percentage. Again principals were higher than coordinators regarding "school related" tasks, while coordinators were much higher when it came to tasks performed for "parents and the community". As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals and coordinators were statistically significant.

In Appendix 1, Table 43 we find further detail. "Fundraising" (item 8) got the highest over-all percentage with "getting free lunches/covering free books" (item 26) coming next. Helping with "classroom reading" (item 5) came in third place. An interesting observation from Appendix 1, Table 43 is that we have a large number of items all with very low percentages. So there was no really consistent approach apart from those already outlined.

### **5.3.3 PERCEPTIONS OF PARTNERSHIP FROM THE HSCL SCHEME: ENRICHING EXAMPLES AND UNPRODUCTIVE EXAMPLES**

We now examine both the enriching and unproductive examples of partnership as perceived by principals, coordinators and teachers.

#### **5.3.3.1 ENRICHING EXAMPLES**

Principals, coordinators, and teachers were asked to state if there had been enriching examples of partnership in the school. In response 86.8 per cent stated "yes" while 13.0 per cent said "no". In total there were 866 perceptions listed by principals coordinators and teachers. These perceptions fell into 56 categories (Appendix 1, Table 44). The 56 initial categories were collapsed and summarised into six categories (Appendix 1, Table 45) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers in relation to enriching examples of partnership. The data on the most enriching example of partnership, as perceived by respondents, were subjected to statistical testing.

#### **The most enriching example of partnership**

We now examine in Table 5.29 the most enriching perception of partnership according to principals, coordinators and teachers.



**Table 5.29 Most Enriching Perception of Partnership According to Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

Most Enriching Perception	Principals	Coordinators	Teachers	Total
	%	%	%	%
Parent-school contact	28.8	28.5	24.3	27.8
Parent-child contact	28.8	24.1	31.4	27.3
Parent-teacher contact	13.0	18.4	8.6	14.4
Parent-parent contact	11.0	7.0	27.1	12.3
Pupil outcomes (whole-school approach)	7.5	11.4	8.6	9.4
Community contact	11.0	10.8	0.0	8.8
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>374</b>

Chi-square = 30.38    DF = 10    P = .0007

"Parent-school contact" was valued by some respondents. "Parent-child contact" received a high figure from teachers, as a most enriching example of partnership. "Parent-parent contact" figured high for teachers with "community contact" unnamed by them. While all the above contacts impinge on the lives of pupils there was a category directly relating to "pupil outcomes" within which the principals has the lowest percentage, while teachers were slightly higher and coordinators higher still.

It is also interesting to note that teachers in giving an 8.6 per cent figure for "parent-teacher contact" were the lowest of the respondents. Parent-teacher contact was high for coordinators and low for teachers. Presumably the reason for this is the focus of the coordinators work on involving the parents and teachers together. Teachers seemed to focus on "parent-child contact" and "parent-parent contact". Teachers were much higher than principals and coordinators in relation to these two areas. The 10.8 per cent given by coordinators to "community con-

tact" is particularly low considering the strong community focus attached to their role. As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant.

We shall examine the findings in more detail through Appendix 1, Table 44. In relation to "parent-child contact" the highest figures (18.6 per cent) went to "reading projects" (item 8) as an enriching example of partnership. The individual figures were principals 17.1 per cent, coordinators 16.3 per cent and teachers 27.1 per cent. The "role focus", so obvious throughout the analysis is in evidence again. "Parent involvement in the classroom" (item 13) had an overall total of 14.1 per cent as an "enriching" example of partnership. Principals, coordinators, and teachers had similar figures. A further 10.1 per cent was given to parent involvement in "extra-curricular work" that is art, craft and gardening (item 1). Another enriching example of partnership was the help parents gave with "events" (item 3). These events, concerts and sports had an overall total of 10.4 per cent. The respondents were reasonably close in their figures. Parent involvement in "Early Start" (item 24) was at 5.5 per cent for principals and 6.3 per cent for coordinators. "Homework support" (item 39) figured at 4.1 per cent from principals and 2.5 per cent from coordinators with no percentage from teachers. Parent involvement in "preparation for religious activities" (item 48) was at 4.1 per cent for principals and 0.6 per cent for coordinators.

Within "parent-school contact" we find that 11.2 per cent went to the Parents' Committee (item 7) as an "enriching example of partnership". The percentage from principals was 15.1 and that of coordinators and teachers was just over 8.0 per cent. "Social events" (item 15) gathered 8.8 per cent of the overall total, with coordinators highest at 11.9 per cent. This would seem to be a "role focus" on the

part of coordinators. The development of a "policy group" (item 43) figured at 6.2 per cent for principals and 11.9 per cent for coordinators seems to be a forward move.

"Parent-teacher contact" included "parent-teacher involvement with children" and was seen as an enriching example of partnership by 23.9 per cent. This type of contact would seem to be at the heart of partnership. The figures were high, with principals at 27.4 per cent, coordinators at 25.6 per cent, and teachers at 12.9 per cent. The fact that there was "teacher involvement in parent courses" figured at 4.5 per cent, with similar figures from all the respondents. "Home visits" (item 50) were mentioned by 0.7 per cent for principals and 0.6 per cent of coordinators with no mention from teachers. This finding is not a surprise at this stage. It is strange that "cluster meetings" (item 44) only got 2.1 per cent from principals and nothing at all from coordinators and teachers.

In "parent-parent contact" we find that "involvement in HSCL activities" (item 17) received the highest figure of 20.5 per cent. Principals figured at 21.2 per cent, coordinators at 8.1 per cent, and teachers at 47.1 per cent. This is an interesting insight on the part of the teachers. The "parent room" (item 9) was at 3.7 per cent and "transfer programmes" (item 54) were at 2.1 per cent.

For "pupil outcomes" the enriching example of partnership with the highest figure was the development of "mutual understanding" (item 41) at 14.6 per cent. The figure for principals was 8.2 per cent, for coordinators it was 20.6 per cent and for teachers 14.3 per cent. Items 22, 25, 32, 33, 36, 37, 40 and 55 were all part of the category relating to "pupil outcomes" and had figures ranging from 0.3 per cent to 1.9 per cent. Finally "community contact" was at 8.8 per cent on Table

5.29. In this category we find community development projects" (item 16) were at 5.1 per cent and the Local Committee (item 11) was at 4.5 per cent.

### **5.3.3.2 PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEGATIVE OR UNPRODUCTIVE EXAMPLES OF PARTNERSHIP**

Principals, coordinators, and teachers were asked to state if they had had "negative or unproductive experiences of partnership". In response 25.9 said "yes" while 73.8 per cent said "no". In total there were 454 responses listed by principals, coordinators, and teachers. These perceptions fell into 31 categories (Appendix 1, Table 46). Principals and coordinators identified 20 categories while teachers identified 8 categories. The initial 31 categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 47), which shows the patterning of *all* the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers. The most unproductive experiences were tested for statistical significance in the variations between groups.

#### **The most unproductive experiences of partnership**

We will now examine in Table 5.30 the most negative or unproductive experiences of partnership according to principals, coordinators, and teachers.

**Table 5.30 Perception of the Most Unproductive Experiences of Partnership According to Principals, Coordinators, and Teachers**

Most Unproductive Experience	Principals	Coordinators	Teachers	Total
	%	%	%	%
Undesirable parent involvement	83.7	51.9	90.9	69.6
Problems within the school	4.1	32.7	9.1	17.9
Resistance to the introduction of new schemes/ideas	10.2	13.5	0.0	10.7
Poor relationships with agencies	2.0	1.9	0.0	1.8
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	49	52	11	112

Chi-square = 18.30      DF = 6      P = .005

"Undesirable parent involvement" got a high overall total while "problems within the school" was in second place. In relation to the former, principals and teachers were highest in their percentages with the latter extremely high. Perhaps the high percentage from teachers (90.0 per cent) stems from the fact that only those with "negative or unproductive experiences" responded i.e. eleven teachers. It is also interesting to note that almost one third of the coordinators claimed that "problems within the school" were responsible for the "negative or unproductive experiences". Principals and teachers gave very low percentages to the category dealing with "problems". "Resistance" had an overall total of 10.7 per cent with the highest figure from coordinators while "poor relationships with agencies" just surfaced. As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers were statistically significant.

We shall further analyse these outcomes through Appendix 1, Table 46. A "poor parent response" (item 5) got the highest figure at 23.9 per cent with "parents taking over" (item 1) at 22.1 per cent. A further clarification of "parents

taking over" was that of "unreasonable demands" being made by "unsuitable parents" after "a short course". The "invasive, over familiar parent" (item 3) got 17.7 per cent with that of principals and teachers being highest at 22.0 per cent and 27.3 per cent respectively. An "abusive encounter" (item 7), initiated by parents, figured at 20.0 per cent for principals and 5.8 per cent for coordinators. "Gossip in the parents' room" (item 16) got 2.0 per cent from principals, 5.8 per cent from coordinators and 9.1 per cent from teachers. It is important to call to mind that the number who responded to "negative or unproductive experiences" was about one-third of the total (Appendix 1, Table 46).

"Problems within the school" incorporates "unwilling teachers" (item 22), "poor parent-teacher communication" (item 14), "poor response from the Board of Management" (item 15), to mention the top three categories. Coordinators were the only respondents to "unwilling teachers" (item 22) but that response was high at 23.1 per cent. Principals (2.0 per cent) and coordinators (13.5 per cent) responded to "poor parent-teacher communication" (item 14). It is interesting to note that there is no response from teachers in relation to "poor parent-teacher communication" in this category. A "poor response from the Board of Management" got 2.0 per cent from principals, 1.9 per cent from coordinators, and 9.1 per cent from teachers. We must recall once more that those who responded to the "negative or unproductive experiences of partnership" were small in number.

The chief category within "resistance to the introduction of new schemes/ideas" was "teacher fears" (item 9) at 9.7 per cent. The figure for principals was 10.0 per cent with coordinators at 11.5 per cent. Interestingly, there was no mention from teachers. A very small number of coordinators (3.8 per cent) claimed it was "hard to support all parties" (item 23).

Regarding "poor relationships with agencies" coordinators named an agency supervisor as a "difficult individual" (item 21), "inter-agency rivalry" (item 27) and "local jealousy" (item 28) all at 3.8 per cent. Principals named "inappropriate links" (item 8) and "inadequate psychological services" (item 18) both at 2.0 per cent.

### **Summary**

From the analysis of the perceptions with regard to the "enriching" experiences of partnership it can be said that:

- "Parent-school contact" got the highest figure as an enriching example of partnership with "parent-child contact" coming a close second. Activities such as "reading projects", parent involvement "in the classroom", "extra-curricular work", "homework support" and "preparation for religious activities" surfaced among the "parent-school/parent-child" contact. All categories named in Table 5.29 impinged on the lives of pupils. However, there was a category directly relating to "pupil outcomes" which had a low percentage. Presumably the reason for this is that there were no direct pupil outcomes seen as an "enriching" experience of partnership.
- "Parent-teacher contact" had a low percentage for teachers.
- "Community contact" had no mention from teachers. In addition the percentage given by coordinators was particularly low considering the strong community focus in their role.
- "Teacher involvement in parent courses" was named as an enriching experience.
- "Home visits" were named as a positive experience but once again had a very low figure from principals and from coordinators.
- The development of "mutual understanding was seen as an enriching outcome for pupils.
- "Community development projects" and the "Local Committee" were seen as enriching examples of partnership but with very low percentages.

From the analysis of "unproductive experiences" it can be said that:

- While we have many enriching examples of partnership around parent involvement so too we have unproductive examples. "Undesirable" parent involvement was high for respondents. Parents "taking over", being "invasive"

and "over familiar", initiating an "abusive encounter", and "gossip in the parents' room" were amongst the named categories.

- "Resistance" to the introduction of new schemes and ideas was an issue for some respondents. In this category "teacher fears" were raised by principals and coordinators.
- "Inter-agency rivalry", "local jealousy", "inappropriate links", and "inadequate" psychological services were named.

Coordinators work in an environment where there are many enriching experiences of partnership named. They include parent-school and parent-child contact. Included in these categories are parents working in the classroom, with reading projects and homework support. One must conclude that these are quite adventurous moves as indeed is that of policy involvement (see Craig, 1995a and 1995b).

However, fears are still obvious and were voiced by 112 respondents. Fears included parents "taking over", "gossip", "abusive encounters" and "resistance" in general. Coordinators, themselves were part of these categories. These attitudes point out the need for self-image building, for in-service training among all respondent groups. The "undesirable parents" (according to some respondents) must add to the pressures of the role of coordinator.

### **5.3.3.3 PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS IN RELATION TO PARTNERSHIP**

It is worth noting at this point that teachers were asked what their understanding of partnership was and that their responses were coded in line with the elements of partnership as outlined by Pugh which follows. "Partnership is ...characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability (Pugh and De'Ath, 1989: 33). The responses of teachers are examined in Table 5.31 which follows.



**Table 5.31 Perceptions of Teachers in Relation to the Elements of Partnership**

<b>ELEMENTS LISTED</b>	<b>% OF RESPONSES</b>
<b>No understanding</b>	54.0
<b>Shared sense of purpose</b>	24.8
<b>Mutual respect</b>	6.2
<b>Willing to negotiate</b>	1.2
<b>Sharing of information</b>	5.9
<b>Responsibility</b>	4.7
<b>Skills</b>	0.9
<b>Decision-making</b>	0.9
<b>Accountability</b>	1.5
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (responses)</b>	<b>339</b>

It is clear from Table 5.31 that more than half of the responses of teachers went to the category "no understanding" in relation to partnership. Obviously this lack has clear implications for the HSCL scheme which is based on the principle and practices of partnership. The implications relate to in-career development for teachers. A "shared sense of purpose" got almost one quarter of the responses with "mutual respect" at only 6.2 per cent. The sharing of "information", which seemed to be important to teachers throughout the analysis in the form of "communication", got a low figure. The aspect of "responsibility" was also very low. From Appendix 1, Table 48 we note further details in relation to the perceptions of teachers on the issue of partnership. The highest first named element was a "shared sense of purpose" at 65.5 per cent. The highest second named element was "mutual respect" at 12.4 per cent and the highest third named element was "accountability" at 2.7 per cent.

The foregoing illustrates that:

### Summary

- When teachers were asked about their understanding of partnership 54.0 per cent had no understanding. The weakness detected here is to some degree understandable in that the HSCL scheme was focused less on teachers than on other agents in 1990-1992. It is an area demanding attention. A "shared sense of purpose" and a "mutual respect" were in evidence among their perceptions. This understanding would be supportive of the coordinator as a link agent.

It is clear from the gap in the thinking of teachers about partnership (54.0 per cent with no understanding) that the role of the coordinator is a very difficult one. It does call for a more proactive role in relation to partnership and staff development by the principal.

#### 5.3.4 PERCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP AMONG STAFF MEMBERS AND AMONG PARENTS

We shall now examine perceptions relating to the development of partnership among staff members and among parents.

##### 5.3.4.1 DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP AMONG STAFF MEMBERS

Principals and coordinators were asked what steps were required to develop partnership among staff members. In total there were 782 responses which fell into 35 categories (Appendix 1, Table 49). Principals and coordinators each identified 31 categories. The initial 35 categories were collapsed and summarised into three categories (Appendix 1, Table 50) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses of principals and coordinators. As before, the most important ways to develop partnership among staff members were subjected to statistical testing for variations between the groups.

#### **The most important method in the development of partnership among staff members**

We now examine in Table 5.32 the most important method listed by principals and coordinators in relation to developing partnership among staff members.

**Table 5.32 The Most Important Method, According to Principals and Coordinators in Order to Develop Partnership Among Staff Members**

The Most Important Method	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
<b>Involve all parties, communicate and build relationships</b>	45.1	32.0	38.0
<b>Develop plans and put structures in place</b>	29.9	32.5	31.3
<b>Highlight the value, the positive outcomes of partnership</b>	25.0	35.5	30.7
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>313</b>

**Chi-square = 6.53    DF = 2    P = .038**

Among principals, in particular, and also among coordinators there is a strong belief that the most important way to establish partnership is "to involve all parties, to communicate and to build relationships". Secondly, they hold that it is necessary to "develop plans and put structures in place". In this area the coordinators are slightly higher than the principals. Coordinators claimed the need to "highlight the value, the positive outcomes of partnership", so too did the principals but with a much lower percentage. It is of consequence that more than half of the principals and coordinators gave planning or talking about partnership a higher percentage than actually involving people. This figure is hard to analyse: it could be wise to plan before action and it could be a reluctance to take practical measures. It is something that will need further study in the years immediately ahead. As indicated by the Chi-square the differences in the responses of principals and coordinators were statistically significant.

The teachers were asked to prioritise the first, second and third most significant "actions of the principal" in the development of partnership. Teachers were

also asked to prioritise the first, second and third most significant "actions of other staff members" in the development of partnership. We note their perceptions in Table 5.33 which follows.

**Table 5.33 Perceptions of the Most Important Action Required by Principals and Other Staff in Order to Develop Partnership According to Teachers**

<b>Most Important Action of Principals according to Teachers</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Most Important Action of other Staff according to Teachers</b>	<b>%</b>
Communication	39.6	Communication	48.1
Affirmation	21.6	Affirmation	21.3
Planning	10.8	Planning	7.4
Parent-teacher meetings	10.8	Parent-teacher meetings	5.6
Delegating responsibility	4.5	Naming concerns	4.6
Training	4.5	Training	4.6
Naming concerns	3.6	Classroom involvement of Parents	2.8
Naming expectations	2.7	Naming expectations	2.8
Other	1.8	Delegating responsibility	0.9
		Social gatherings	0.9
		Other	0.9
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>108</b>

Teachers listed "communication", "affirmation", and "planning" as the action required in order to develop partnership. It is interesting to note that principals, coordinators, and teachers had "communication" in common as their first action required. According to teachers "planning" was in third place while for principals, and coordinators "developing plans and putting structures in place" took second position. In the area of planning the principals, coordinators, and teachers held similar perceptions. In second place for teachers was "affirmation" while for

principals and coordinators in third place was "to highlight the value, the positive outcomes of partnership".

We shall now examine the findings of teachers in further detail, (Appendix 1, Table 51) and later those of principals and coordinators (Appendix 1, Table 49). In addition to those already outlined other factors for principals in the development of partnership, according to teachers, were: permitting teachers "to name concerns" which figured at 12.7 per cent and "to name expectations" at 9.7 per cent; use of the "delegation" process at 8.8 per cent and "parent-teacher meetings" at 7.6 per cent. Other "staff factors" in the development of partnership were: freedom to "name expectations" at 10.2 per cent; the "planning" process at 9.5 per cent; "parent-teacher meetings" at 8.1 per cent and "training" for teachers at 5.6 per cent (Appendix 1, Table 51).

Now we analyse the findings from principals and from coordinators on the development of partnership (Appendix 1, Table 49) and firstly to the category dealing with involvement, communication and the building of relationships. The highest figures, those of 24.8 per cent was given to the addressing of "staff issues" (item 2) at 24.8 per cent. Next came "parent-teacher meetings" (item 13) at 18.1 per cent. An ability "to take risks" (item 3) was named by 11.7 per cent of the respondents with the building of respect/trust (item 5) at 10.7 per cent. "Informal meetings" (item 10) between parents and teachers, was listed at 9.8 per cent with "encouragement and support" (item 15) at 7.1 per cent. In the foregoing work from teachers, and from principals and coordinators it is clear that good communication, be it through the naming of concerns, expectations, issues, parent-teacher meetings or informal meetings, is of paramount importance to the respondents.

When it came to the areas of developing "plans" and putting "structures" in place "training for teachers" (item 14) figured at 38.2 per cent from coordinators. The total figure for the ability "to plan together as teachers" (item 8) was listed at 19.3 per cent with "discussion time" (item 23) at 8.6 per cent. A willingness "to move slowly" (item 21) was named by 4.6 per cent of principals and 8.1 per cent of coordinators. The somewhat ambiguous "willingness to move slowly" could be positive or negative, but at least it includes an openness to move albeit slowly. An openness "to share power" (item 7) was named by 7.8 per cent and 3.5 per cent of principals and coordinators respectively.

In highlighting the "value" and "possible outcomes" of partnership the work "reinforcement" (item 1) was used by 33.3 per cent of principals and 49.1 per cent of coordinators. The ability "to show example" (item 9) was named at 0.7 per cent by principals and 6.4 per cent by coordinators. "Understanding the values of HSCL" (item 19) got an overall figure of 3.7 per cent while "agreeing a common vision" (item 20) got an overall figure of 2.5 per cent.

#### **5.3.4.2 PERCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP AMONG PARENTS**

Principals and coordinators were then asked their perceptions about the steps required to develop partnership among parents. In total there were 775 responses which fell into 38 categories (Appendix 1, Table 52). Principals identified 36 categories and coordinators 26 categories. The 36 categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 53) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses of principals and coordinators in relation to developing partnership among parents. For the purposes of statistical testing the distribution of the most important method for developing partnership among parents is presented.

**The most important method for the development of partnership among parents**

We now examine, in Table 5.34, the most important method for the development of partnership among parents according to principals and coordinators.

**Table 5.34 Perception of the Most Important Method According to Principals and Coordinators, in Order to Develop Partnership Among Parents**

The Most Important Method	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
Create an environment of co-operation and partnership	56.5	57.0	56.7
Help parents to set up structures, share power and decision-making	22.4	23.3	22.9
Provide training	20.4	19.8	20.1
Create an environment of trust	0.7	0.0	0.3
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	147	172	319

**Chi-square = 1.21      DF = 3      P = .750**

It is obvious from Table 5.34 that setting out "to create an environment of co-operation and partnership" is important for principals and coordinators. They also speak of the importance of helping parents "to set up structures" and "to share power and decision-making". We note that "training" for parents was named by both parties. The responses of principals and coordinators were very similar.

The teachers were asked to prioritise, the first, second and third most significant actions of "Parents" in the development of partnership. We note the most important action required of parents in Table 5.35 which follows. The three most important actions can be found in Appendix 1, Table 54.

**Table 5.35 Teacher perceptions of the most important Action of Parents required in order to develop Partnership**

<b>Top Priority</b>	<b>%</b>
Communication	40.2
Naming concerns	15.0
Affirmation	14.0
Parent-teacher meetings	12.1
Naming expectations	4.7
Planning	4.7
Training	3.7
Classroom involvement of parents	2.8
Social gatherings	1.9
Other	0.9
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>107</b>

"Communication" came first for teachers. This is not surprising as it has always been high on the priority list for teachers. Parents being free "to name concerns" figured next while "affirmation" was third. "Parent-teacher meetings" were further down the list.

Now we analyse the findings from principals and coordinators on the development of partnership among parents (Appendix 1, Table 52). Among the principals and coordinators a figure of 29.7 per cent went "to building the confidence of parents" (item 12). Next in this category was "to encourage and to facilitate the understanding" of parents (item 1) in relation to partnership at 15.9 per cent. Working "to share information" with parents (item 11) had an overall figure of 14.1 per cent while the "breakdown" of parent fear about partnership (item 4) figured at 13.8 per cent. The school as "an open community" (item 6) had a figure of 16.2 per cent from principals and 9.3 per cent from coordinators. "Respect and



sensitivity" (item 7) was at 11.5 per cent for principals and 8.1 per cent for coordinators, an overall of 9.7 per cent.

Helping parents to "set up structures" and "to share power and decision-making" was composed of a number of categories, the highest figure being 31.9 per cent for "collaborating-participating-being positive" (item 5). The figure for principals was 35.1 per cent while that of coordinators was 29.1 per cent. The establishment of "boundaries" (item 3) was at 5.4 per cent for principals and 12.2 per cent for coordinators. Clear guidelines in relation to roles and the inherent rights and responsibilities is a strong recommendation within the HSCL scheme.

"Formal parent-teacher meetings" (item 18) had 9.5 per cent from principals and 8.7 per cent from coordinators as a step towards establishing partnership. Principals (2.7 per cent) and coordinators (9.9 per cent), encouraged the sharing of "power" and "decision-making" (item 9) as a way of developing partnership with parents.

The provision of "training" for parents (item 2) figured at 29.1 per cent for principals and 26.7 per cent for coordinators, while developing the parent "as prime educator" (item 20) had a percentage of 10.1 from principals and 18.6 from coordinators. Among the coordinators, 8.7 per cent said that developing leadership among the "core group" of parents (item 37) was a value. A small percentage from principals (2.0 per cent) and from coordinators (1.2 per cent) thought it important to "explain staff fears and difficulties" to parents (item 10) in order to develop partnership.

## Summary

From the foregoing perceptions relating to the development of partnership it is obvious that:

- "Involving all parties, communicating and building relationships" was deemed very important by principals and coordinators in developing partnership among staff members.
- The perception of teachers seemed to be that "communication" is very important because it took first place in all their percentages.
- Principals and coordinators seemed to value the addressing of "staff issues" the use of "parent-teacher meetings", other "informal meetings", the giving of "encouragement and support", and the taking of "risks" as paths to partnership.
- Teachers valued the freedom to name "expectations" and "concerns". The "delegation process" and "parent-teacher meetings" were also important to teachers. "Training" came in with a low figure by teachers, however this was not the case for principals or for coordinators.
- "Planning together as teachers" was important for principals and for coordinators and the word "reinforcement" was used by 33.3 per cent of principals and 49.1 per cent of coordinators as a way of highlighting the "value" of partnership.
- Principals and coordinators emphasised the building of parent "confidence", the "encouragement" of parents and the facilitation of their "understanding" of partnership, the sharing of "information" and the breaking down of parent fear about partnership.
- Teachers named "communication", freedom to voice "concerns" and "expectations", the giving of "affirmation" and the provision of "training" as actions necessary by parents.
- The evaluation process was scarcely mentioned.

The environment in which coordinators work is one where "involving all parties, communicating and building relationships" was perceived by principals and coordinators to be very important. "Communication" was very important to teachers also. The fact that principals and coordinators were seeking "plans" and "structures" fell very much in line with the role of the coordinator. Planning was also considered an important aspect of the principal's role according to teacher perceptions. In order for parents to develop partnership, teachers perceived once more that "communication" was important. It would seem that from a theoretical point of view all groups of respondents had some clear perceptions regarding the development of partnership.

#### **5.4 OUTCOMES FROM THE HSCL SCHEME**

Cultivation of practices leading to Partnership were encouraged from the inception of the HSCL scheme. There was, however, a clear understanding from research evidence that the real outcomes would be long term. To keep momentum up it was judged necessary from the beginning to have clear structures, including evaluation procedures, in place. It was viewed that naming outcomes, strengths and challenges, could lead to the sharing of good practice and the avoidance of some pitfalls.

##### **5.4.1 PERCEPTIONS OF IMPORTANT CHANGES IN THE SCHOOL SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SCHEME**

Principals, coordinators, and teachers were asked if major changes had occurred in the school since the HSCL Scheme was introduced. Among the responses 71.6 per cent said "yes", 9.9 per cent said "no", while 18.5 per cent were "not sure".

The respondents were then asked to indicate the nature of the "most important change" by completing a sentence and by saying whether the change was "very helpful", "helpful" or "unhelpful". They were then asked to complete a similar process in relation to the "next most important change" and also to the "third change in importance".

### 5.4.1.1 THE MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE PERCEIVED IN THE SCHOOL

There were 362 perceptions relating to the "most important change". The changes fell into 22 categories, 16 categories were identified by principals, 17 by coordinators, and 12 by teachers (Appendix 1, Table 55). The 22 categories were collapsed and summarised into three categories which were measured against "very helpful/helpful and unhelpful". In Table 5.36 which follows we shall find the perceptions of principals, coordinators, and teachers.

**Table 5.36 Perceptions of the Most Important Change, According to Principals (P), Coordinators (C), and Teachers (T), and Whether it Was Very helpful, Helpful, or Unhelpful**

Category of Change	Attitude change by school towards parents			Parent enhancement/participation			School development			Total		
	%			%			%			%		
	P	C	T	P	C	T	P	C	T	P	C	T
<b>Very helpful</b>	67.3	73.9	48.2	67.9	69.6	36.4	33.3	60.0	50.0	66.7	72.3	46.5
<b>Helpful</b>	31.8	26.1	46.4	28.6	30.4	54.5	66.7	40.0	50.0	31.9	27.7	47.9
<b>Unhelpful</b>	0.9	0.0	5.4	3.6	0.0	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4	0.0	5.6
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>71</b>

From Table 5.36 we note that "attitude change by the school towards parents" was the most important outcome for principals, coordinators, and teachers. In second place was "parents enhancement/participation". These are highly impressive findings on the part of schools as both relate to the parent body. The area of "school development" just surfaced for principals and teachers with a more noticeable consideration on the part of coordinators. Holding the wider view, as coordinators do, they may have visualised the fact of parent involvement as leading to "school development" (see Fullan 1995a and 1995b). Coordinators did not sur-

face in the "unhelpful" category of change while some principals and a higher percentage of teachers did surface.

We shall now examine the perceptions of principals, coordinators, and teachers in more detail through Appendix 1, Table 55. The highest overall figure in "attitude change by school personnel towards parents" went to the raising of the "parent profile" (item 1) at 40.3 per cent. "Unity of purpose" between parents and teachers (item 5) was high for principals and teachers with figures of 19.9 per cent and 19.7 per cent respectively. The regarding of parents "as partners" (item 13) was high for coordinators at 14.7 per cent. Regarding "parent participation", the category with the highest percentage was "an increased awareness" of the school by parents (item 7) at 9.1 per cent. The development of "courses" and "facilities" for parents (item 8) had an overall figure of 5.0 per cent. Teachers were highest in this category at 8.5 per cent. Within "school development" we find that "change in the perception of the school" (item 3) had the highest overall figure of 4.7 per cent. The figure for coordinators was 8.0 per cent.

#### **5.4.1.2 THE NEXT MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE PERCEIVED IN THE SCHOOL**

There were 455 responses to naming the next most important change, that is the second change in importance. The changes fell into 24 categories, 22 categories were identified by principals, 20 by coordinators, and 12 by teachers (Appendix 1, Table 56). The 24 categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories, which were measured against "very helpful/helpful and unhelpful". In Table 5.37 which follows we shall find the responses of principals, coordinators, and teachers.

**Table 5.37 Perceptions of the Second Most Important Change, According to Principals (P), Coordinators (C), and Teachers (T), and Whether it Was Very helpful, Helpful, or Unhelpful**

Category of Change	Attitude change by school towards parents			Parent enhancement/participation			School development			School inserted into community			Total		
	%			%			%			%			%		
	P	C	T	P	C	T	P	C	T	P	C	T	P	C	T
<b>Very helpful</b>	70.0	74.7	57.1	80.0	77.5	61.5	86.4	66.7	46.2	71.4	88.9	0.0	74.4	75.5	55.6
<b>Helpful</b>	30.0	25.3	42.9	20.0	22.5	38.5	9.1	26.7	53.8	14.3	11.1	0.0	24.0	23.8	44.4
<b>Unhelpful</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	6.7	0.0	14.3	0.0	0.0	1.6	0.7	0.0
<b>Total %</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	0	100	100	100
<b>N (respondents)</b>	80	83	28	20	40	13	22	15	13	7	9	0	129	147	54

In Table 5.37 we note once again (see Table 5.36) that "attitude change by the school towards parents" gets the highest response from all the groups. In second place was "parent enhancement/participation". We must admit that there is great growth in the thinking and attitudes of schools visible here and must give recognition accordingly. Next came "school development" with the "school inserted into the community" last (see Bastiani 1987 and 1989). We note that teachers did not surface in this category relating to the community. When we look at the unhelpful category we observe that on two occasions the percentages from principals seem quite high. However, it must be remembered that these percentages relate to a small *number* of people.

We shall now examine the outcomes of principals, coordinators, and teachers in more detail through Appendix 1, Table 56. In the category "attitude change towards parents" the fact that "staff were more aware" of parents (item 3) got the

highest overall figure of 17.2 per cent. Coordinators were by far the highest at 26.5 per cent. The fact that there was "more ease of contact" between home and school (item 5) got a figure of 23.6 percent from teachers. Principals were also quite high at 18.6 per cent. The fact that parents were "welcomed to the school" (item 7) was named by 8.5 per cent of principals, 9.5 per cent of coordinators, and 5.5 per cent of teachers.

"Parent enhancement/participation" highlighted "parent participation" (item 9) with principals at 6.2 per cent, coordinators at 10.2 per cent and teachers at 10.9 per cent. Another area in this category was "parent attitude to change" (item 20) with principals at 3.1 per cent, coordinators at 10.2 per cent and teachers at 1.8 per cent. "School development" was made up of a number of items mostly with low percentages all round. The "support of the coordinator for teachers" (item 4) is worth noting with a figure of 18.2 per cent given by teachers. All the items from principals and coordinators (items 8, 15, 17, 22) had very low percentages. These items related to how the "school inserted [itself] into the community". The teachers did not surface in this category.

#### **5.4.1.3 THE THIRD MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE PERCEIVED IN THE SCHOOL**

There were 286 perceptions to the third most important change. The changes fell into 22 categories, 16 categories were identified by principals, 18 by coordinators and ten by teachers (Appendix 1, Table 57). The 22 categories were collapsed and summarised into four categories which were measured against the "very helpful/helpful/unhelpful" ranges. In Table 5.38 which follows we shall find the perceptions of principals, coordinators, and teachers.

**Table 5.38 Perceptions of the Third Most Important Change, According to Principals (P), Coordinators (C), and Teachers (T) and Whether it Was Very helpful, Helpful, or Unhelpful**

Category of Change	Understanding by all parties /relationships			School Development			Interconnection of home and school			Negative Factors			Total		
	%			%			%			%			%		
	P	C	T	P	C	T	P	C	T	P	C	T	P	C	T
<b>Very helpful</b>	70.2	77.4	66.7	61.4	78.8	60.0	77.3	91.4	54.5	0.0	50.0	0.0	68.1	80.6	60.5
<b>Helpful</b>	29.8	22.6	33.3	36.4	21.2	40.0	22.7	8.6	45.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	31.0	17.9	39.5
<b>Unhelpful</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	0.9	1.5	0.0
<b>Total %</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	0	100	0	100	100	100
<b>N (respondents)</b>	47	62	12	44	33	15	22	35	11	0	4	0	113	134	38

In Table 5.38 we note "understanding by all parties/relationships" took first place (see Dalin, Rolff and Kleekamp, 1993). This "change" on the part of schools clearly linked with the change in "attitude" towards parents and the promotion of their "enhancement" and their "participation" (Tables 5.36 and 5.37). An increase in the areas of "school development" was noted here as was the "interconnection of home and school". The fourth category "negative factors" surfaced for four coordinators. A very small number of principals identified with the "unhelpful" category.

We shall now examine the outcomes from principals, coordinators, and teachers in more detail through Appendix 1, Table 57. The "interconnection of home and school" (item 2) got an overall total of 17.5 per cent. The figure for teachers was high at 23.7 per cent. Viewing "the school as part of the community" (item 5) figured at 6.1 per cent for principals and 3.0 per cent and 5.3 per cent for coordi-



nators and teachers respectively. The fact that the "Local Committee" had created a "profile" for the school (item 15) was given by 1.8 per cent of principals and 3.0 per cent of coordinators. "Parent empowerment" (item 7) got an overall percentage of 19.2. Teachers gave a high figure to "parent empowerment" (26.3 per cent). An improvement in "pupil attitude" (item 10) was named by 7.9 per cent of principals, 2.2 per cent of coordinators and 7.9 per cent of teachers.

A "sense of belonging " for parents (item 4) was valued by 16.7 per cent of principals, 17.2 per cent of coordinators, and 7.9 per cent of teachers. The figure for teacher responses is quite low here considering the overall is 15.7 per cent. The fact that parents were "not taking over" (item 1) was considered important by 10.5 per cent of principals, 20.1 per cent of coordinators and 2.6 per cent of teachers. An improved "pupil-teacher atmosphere" (item 3) got an overall figure of 3.8 per cent as did the "value of the coordinator" (item 11). "Attitude change all round" (item 13) was named by 4.4 per cent of principals and 3.0 per cent of coordinators. According to coordinators (2.2 per cent) the fact that "parents had stepped back" (item 18) was seen as a "negative outcome", as was "fear/unrest among teachers" (item 20) at 0.7 per cent.

### **Summary**

In relation to the "most important change/second most important change/third change in importance" it can be said from Tables 5.36, 5.37 and 5.38 that:

- "Attitude change by the school towards parents" was the most important outcome for principals, coordinators, and teachers. This was supported by "parents enhancement/participation". This "most important change" since the HSCL scheme started calls for recognition for schools.
- The "second most important change" reflected the first, that is, "attitude change" and parent participation".
- The "third change in importance" related to "an understanding by all parties" followed by "school development".

This is the environment where coordinators work and undoubtedly the positive perceptions of principals, coordinators, and teachers should make the link role of the coordinator more possible. These outcomes portray change in schools, one could say fundamental change, since the HSCL scheme was initiated. This data was gathered very late in 1995 into early 1996 at a time the HSCL scheme was just over five years in existence.

#### 5.4.2 PERCEPTIONS OF THE LOCAL COMMITTEE

Local Committees were established to promote community 'ownership' of the HSCL scheme and as a support structure for coordinators. The membership of the Local committee is divided equally between parents on the one hand and school/community personnel on the other. Local Committees identify school related issues at community level and seek to address them by involving the local community. Principals and coordinators were asked if their school was part of a Local Committee. Their outcomes follow in Table 5.39

**Table 5.39 Is Your School Part of a Local Committee Within the HSCL Scheme?**

Outcomes listed	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
No	56.1	66.7	61.6
Yes	43.9	33.3	38.4
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	164	177	341

Chi-square = 4.01      DF = 1      P = .044

From Table 5.39 we note that 61.6 per cent of the respondents replied "no" while 38.4 per cent stated "yes". Principals have a high figure of 43.9 per cent in the "yes" category. It can be clearly stated that the outcome from principals and coordinators in Table 5.45 should tally. The coordinators' figures are in fact more accurate. Exactly one third of the schools in the HSCL scheme had a Local

Committee established at the time the questionnaires were distributed to the research population. Principals may not have understood the meaning of Local Committee. In some instances principals referred to another community committee in which they were involved. However, since the Local Committee has been an aspect of the scheme since its inception in 1990 this should not have been the case. Perhaps more recent schools joining the HSCL scheme were not ready for a Local Committee at the time of the questionnaire. As we draw to the close of the 1999 academic year a total of 89.5 per cent (of the 310 schools in the HSCL scheme) are part of a Local Committee.

#### **5.4.2.1 PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING A LOCAL COMMITTEE**

Principals and coordinators were then asked to specify three consequences of the Local Committee in the previous academic year. There were 288 responses from principals and coordinators which fell into 24 categories (Appendix 1, Table 58). Principals identified 21 categories and coordinators 15 categories. The perceptions were collapsed and summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 59) which shows the patterning of *all* the responses from principals and coordinators. The main consequences of having a Local Committee were tested for statistical significance in the variations between groups.

##### **Main consequence of having a Local Committee**

We will now examine, in Table 5.40, the perception of principals and coordinators in relation to having a Local Committee.

**Table 5.40 Main "Consequence" of the Local Committee, According to Principals and Coordinators**

Main Consequence listed	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
<b>Benefits to the school/community/coordinator</b>	58.3	65.5	61.7
<b>Communication/co-operation</b>	25.0	27.3	26.1
<b>Course outcomes/involvement for parents</b>	10.0	7.3	8.7
<b>Negative outcomes</b>	6.7	0.0	3.5
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>N (respondents)</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>115</b>

**Chi-square = 4.20    DF = 3    P = .2402**

Coordinators were somewhat higher than principals regarding the "benefit" of the Local Committee. In the other areas principals and coordinators were very close in their responses except in relation to "negative outcomes" which were not named by coordinators. The differences in the responses of the two groups were not statistically significant.

We shall examine the findings more closely in Appendix 1, Table 58. In the category dealing with "benefits" by far the highest overall figure (55.7 per cent) went to the "areas" of work targeted by committee members for attention (item 2). Coordinators had a very high percentage in the "areas targeted" (78.2 per cent). The second highest percentage went to the "contribution of the school to the community" (item 4) at 22.6 per cent. Also at 22.6 per cent was "an awareness of local needs" (item 9). The figure for principals was high at 28.3 per cent. "Contact with neighbouring schools" (item 8) had an overall figure of 18.4 per cent. The figure for principals was high at 23.3 per cent. "An awareness of local needs" (item 9) links with the "identification of areas for improvement" (item 13) at 9.6 per cent. The response from coordinators in this category is very high at 18.2 per

cent. Another benefit, was "growth in support for the school" (item 7), with a figure of 11.7 per cent for principals and 1.8 per cent for coordinators.

In the area of "communication/co-operation" we note that "improvement in communication" (item 6) had an overall figure of 31.3 per cent with that of coordinators at 38.2 per cent. "Co-operation/ barriers broken down" (item 5) had an overall figure of 30.4 per cent where principals and coordinators were very close in the percentages given. "Delegation" (item 23) figured at 7.3 per cent for coordinators.

"Course outcomes/involvement for parents" included "increased confidence" (item 3) at 15.7 per cent and "training" (item 1) at 13.0 per cent. Regarding increased confidence (item 3), coordinators figured at 21.8 per cent. Involvement in "drug awareness" programmes (item 14) and extra-curricular activities was named by 1.7 per cent and 3.3 per cent of principals respectively.

In relation to consequences termed as "negative outcomes", which came from principals only, the following can be stated. According to 3.3 per cent of principals the Local Committee was "too big" (item 17). Principals (3.3 per cent) claimed that involvement in the Local Committee created "more work" for them (item 19), while 1.7 per cent said that the "discussion was meaningless" (item 20).

#### **5.4.2.2 PERCEIVED BLOCKS TO SETTING UP A LOCAL COMMITTEE**

Principals and coordinators who had not set up a Local Committee were asked to name three blocks that prevented them from doing so. There were 248 perceived blocks from principals and coordinators which fell into 21 categories (Appendix 1, Table 60). Principals identified 14 categories and coordinators 20 categories. The perceptions were collapsed and summarised into four categories (Appendix 1, Table 61) which show the patterning of *all* the responses of principals and coordi-

nators. For the purposes of statistical testing the distribution of the most significant block to setting up Local Committees for each group is presented.

**Most significant block to setting up a Local Committee**

We will now examine, in Table 5.41, the most significant block to setting up a Local Committee according to principals and coordinators.

**Table 5.41 Perceptions of the Most Significant "Block" to Setting up a Local Committee According to Principals and Coordinators**

Most significant "Block" listed	Principals	Coordinators	Total
	%	%	%
Not ready for a Local Committee	72.2	42.5	50.0
Structures were not in place	13.9	23.6	21.1
Coordinator blocks	2.8	21.7	16.9
Principal blocks	11.1	12.3	12.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0
N (respondents)	36	106	142

**Chi-square = 11.68      DF = 3      P = .008**

The fact that principals and coordinators were "not ready" for a Local Committee was the reason for a high percentage of principals and over one third of coordinators not setting up a Local Committee. A further number of the responses related to the fact that "structures were not in place". Coordinator "blocks" were responsible for a quarter of the coordinators not taking part in a Local Committee. A high percentage of responses from principals who were "not ready" for a Local Committee was evident while their responses were low for the fact that "structures were not in place".

Further analysis of the data can take place through Appendix 1, Table 60. Among the respondents 35.9 per cent claimed that they were "not ready" for a Local Committee (item 2). The principals gave quite a high percentage (38.9 per

cent). Not being "ready" included: fear of the Local Committee becoming a "talk shop", a feeling of "inadequacy", not "sure" about the HSCL scheme and the fact that the scheme was not "impacting sufficiently" on schools. The overall total, relating to a "lack of clarity" about Local Committees (item 1), was 11.3 per cent. The outcome from principals for this item was very high at 27.8 per cent.

Local Committees were established with the post-primary school as central, together with its relevant primary schools. In the light of this, 7.7 per cent of the respondents were awaiting the "grouping" of their school (item 6) by the Department of Education. This is obviously a local responsibility. The response from principals was high at 22.2 per cent while that of coordinators was 2.8 per cent. "Parental apathy" (item 8), was another block named by 13.9 per cent of principals and 6.6 per cent of coordinators. A further 8.3 per cent of principals considered there was a need for "work to be done with parents" (item 9) before setting up a Local Committee. Principals (2.8 per cent) and coordinators (2.8 per cent) claimed that "leaders" were not "emerging" (item 11). Furthermore 10.4 per cent of coordinators held that "parent potential" was "lacking" (item 18), while 8.3 per cent of principals believed that "work needed to be done with parents" (item 9).

The fact that the National Coordinator had "deferred" the setting up of the Local Committee (item 5) was named by 5.6 per cent of principals and 3.8 per cent of coordinators. There was fear on the part of 5.6 per cent of principals and 1.9 per cent of coordinators that the "focus" of the Local Committee might not meet their "needs" (item 7). In the case of one coordinator (0.9 per cent) the chairperson was "unwilling" to set up a Local Committee (item 17). Coordinator "blocks" to setting up a Local Committee included "reluctance" (item 10) named by 5.6 per cent of principals and 26.4 per cent of coordinators, with "antagonism" (item 14)

at 2.8 per cent and 0.9 per cent for principals and coordinators respectively. The fact that the "coordinator was over independent" (item 19) was named by 13.2 per cent of coordinators. "Inter-coordinator conflict" (item 20), that is problems between coordinators themselves at local level, received a percentage of 1.9 from coordinators. Principals and coordinators claimed that there were "too many committees" in place already (item 4), at 8.3 per cent and 21.7 per cent respectively. "Blocks" to setting up a Local Committee, for the principal, included the fact that the principal was "too busy" (item 3) named by 27.8 per cent of principals and 17.9 per cent of coordinators. Coordinators (4.7 per cent) stated that the principals were "threatened" by the notion of a Local Committee (item 15). Coordinators (2.8 per cent) also said that principals "grudgingly accepted parents" (item 16).

### **Summary**

From the analysis of the perceptions on Local Committees it is evident that:

- Among the principals, it would seem that 10.6 per cent of those who responded "yes" to having a Local Committee were unclear about its nature.
- "Benefits" to the school, to the community and for the coordinators were named by more than half of the respondents.
- There was a high level of satisfaction with the "areas" of work that the Local Committee adopted.
- There was also satisfaction around the contribution of the school to the local community.
- The identification/awareness of local needs was named as important as were "areas for improvement".
- Contact with "neighbouring schools" was seen as valuable.
- "Growth in support for the school" was in evidence from the perceptions and was named by some principals and a small number of coordinators.



- Improved "communication" through the Local Committee was perceived as valuable as was "co-operation". "Delegation" was also named by coordinators.
- "Increased confidence" for parents figured at 15.7 per cent with "training" at 13.0 per cent.
- Principals named some negative consequences of the Local Committee: that the committee was "too big", that is was "more work" for them as principals, and that the discussion was "meaningless".
- Among the "blocks" to having a Local Committee the fact that people were not ready" and that there was a "lack of clarity" about Local Committees were named.
- Some respondents were waiting for the Department of Education to group or cluster their schools for the Local Committee. In fact this was a local responsibility.
- Principals and coordinators named "parental apathy" as a reason for not setting up a Local Committee. A small percentage of both principals and coordinators claimed that "leaders" were not "emerging". Parent "potential" was "lacking" according to some coordinators while some principals believed that "work needed to be done with parents".
- The National Coordinator "deferred" the setting up of the Local Committee, and there was fear on the part of respondents that the Local Committee would not meet local "needs", there were some "inter-coordinator problems", and the principals seemed "too busy" and "threatened" by the notion.

Just one-third of the coordinators work in an environment where Local Committees have been established. Principals and coordinators perceived "benefits". The fact that benefits were perceived should be very supportive of the role of the coordinator. It was also perceived by the respondents that communication/co-operation had been enhanced. Coordinators have still to work with the perceived "blocks" to setting up a Local Committee. The blocks included a "lack of clarity" about the Local Committee, "parental apathy", a lack of leadership and of parent "potential", and some inter-coordinator problems (see Crawley, 1995).

## 5.5 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS WITHIN THE COORDINATOR IN ACTION

In Chapter Four we cited key issues from the research perceived to relate to the "Field of the Coordinator". In the "Coordinator In Action" we articulated work practices of the coordinator and other central players. We now adopt the same

reporting pattern, as in the Summary of Chapter Four (4.3) that of the home followed by the school and lastly the community. To begin with we return to the home.

### **5.5.1 THE HOME**

Almost all coordinators and a high per cent of principals sought the views of individual parents three times or more in the previous academic year. Regarding consultation with parents on "uniform", "homework", and "discipline" principals gave high figures in the categories "2-4 times" and "more than 4 times". In other words principals agreed that parents were quite widely consulted in the previous year. This was consistent with the findings on the items of the Likert scale where principals seemed to hold a more positive perception of the reality within their schools. Returning to the issues of "uniform", "homework", and "discipline" we noted that the teachers scored high in the "not at all" or "once" categories. So teachers disagreed that parents were widely consulted in the previous year. Perhaps the coordinators who lay somewhere between the principals and teachers have a more clear and overall picture. The perceptions of teachers may be coloured by the confines of the classroom.

Feedback was sought more frequently from parents in group situations and as members of agencies rather than on an individual basis. "Parent involvement" was also a mechanism used for attaining feedback.

Principals, coordinators and teachers all felt that parent development would be achieved through "involvement-participation" and particularly through "parent-teacher meetings" according to teachers. All groups valued courses for parents. "Leisure time" activities for parents were not valued in the same way by teachers

who would prefer to see parents staying close to children's learning. However, the latter is an outcome rather than an initial activity.

An interesting factor in parent development and named by principals, coordinators and teachers was "to invite and to encourage partnership-real decision making". This was in contrast to "informing parents" and to the giving of "advice" and "information". Principals and coordinators emphasised the building of parent "confidence", the "encouragement" of parents and the facilitation of their "understanding" of partnership, the sharing of "information" and the breaking down of parent "fear" as vital in order to develop partnership with parents.

The perceptions of principals and coordinators in relation to tasks performed by parents was easily discernible. Despite the foregoing theory on partnership, "fundraising" got the highest overall percentage from principals and coordinators. However, when "classroom work-general" and "classroom work-reading" were linked we got some picture of the parent as a resource to the school. "Leisure time activities" returned us to the more traditional role of parents providing social activities for other parents, supervising children en route to the swimming pool with teachers, decoration of the school for events, care of the tuck shop, light gardening, care of the school grounds and the organisation of surprises for children. It would appear that despite the fact that all groups upheld consultation with parents, and sought to involve them the sense of partnership in action was not very real. To a large extent what we have noted are "facets of partnership" that are "largely managerial" (Macbeth, 1995:51).

We also found perceptions in relation to "enriching examples of partnership". It was interesting to note that the highest figure from principals and coordinators went to "parent-teacher involvement with children" while that of the teachers went

to "involvement in HSCL" activities. This was a more hopeful attitude on the part of teachers and a movement away from the more narrow focus. We found "unproductive examples of partnership" and almost all the issues related to parents. They were issues such as: parents "taking over", "invasive and over familiar parents", a "poor response from parents", an "abusive encounter" and "gossip in the parents' room". For coordinators an additional unproductive experience was "unwilling teachers". A phrase like this gives us insight into just how difficult it is for coordinators to be agents of change.

Principals, coordinators, and teachers were asked to name the "most important change" in the school since HSCL was introduced. It must be stated that in both the "most important" and "second most important" change an increased parent profile was obvious. Principals, coordinators and teachers named "an attitude change by the school towards parents" and "parent enhancement/participation" as their perceptions of that change. A deeper "understanding by all parties" surfaced as the "third change in importance". Further down the list of priorities but obviously present were areas such as "school development", the "interconnection of home and school" and the fact that the school had been "inserted into the community". "Negative factors" were named by a very small number of respondents.

So, while schools still adopt a traditional approach in many ways to the home and to parents, principals, teachers and coordinators themselves still noticed the changes initiated through the work of the HSCL coordinator.

### **5.5.2 THE SCHOOL**

When examining the home we noted ways in which the home/parents were involved in the life of the school. In some cases this involvement happened in the traditional sense, in others through a definite role focus on the part of school per-

sonnel while in the remaining we delineated a contradiction of theory in the practice. We will now look at how school practices effected school change or the opposite.

The absence of evaluation among primary and post-primary principals links into the issue of teacher expectations in disadvantaged areas. As well as having implications for the pupils and for the whole school there are implications also for the Department of Education Inspectorate and for whole-school evaluation (WSE). It was quite astonishing that only 0.8 per cent of primary school principals involved the school inspectors in evaluation processes. At post-primary level the figure is somewhat higher. However, evaluation through the inspectors in the post-primary sector takes place in the areas of Religious Education, Life Skills and Sport according to principals.

Coordinators used many methods of evaluation from formal group evaluation procedures, through informal methods including feedback, listening, observation, and noticing a "change-improvement". The methods seem both interesting and practical and could be promoted as valuable tools in evaluating development work with people. The lack of evaluation on the part of school leaders could account for the difficulty experienced in encouraging and guiding coordinators to become involved in such processes.

Regarding "consultation" of individuals it is claimed by almost all principals and coordinators that they sought the views of individual teachers three times or more in the previous academic year. In addition some principals and coordinators sought feedback about the school from individual staff members. The views of middle management were also sought. It can be concluded from the findings in

5.1.3 that schools are more open to hearing comments relating to how they are performing.

When we come to "developing" and "revising" the School Plan/Vision-Mission Statement we noted once more that principals perceived their schools to be much more involved in these processes than either the coordinators or the teachers. Teachers did not seem to have a sense of involvement at either the "developing" or "revising" stages. Again if we are seeking to promote an evaluative process it needs to start with an "ownership" of the process at the "planning" stage. It would seem impossible to build a partnership with parents and the wider community if the staff has not an internal collaborative approach. It would seem that there is an openness to the promotion of "teacher development" from the perceptions of respondents (Table 5.19). It is interesting to note from Appendix 1, Table 33 that coordinators value "staff meetings", "one-to-one relationships", "personal development", the giving of "good example", "affirmation", "listening" and "consultation" as helpful ways to promote teacher development. Teachers were low on most of these items, while principals were low on "one-to-one relationships", "listening and consultation".

On examination it would seem that coordinators have realistic perceptions regarding the development of partnership among staff. "Reinforcement", "addressing staff issues", providing "training for teachers", "affirmation" and "communication" were all high on their agenda. Principals were low in these areas which were ultimately, elements of partnership. They were high on "risk taking" and "parent-teacher meetings" on an informal basis. As was noted most of the examples given by principals as "enriching examples of partnership" were pupil-school focused. An emerging need would seem to be a requirement on the part of princi-

pals for focused in-career development in the areas of school structures as outlined throughout 5.1 (see Craig, 1982; Crawford, Kydd and Riches, 1997 and Brookfield, 1990). An additional need would seem to be in the theory and practices of partnership giving principals a wider vision. This need can be deduced from what principals say when one visits their schools and can be inferred from their responses to the questionnaire. Teachers had a pupil-school focus also but balanced this with a very high value on parent involvement in HSCL activities. Despite the fact that teachers have remained very close to their own role, and rightly so, there seems to be a growing awareness among them of the presence and the outcomes of the HSCL scheme.

As writer of this dissertation and initiator of many scheme practices it is accurate to say that the attitude among teachers is very different now to what prevailed up to the mid 1990s. It could be said that coordinators crystallise this point in giving a high value to "the development of mutual understanding" as an enriching outcome. However, we must hear once more the "unproductive" example of "unwilling teachers" named by 23.1 per cent of coordinators. It should be borne in mind that only one-third of all the respondents replied to the question on unproductive examples of partnership.

The delegation process gave an insight into the school's perception of partnership. Principals were very high in the delegation of "administration matters" and teachers were high in their acknowledgement of this fact. It was interesting to note that issues in relation to "planning, monitoring and evaluating" were very low on the agenda of all respondents. It would seem that these structures need to be set up and used within schools. The time to do so is also necessary. Some coordinators have a clear understanding of the delegation process as an "empowering"

of parents rather than as a balancing of the work load. This is evidenced by the following practices which coordinators delegated:

- the process of parents and teachers "working together" in small groups;
- the "recruiting of parents";
- the "training" of parents as facilitators;
- "leadership training";
- the "running of the crèche";
- the maintenance of the "parents' room";
- the training of parents "as home visitors";
- the "facilitation" of Local Committee meetings;
- the giving of "parent-to-parent input" at meetings;
- the management of HSCL "funds";
- the work of the "parent council".

Delegation is a key element of the HSCL scheme and is a practice that more coordinators need to adhere to.

In relation to perceived "changes" since the HSCL scheme was introduced it is difficult to separate home and school. The changes dovetail; there is a sense of "interconnection of home and school". The changes pertaining directly to schools include "change in perception of school personnel", "unity of purpose" among parents and teachers, teachers feeling "supported" by coordinators, teachers "aware of home background, of disadvantage", "classroom work" by parents, "pupil-teacher atmosphere", "improved pupil attitude" and many more.

The perceptions, structures, attitudes to partnership and indeed the changes themselves, which we have outlined, portray consciously or unconsciously the school's disposition towards its pupils. We continue the train of thought, introduced earlier about teacher expectations regarding pupil achievement in disadvantaged areas. "Active pupil-centred learning" could be viewed as a consequence of the "affective development" of pupils, "good communication" and the "professionalism" of the staff. This process is commendable and questionable at the same time. It is interesting to note that school personnel recognised the im-



portance of their behaviour in promoting the development of pupils but more is required. For example, the provision of a "comprehensive school programme" was valued by less than one third of the respondents. "Target setting and evaluation" got a very low overall total from all the groups. "Accountability", the "early detection" of difficulties and "remediation" were scarcely mentioned by principals and teachers and not at all by coordinators. This is surprising when one considers that the role of the coordinator is based on the principle and practice of preventative measures. "Home visits" surfaced at an overall total of 0.7 per cent in the development of pupils and "school attendance" got a total of 0.6 per cent. Much more emphasis needs to be placed on "target setting", "evaluation", "accountability", the "early detection" of difficulties and "home visitation" as promoted in the "preventative" philosophy of the Department of Education for the HSCL scheme schools. Schools need to become focused on the "early detection" of difficulties.

### **5.3.3 THE COMMUNITY**

The third aspect we shall deal with within the ambit of "the coordinator in action" is the community. Getting mention in this area of "consultation" was the "Adult Education Organiser" and the "Local Committee". Local agencies that were consulted were: the Gardaí, Social Workers, Psychological Services, Public Health Nurse, Community Care (the director), Saint Vincent de Paul and Family Resource Centres. An even clearer picture was where we noted those who gave "feedback" about the school. The "consultation" and "feedback" findings overlapped.

Only through the perceived consequences of Local Committees do we get a picture here of community involvement.

The "areas" of work targeted by Local Committee members for attention included:

- the prevention of absenteeism and early school leaving;
- a practical and focused approach to transfer programmes, (from home to school and from primary school to the post-primary sector);
- after school activities for children at risk, ranging from sport to homework support;
- anti-bullying campaigns;
- the inclusion in school structures of uninvolved parents;
- the forming of links with post-primary schools, serving a small proportion of disadvantaged pupils, not in the liaison scheme.

Within the framework of "changes" since the HSCL scheme was introduced the "school as part of the community" figured for 6.1 per cent of principals, 3.0 per cent of coordinators, and 5.3 per cent of teachers. The "profile of the Local Committee" was also named as was an "understanding of disadvantage".

While it is difficult to separate the development and inclusion of parents from the notion of community we do so here. The concept of community used in this dissertation has a wider ambit than that of parents and the home. It must be acknowledged that respondents did not name the power of the school-community link, or vice versa, except in Table 5.37. This was done by a very small number of principals and coordinators.

## CHAPTER 6

### INTERVIEWS

In addition to the questionnaire data interviews were held in sixteen schools randomly selected with the advice of an independent statistician. Sixteen principals, fifteen core groups of parents, and eighteen coordinators were interviewed, as indicated in Chapter Three. The core group of parents is a group of leader parents close to the coordinator and to his/her activities. Generally parents in the core group would have attended courses or classes at the school.

The interviews followed qualitative methodology producing descriptive data with the findings primarily communicated in words rather than in numbers (Gordon and Langmaid, 1988). The quantitative approach was used in Chapters Four and Five to investigate various dimensions of school life as the backdrop against which the coordinator carried out his/her duties. The qualitative approach offered the opportunity to explore in some depth and detail the sensibilities, hopes, concerns, values, beliefs, communication patterns, difficulties and lived practice of a smaller number of coordinators.

The opinions and perceptions of interviewees on the coordinator and on his/her role as a link-agent within the HSCL scheme were sought directly during interview. Opinions can be deduced from indications and suggestions made by principals and core groups of involved parents during the interview and indeed from those of the coordinators themselves. Chairpersons and a further group of randomly selected parents, all in the sixteen selected schools, were asked about the same issues through the form of a short questionnaire.

The Brown model for team buildup underlies much of the in-career development for coordinators. Indeed it could be said that the application of this model could enhance the job performance of coordinators. Brown, who conducted research during the mid-eighties at the University of California, suggested that there are phases which groups experience as they create the elusive quality of "team spirit" - a quality so pertinent to the role of the coordinator.

These phases are:

- "awareness of self;
- awareness of others;
- appreciation of differences;
- contact;
- trust;
- respect;
- a sense of team" (O'Connor, 1993: 105).

Brown suggests that those who want to build trusting relationships should start by increasing their own self awareness, progressing to an awareness of others and an acceptance of difference. Brown holds that contact occurs when "individuals are self-aware enough to see and hear their colleagues as different individuals...it also leads to the development of trust" (Ibid., 106).

The interviews sought insights and information about how self-aware the coordinators were regarding their strengths, their challenges, their ability to communicate, their ability to build relationships, and hence their ability to interrelate. Evidence of how this self-awareness can lead to a deeper awareness of others and in turn to an appreciation of difference was also sought. This appreciation of difference emerges if the coordinator has the ability to see and hear others as different individuals, and it is indicated through the "values and beliefs that the coordinator seems to hold and how he/she sees the scheme" (6.2). The ability of the coordinator to communicate and thus make contact was a central issue for exploration

during interviews (6.3). Contact can promote good relationships, enthusiasm, proactive ideas, and can lead to the multiplier effect and thence to a delegation process (5.1.6). According to Brown quality contact also leads to the development of trust. However, trust alone will neither develop interrelatedness nor partnership. Brown further notes that if sufficient time and effort have been afforded to the development of the self, leading to greater awareness of others and to appreciation of difference, then trust can grow (O'Connor, 1983: 104).

As already outlined in 1.7, partnership can begin to develop when home and school, parents and teachers value their association with each other in the name of the pupil. "The presence of respect turns a group of associates into a team" which can be as small as the parent-teacher-pupil team (Ibid., 106). The quality of mutual acceptance found in the principal-coordinator team, the teacher-coordinator team, the parent-coordinator team and the principal-teacher- parent- pupil- coordinator team can enhance the enjoyment of mutual roles and can lead to greater benefits for the pupil.

In outlining the findings from the interviews it is intended to use the following process:

- perception of the coordinator by principals and core groups of parents, and the coordinator's own evaluation (6.1);
- values and beliefs that the coordinator seems to hold/holds and how he/she sees the HSCL scheme (6.2);
- communication on the part of the coordinator (6.3);
- the development by the coordinator of a sense of team, interrelatedness, partnership (6.4);
- the improvement of the HSCL scheme (6.5);
- outcomes from the questionnaires sent to parents of the sixteen selected schools (6.6);

- the conclusion (6.7).

A representative sample of parents in the sixteen schools selected for an indepth study were circularised as were the sixteen chairpersons. The views of parents relating to the role of the coordinator will be outlined in 6.6 of this Chapter.

In relation to the interviews with parents it can be said that the feelings of the parents are sometimes as important as the information they convey. The vivid colloquial style of some of the answers has been retained to catch something of the flavour of the interview.

### **6.1. PERCEPTION OF THE COORDINATOR BY PRINCIPALS AND PARENTS, AND THE COORDINATOR'S OWN EVALUATION**

We shall examine under two headings, the perceptions of the coordinator held by principals and core groups of involved parents, and self-awareness on the part of the coordinator:

- the coordinator as a person;
- the coordinator as link agent with the principal(s), staff members and parents.

#### **6.1.1 THE COORDINATOR AS A PERSON**

The comments from the various respondents were largely of a personal nature within the category, the coordinator as a person. We now name the perceptions of principals, core groups and the coordinators themselves.

##### **6.1.1.1 THE COORDINATOR AS A PERSON ACCORDING TO PRINCIPALS**

Eleven of the sixteen principals interviewed spoke in very positive personal terms about the coordinator. One principal had reservations at the time of the interview and four principals did not make personal comments. Comments made by the eleven principals incorporated the following. The coordinator was "ideal for the role", was "warm and thoughtful", had a "sense of vision", was "very committed

and enthusiastic", was "compassionate", was "full of ideas" and was "a good listener". It was further said that the coordinator had "built up a lot of support for the school" had "done fantastic work" but that the "workload was too heavy". Another principal stated that "the coordinator was the non-threatening, friendly face of the school".

#### **6.1.1.2 THE COORDINATOR AS A PERSON ACCORDING TO CORE GROUPS**

Fourteen of the fifteen core groups of parents who were interviewed made comments of a personal nature. Included were that the coordinator was "superconfident" had the "gift of the gab" was "friendly and relaxed", was "approachable, very caring, enthusiastic, and good fun". Other parents spoke of the fact that the coordinator was "brilliant, one of ourselves, down to earth and very understanding". A core group spoke of the coordinator being "so gentle" while in another situation the parents spoke of the coordinator being "very very assertive and very diligent". At another interview the parents said that the coordinator was "bubbly, had a great personality, and tries to do anything". A final comment in this area was that the coordinator was "very welcoming the minute you saw him".

#### **6.1.1.3 THE COORDINATOR'S OWN EVALUATION**

Sixteen of the eighteen coordinators interviewed made personal comments. Coordinators spoke of themselves as being "warm, approachable, and not very teachery". Another coordinator said that she came across as "friendly, approachable, hard-working sincere and supportive". Others saw themselves as "modelling hope", as "non-judgemental", as "competent", as having "no problem" at their work or in their relationships and many mentioned the fact that they were "a good listener".

The above comments of principals, core groups of parents and of coordinators were common among the responses.

## **6.1.2 THE COORDINATOR AS LINK AGENT**

The link role of the coordinator is central to the investigation in this dissertation.

We now detail the perceptions of the interviewees.

### **6.1.2.1 THE COORDINATOR AS LINK AGENT ACCORDING TO PRINCIPALS**

Six of the principals acknowledged that they either had a "very good working relationship" with the coordinator, or that the coordinator was "seen by staff and principal as infinite support", or that the coordinator was "very very helpful in a crisis" or that they were "personally very pleased". One principal believed that the coordinator made the "principal's life easier". In relation to staff, six of the principals made somewhat similar claims. They stated that there was "some fear initially" on the part of teachers but that now they were "open, receptive and warm" but that "work [needed] to be done on teachers taking ownership". Finally a principal claimed that the "coordinators came across as very useful" and that "the teacher finds them valuable in relation to absenteeism".

A principal said that the coordinator saw "parents as an extension of children's education", while another principal claimed that the coordinator was "very defensive of her parents" and that "the parents' point of view must be got across at all costs".

### **6.1.2.2 THE COORDINATOR AS LINK AGENT ACCORDING TO CORE GROUPS**

Fourteen of the fifteen core groups of parents spoke about their awareness of the coordinator through his/her work. Issues that arose were that the coordinator was "one of the group", was "a friend", got "involved with parents", "does the courses



with you" and was "not a snooty one, or high and mighty". Another core group said that "it takes a very special person to be a home, school, liaison person". Parents noted also that coordinators "try to bring the quieter parents in" and that they were "very encouraging".

### **6.1.2.3 THE COORDINATOR'S OWN EVALUATION OF THEIR LINK ROLE**

One coordinator said that staff would view her as "organised and talented", another believed that the staff would see her as unafraid in trying "to build on strengths and opportunities available to staff". Three other coordinators gave opinions in this area and they were that they would still be viewed "as some sort of ambulance service". However, the staff would approach them "much more than in the beginning" and there was appreciation of the fact that coordinators "try to answer their needs".

The phrases that came up for coordinators regarding their relationship with parents were: "very well known"; "supportive to parents; very comfortable with parents"; parents were "comfortable talking to me" and "I [the coordinator] don't listen enough".

### **Summary**

From the foregoing it can be said that:

- *Principals* valued the coordinator as "ideal for the role" and as possessing many personal qualities such as warmth, commitment, and enthusiasm. It emerged that principals were enjoying a "very good working relationship" with the coordinator. It could be interpreted that a particular type of person applied for the role of coordinator or that principals made a wise choice when appointing the coordinator, and/or that training and motivation of coordinators went hand in hand. Principals seem to rely on coordinators as important people in the life of the school. One might question statements from the principal in relation to the coordinator who "makes life easier for the principal" or who is "very very helpful in a crisis" or who is "invaluable in relation to absenteeism". Taking the proactive and preventative nature of the HSCL scheme into consideration these statements reveal the immediate needs of principals.

- *Core groups* of parents valued the coordinator's personal and work traits. For parents the coordinator was approachable, diligent, very understanding and non-authoritarian. It would appear from this that the coordinator was very accepted by parents in the core group, at least.
- *Coordinators* held positive views about themselves as persons and in relation to their work. They viewed themselves as "warm", "non-judgemental" and "competent". They were also realistic in that they were aware of the need "to listen more" and to bring staff on board.

## **6.2 VALUES AND BELIEFS THAT THE COORDINATOR SEEMS TO HOLD/HOLDS AND HOW THE COORDINATOR SEES THE HSCL SCHEME.**

The values and beliefs that the coordinator holds in relation to parents, to staff and to education in general will obviously colour how he/she sees the HSCL scheme.

This in turn springs from the self-awareness outlined in 6.1.

### **6.2.1 VALUES AND BELIEFS OF THE COORDINATOR**

We now examine the values and beliefs of the coordinator as perceived by principals, by the coordinators themselves and by chairpersons.

#### **6.2.1.1 VALUES AND BELIEFS OF THE COORDINATOR ACCORDING TO PRINCIPALS**

Ten of the sixteen principals named appreciating parents in the "child's education" or "parents as an integral part of the whole education process" or simply "valuing the parent", as part of the values and belief system of the coordinator. Other values held by the coordinator according to principals, were those of "great compassion", a "deep Christian philosophy", a "deep understanding of the ethos of the school", and a "belief in the long term strategy and a holding out of hope for the future". Qualities of coordinators named by principals were "commitment", "loyalty", "infinite support", and the seeing of "good in everybody".

One principal held that the coordinator's view "complied" with his own "that the school should be a very real support to community" while another claimed that as principal he had "to be careful where they [the coordinators] are leading".

#### **6.2.1.2 COORDINATOR'S OWN VALUES AND BELIEFS**

The rationale underpinning the value system of one coordinator was that she would "help parents to help themselves and to help children" while another coordinator stated "I believe completely in it [the HSCL scheme] as a preventative model". "Respect" was a value for coordinators, "the most profound thing is respect" and "you have to be seen to give respect". This was echoed by another coordinator "I would like to see all children treated with respect...parents treated with respect by teachers. I would like to close the gap between teachers and parents". The foregoing impressions were reflected throughout the interviews with coordinators.

One coordinator had, for many years, visited the homes of his pupils and had given the use of his home phone number to parents and pupils for two hours each evening, as a class teacher. He had spent years as a coordinator at the time of interview. He said that keeping "in touch with the home and with parents" was "the most powerful aid you could have to a successful life as a teacher". This coordinator was convinced of the value of linking home, community, and school, of building up "a community in the school and the school as a service to community". He concluded by saying "I would have read it [value of home, school and community] in books, but I lived through it first hand and that makes the difference".

Another coordinator's "values/beliefs" were to have parents "more involved in education in its broadest sense...as a lifelong process...not just academic

work...learning to be relaxed...[to] make life better for everyone". For other coordinators the big issue was "the empowerment of parents and the opening of teachers' eyes, very slowly". This, one concluded, must be done in a non patronising way.

The focus on the "disadvantaged child" which seemed to be lacking in the quantitative data was more in evidence during the interviews. An interviewee claimed that her motivators included the holding out of "help to the disadvantaged children" as "they don't get a fair deal out of the education system" while children, like her own, "get so much". It was also held by coordinators that parent experiences of school "had to be worked on" because these bad experiences are "bound to rub off on their children".

#### **6.2.1.3 VALUES AND BELIEFS OF THE COORDINATOR ACCORDING TO CHAIRPERSONS**

The chairpersons of the sixteen schools selected for an indepth study were circulated regarding the "values and beliefs" of the coordinator (3.1.2.1). The responses from chairpersons have been drawn together as follows:

- 40.9 per cent said that "empowerment of parents" was a value for the coordinator;
- 38.6 per cent held that "partnership" was a value;
- 9.1 per cent spoke of "community development";
- 6.8 per cent maintained that "staff - school" change was a value;
- 4.5 per cent claimed that "benefits for children" was a "value/belief" of the coordinator.

Core groups of parents were not asked about the "values/beliefs" of the coordinator. However, all groups, principals, parents, and coordinators were asked about how the coordinator saw the scheme. This obviously links into the coordinator's value/belief system.

## **6.2.2 HOW THE COORDINATOR SEES THE HSCL SCHEME**

In this section we shall outline what principals and parent core groups perceive as the view of the coordinator about the HSCL scheme. The coordinator's views are also noted.

### **6.2.2.1 HOW THE COORDINATOR SEES THE HSCL SCHEME ACCORDING TO PRINCIPALS**

Principals gave very positive responses in relation to the views of coordinators on the HSCL scheme. Ten of the sixteen principals spoke of the coordinator as building "a relationship-bridge-link" between home, school, and community "through parents for children". Individual comments from principals were that their own coordinator saw the work as "extraordinarily worth while" and that he/she worked hard giving "attention to detail and everyday commitment". The coordinator saw the scheme as "very valuable and very necessary", saw the scheme as "an ongoing thing to combat poverty and disadvantage", had made "a solid start" and because of that the principal could say, "I believe in it myself".

One principal held that the coordinator saw her role as "her vocation in life", was "totally converted and committed to the scheme", was "never off duty and was very accommodating". For another principal the coordinator was "not a bit selfish", "believed wholeheartedly" in the scheme, had a "great understanding of people" and worked on "developing a camaraderie even with local people".

Personal comments from principals included that the coordinator was "a fine quality person" and worked with "a very genuine, sincere, open desire". One principal said that she could not fulfil the role of coordinator herself, "I couldn't do what she's doing". Another principal said that he "couldn't run the school at present without the coordinator".

### **6.2.2.2 HOW THE COORDINATOR SEES THE HSCL SCHEME ACCORDING TO CORE GROUPS OF PARENTS**

Comments from core groups of parents can be summed up under three headings:

- job enjoyment for the coordinator;
- job qualities of the coordinator;
- the clear job focus of the coordinator.

#### **Job enjoyment**

Four core groups spoke of the job enjoyment of the coordinators, "she loves it...she likes working with parents...she's very friendly...like a friend but she's very professional". Another core group claimed "she's getting enjoyment out of what is happening...you'd have to enjoy it to do it right". The third core group held that "they enjoy their work...enjoy being with parents...an awful lot of hard work in it...even working after school hours". One can gather the sense of self-worth of the parents who believe that the coordinators enjoy working with them and they acknowledge the energy and commitment given by the coordinators. This adds to the value of the role which we have already outlined in 6.1.

#### **Job qualities**

Job qualities of coordinators, listed by parents on five occasions, included he is "patient, a low key person, [has] great understanding...the boys always liked him...he's very approachable, listens to everything" and "is always available". Another core group held that "communication on a personal level is very high", and the coordinator "will get back to you day or night". Other parents spoke of the fact that the coordinator had built up "a personal relationship with kids and parents" and concluded with "he had a very good personality" and "he never resorted to corporal punishment". The fact that the coordinator "gets frustrated"

was named by one core group while at the same time "she does push things" and was "dedicated" were also acknowledged.

The clear focus of the coordinator was intimated by eight different core groups and in turn this showed how the coordinator had communicated to parents the vision of the scheme (6.3). While one core group held that the coordinator "could do with an assistant" they concluded by saying "we are all assistants, she is facilitating us, helping to close the gap that exists in the communication between home and school". This portrays a very focused outlook on the part of parents who would be categorised as marginalised. We note the opening up of the communication process and that of delegation "we are all assistants". Another group spoke of how the coordinator helped to clarify with parents and teachers their respective roles resulting in "we are all kind of like friends now, all for the children". Parents were clear that "the number one aim, is the children".

A further emphasis on the role focus was detected through a coordinator going "out of her way to accommodate people" helping parents to become "involved in the school" and "building community". This involvement, parents believed, had repercussions for the pupils "who are more secure" who are "going to the library as a result" and whose parents read to children "every day". The following quote sums up this report from core groups and also outlines how focused the coordinator is and has enabled the parents to become. "Her whole life", parents say,

tells us that we are partners in the education of children. She sees herself forming that partnership...there was no link, the school is more open because of her. She keeps insisting that the school won't function unless we take part. We are the primary educators of our children and we should be aware of what's going on in the school and she keeps encouraging that having a HSC link will bring us nearer to their education [the pupils' education].

By way of conclusion we quote the belief of one core group: "she's capable of doing all she sets out to do".

### 6.2.2.3 HOW COORDINATORS SEE THE HSCL SCHEME

In relation to how coordinators saw the scheme the following can be stated. All coordinators had very positive comments about the HSCL scheme and all admit that their perception of parents, teachers, possibilities, and personal power had changed. We shall now examine the outcome in more detail. Individual coordinators said that they were happy about the scheme", had "learned patience", that it was a "great [scheme] locally and nationally" and that it was "exceptionally well run". Coordinators held that they were "trying to reach those parents they haven't reached already, thinking about teachers too, that they haven't got on board". It appeared that coordinators were more content with the "long term" aim of the scheme" and were aware of the "huge change in schools although there was "still a long way to go". Coordinators were "increasingly sympathetic to principals, and less sympathetic to teachers, sometimes embarrassed to be a teacher". This statement sprang from the positive experience that a coordinator had while working with parents. She ended by saying "you'd nearly want to do it [liaison work] first, before you go for teaching".

Some coordinators were unclear, could not "imagine...how we could function without HSCL". It had become "an integral part of the school and of community life...it means so much to so many people...it is the spearhead for developments". This coordinator recommended that "we continue" with HSCL activities "quietly in the background". Coordinators were aware that parents now "see the school as non-threatening, as a community resource", and that "their views are now valued". It was also held that "staff were beginning to feel more at ease with parents". Another coordinator said that two staff members had moved to the point of having "parents in the classroom". It was the conviction of some coordinators that one



cannot talk "about partnership in education unless parents are invited in and a space [provided] for them in policy making" procedures.

Key issues in development have been raised in the foregoing by coordinators, showing that they are focused in their role:

- that of trying to reach the marginalised;
- being content with the long term aim of the HSCL scheme;
- being aware of scheme structures, locally and nationally;
- owning the fact that liaison had become an integral part of school and community life;
- having the insight to carry out liaison duties quietly in the background;
- acknowledging the difficulty of including staff in HSCL scheme practices.

Coordinators acknowledged that their perceptions had changed and developed since the HSCL scheme started. Individuals said: "I feel grounded in myself", "I see where parents are coming from now", "I see it [the HSCL scheme] as something continually evolving" and "it is actually happening, before this the vision was not there and we were striving after it". Coordinators found that "the emergence of parents as ring leaders and the support they can give to other parents" was enlightening. One coordinator thought it was going to be easier to change things" but there was "no easy recipe" he added. There was more "openness" among teachers now "because they see that the parent can help" was commented on by some coordinators. The movement from "great numbers" of parents attempting courses to the development of "partnership", and the "empowerment of parents as first educators" was a quality change according to coordinators. A final comment from a coordinator can act as summary. She expressed the wish "that everyone, myself and teachers, would be convinced of the power within and the ability to do".

## Summary

From the foregoing it is evident that:

- *Principals* spoke highly of the values and belief system of the coordinators. Examples given included "valuing the parent", a "great compassion", a "belief in the long term strategy", a sense of "commitment", of "loyalty" and that of "infinite support". Many principals spoke of the coordinator building "a relationship-bridge-link" between home, school, and community. Personal comments by principals included such phrases as "a fine quality person", and people who worked with "a very genuine, sincere, open desire".
- *Core groups* of parents spoke of how much enjoyment coordinators got out of their role, this must have brought a sense of well being to parents. Qualities of the coordinators named by parents were: "patience, availability and dedication". From parent interviews it can be said that the coordinator was very focused in involving parents as prime educators in the learning of their children.
- *Coordinators* aimed at helping parents "to help themselves and to help children". The "preventative" nature of the HSCL scheme was underwritten by coordinators. Coordinators valued "respect", respect for children and for their parents. The disadvantaged child and his/her needs was highlighted as were the bad experiences of schooling that some parents in "disadvantaged areas" had had at school. Coordinators had changed and developed their views of parents and of education since the inception of the HSCL scheme. They felt more "grounded" and had a clearer understanding of parents while they continued to encourage teachers.
- Among the views of *chairpersons* were "empowerment of parents", "partnership", "community development", "staff-school" change and "benefits for children".

### 6.3 COMMUNICATION ON THE PART OF THE COORDINATOR

The ability of the coordinator to communicate and thus make contact was a central issue during the interviews. As already stated, contact can promote good relationships, enthusiasm, a proactive work method leading to use of the delegation process which in turn activates trust. When mutual respect is present there is hope of developing a partnership way of working. We shall examine, firstly, the response of principals, core groups of parents and of the coordinators themselves in relation to the coordinator's leadership.

### **6.3.1 DOES THE COORDINATOR GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF LEADING OR REACTING?**

Within the HSCL scheme the word "react" has almost a technical meaning from received usage. It is the opposite to being proactive and it does not mean an instinctive reaction, which is a common meaning in colloquial speech. While carrying out HSCL duties a proactive approach on the part of the coordinator is deemed vital in the philosophy of this "preventative scheme" (2.2.3). In contrast many schools in the past have been reactive to situations and people. Though they are not necessarily always exclusive the interviews sought to determine whether the coordinator was primarily proactive or leader, rather than reactive. In addition the thesis is focusing largely on the leadership of the coordinator, of the coordinator as a link agent. Hence the need to question interviewees about the coordinator's communication ability.

#### **6.3.1.1 THE VIEWS OF PRINCIPALS WITH REGARD TO THE COORDINATOR "LEADING" OR "REACTING"**

Eleven of the sixteen principals interviewed were clear that the coordinator was "leading" within the school and community while five principals saw the coordinator as "leading" and "reacting". One principal defined "leading" as the coordinator being "expert and seen to be expert by teachers, parents and myself". Another principal identified the coordinator as "very much a leader" holding a "long term view", creating an "ease" around the school with "no pressure for parents, school or children" and as being "very concerned about staff...parents and school needs". A further insight was along the same lines with the addition that "teachers were beginning to work a lot more with parents, and as a result children were benefiting". A principal held that an experienced coordinator had "almost a responsibility for leadership". A different type of emphasis came from a principal

who held that since the role of the coordinator was a new one, the coordinator was "a very valuable witness for other teachers". Furthermore, "by taking on the role, by being faithful to the role, by staying with it and with the vision of the HSCL scheme", coordinators expressed leadership qualities.

### **6.3.1.2 THE COORDINATOR'S OWN VIEW ABOUT "LEADING" AND "REACTING"**

Sixteen out of the eighteen coordinators expressed the view that they saw themselves as "leading" rather than "reacting". Two coordinators said that whilst initially they generally "reacted", they led in "minor things".

Some comments from coordinators give us a flavour of their leadership role. One coordinator held that in so far as parents are availing of courses "I see myself as leader...a quiet type of leader, quietly influencing individual members of staff". Another coordinator commented "I would be challenging and questioning parents and teachers about themselves or their role or what they are doing, and trying to show a way forward, leading people towards their own answer". For still another coordinator the comment was that "probably I would lead, a natural instinct to move to the front of the group and take responsibility". Coordinators held that "we're [the coordinators] constantly opening up new initiatives", that they see "planning as very important" and that they see themselves "primarily as a leader". A final comment from a coordinator was that "hopefully leading and learning where to lead by reacting".

The above comments illustrate many aspects of the leadership role within schools: leading parents to their own learning and to their own answers, quietly being an influence to teachers, challenging both parents and teachers, taking on personal responsibility as coordinator, opening up new initiatives, and being in-

volved in planning. While the leadership instinct was strong, and was proactive, as has been illustrated many coordinators added:

- "sometimes you need to react";
- "but I react as well";
- "I'm sure there are times when I react" instead of being proactive;
- "but I react...if I'm asked to take something on board".

The spirit in which the coordinators seem to react to situations would not be at odds with the vision of the HSCL scheme.

While core groups were asked many questions about the coordinator's leadership and communication they were not asked the one on "leading" and "reacting". However, through the "feelings about the HSCL scheme" named by core groups the leadership/facilitation role of the coordinator can be deduced.

### **6.3.1.3 FEELINGS ABOUT THE HSCL SCHEME NAMED BY CORE GROUPS**

Core groups claimed that there was "a lot more communication, a lot more ease of access, a lot more help, someone to go to". Parents held that "for a long time parents were afraid to go to school, we only went for trouble or for parent-teacher meetings. We didn't look forward to it". For parents, "breaking down the barriers in the school is the big thing", while another group said that "she tells us the teachers' perspective and helps us to work along with them". Parents felt that "it makes a difference to children that they know you are there". As a parent "if you had a problem you'd discuss it with the coordinator and see what she had to say and maybe she would help organise with the teacher for you". A similar point from another core group "if you are not comfortable going to a principal or

teacher, you have the HSCL coordinator to go to, and parents feel more comfortable with her if they have a problem or anything like that".

Parents thought that the "aims of the teachers are clearer, you are hearing the two sides instead of feeling it's you against the teacher". The coordinator was viewed as "a lifeline for parents" while attending classes" gives you confidence in the school". The coordinator and his/her work in the HSCL scheme enables parents "to give more time" to children, "helps the children get over the problems and remain in school", "children like to feel parents are doing classes", and "children love seeing you in school". These points were made by almost all core groups. The courses for parents promoted by coordinators were viewed as "brilliant", "absolutely fantastic", and "very valuable and relevant". One parent who found the coordinator "fantastic" and held that he should be put "on a pedestal" saw courses for parents as "a load of bull". This was an isolated observation. The leadership role of the coordinator seems evident through the above quotes. This section on the coordinator can be summed up by a core group which spanned a primary and post-primary school. This group claimed to be "very privileged" to have coordinators "because without the scheme we wouldn't be here today".

### **Summary**

From the foregoing it can be stated that:

- Eleven of the sixteen *principals* interviewed saw the coordinator as leading within the school and the community. Five principals saw the coordinator as "leading" and "reacting". The views of principals in relation to the coordinator's leadership were those of "holding a long term view", creating "ease" around the school, being "very concerned about staff...parents and school needs", seeing children "benefiting", being "a valuable witness for other teachers", and staying "with the vision of the HSCL scheme".
- Sixteen out of the eighteen *coordinators* expressed the view that they saw themselves as "leading" rather than "reacting". Two coordinators said that they "reacted" initially with leadership in "minor things". The views of coordinators in relation to their own leadership were those of leading parents to

their own learning, quietly being an influence to teachers, challenging both parents and teachers, taking on personal responsibility as coordinator, opening up new initiatives, and being involved in planning.

- In some form, all *core* groups claimed "ease of access", "more help", the "breaking down of barriers", the seeing of another "perspective", the value of "courses" and the support of their children through the influence and the presence of the coordinator.

### **6.3.2 HOW THE COORDINATOR'S COMMUNICATION IS PERCEIVED**

We have detailed in 4.2 the theory and practice of communication. We now record the perceptions of the coordinator's communication testified by the interviewees, viz. principals, core groups, the coordinators themselves and chairpersons.

#### **6.3.2.1 PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS REGARDING THE COORDINATOR'S COMMUNICATION**

Fifteen of the sixteen principals interviewed had very positive comments regarding the communication of the coordinator with principal and parents. Some had reservations, as we shall see, in relation to communication with staff. One principal held the view that "the whole thing has been sold to the staff here". This principal claimed that since the "school is owned by the local community, staff would feel somewhat reassured that because of the scheme the parents understanding of school would be accurate". However, the views of parents in this school were not as hopeful, as we shall see later.

The views of fifteen principals will shed light on how the coordinator's communication is perceived and on how he/she has managed to communicate the inspiration and practicalities of the scheme. The comments from principals were as follows: One principal held that communication with him was "A1", and that the scheme was "adequately announced among the parent body". He held that the teachers were "neutral rather than positive", that there would be difficulty with the scheme being accepted "as an integral part" of school life because it was "not

aimed at children", yet, "ironically [there was] a lot less confrontation between teachers and parents". In describing the coordinators' communication many principals used phrases such as "very good", "much better than me", "very good and very tactful", "a good communicator...very clearly focused", "a bridge person", "good, with some excellent", "generally good", and "very good rapport".

Principals held that work still needed to be done with staff, as there was a "problem about the way teachers perceive things...teachers feel that the coordinator is possibly not taking their problem seriously". From another principal the view was that it is "slower telling teachers", while for someone else the view was that "earlier on, the teachers weren't open". Again we note a principal who said that the "messenger is giving the message but they [the staff] are not hearing". This principal held that it "suits teachers better" to have the coordinator working on absenteeism issues. Still another example was from a principal who gave an "overall yes" to the coordinator in communicating the inspiration and practicalities of the scheme but admitted that there was still "some distance to go" and that "parents" would be more aware than the wider "school community".

#### **6.3.2.2 PERCEPTIONS OF CORE GROUPS REGARDING THE COORDINATOR'S COMMUNICATION**

We shall now examine the views of the fifteen core groups in relation to how well the coordinator has communicated the aim of the HSCL scheme to parents. Statements from parents span the coordinator's communication in general, including that done during home visitation. Some groups claimed that parents were "very aware of the scheme" and that people who "have an opinion" were "listened to". Communication of information was good: "letters are sent home" and there is information "in church newsletters". The "coordinator stood out [at the school door] every morning and showed us where to go" and aimed at "getting parents



involved" and it was "not unusual to see coordinators on the road". The coordinator also "visited homes", "phones you" and "everyone is met at the very same level". The coordinator was "constantly training parents to help each other and other parents...when facilitating we're not solving people's problems or telling groups" how to do things.

On the other hand a small number of core groups held that it would "take years for the school to be looked at as a safe place...our generation were intimidated by the education authorities". Core groups claimed that the coordinator had "a very hard job" because "people who are underprivileged find it hard to mix" and "their own experience of school may be a bad experience". The core groups were also realistic: there are "always some you won't reach" and the lack of interest on the part of parents around their own involvement was obvious while at the same time "they want the child to do well".

### **6.3.2.3 THE COORDINATOR'S OWN EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION**

Fifteen out of the eighteen coordinators interviewed perceived their communication with parents to be "good" or "very good" and as the giving of "quality listening time". A few coordinators held that their communication was "honest sincere and down to earth" while another coordinator hoped that people would come to him "anytime within limits". Since another coordinator had "explained" her "position very carefully" to parents she was not asked "to compromise" her "professional status". Coordinators believed that "teachers were less accessible", and that "at the start [there was] an area of suspicion about what was going on". One coordinator held the view of being "a quiet communicator with teachers", while another claimed that the "barrier is breaking down". A "concern" for one coordinator was the fact that "teachers would expect to hear more from home visitation"

than the coordinator was free to share. One coordinator held that if "the outcome" of her communication did not meet her expectations, if parents did not "turn up to courses", then the communication was not "clear". This thinking would seem flawed as there could be very many reasons why people might not attend.

In relation to the communication of the inspiration and practicalities of the HSCL scheme some coordinators held that it is difficult to inform staff. Coordinators believed that staff may "know the rationale [of HSCL] but they might not necessarily accept it". Coordinators held that in some staff rooms "there is a trouble shooting mentality" and the coordinator is asked to be involved in crisis work. It was the belief of coordinators that in the case of some teachers "there is resistance...they don't want to hear and reluctantly they are watching and waiting to see how it's developing [HSCL work]...if it progresses then they move a little closer". According to coordinators, staff members are "not really interested...not inclined to move out further to parents...they leave me to do my thing".

Readiness for change on the part of teachers featured for coordinators who said that the "main body of people here heard the message, and they respond at various stages in their own way". For other coordinators the view was that staff "feel well informed" about the HSCL scheme and that teachers "are very supportive now and in agreement now with the whole thrust and aims of the scheme". One coordinator held that the principal was "neutral - sceptical" and had become "supportive - pro" HSCL.

Regarding the communication of the aims and thrust of the HSCL scheme to parents some of the comments of coordinators are as follows: "anything I do, unless it is to maximise parental involvement, it's not worth doing" and "parents have got as far as seeing more value in education". "Success" for one coordinator

was "in the number of people who contact me...if success is measured by voting with your feet...they come to me".

#### 6.3.2.4 PERCEPTIONS OF CHAIRPERSONS REGARDING THE COORDINATOR'S COMMUNICATION

The sixteen chairpersons were asked if the coordinator "had managed to communicate adequately the inspiration and practicalities of the scheme" to the Board of Management, to parents, to teachers, to others in the community, and to the chairperson. In the following Table we note the responses from chairpersons:

**Table 6.1 Has the Coordinator Communicated Adequately the Inspiration and Practicalities of the HSCL Scheme?**

	Yes	No	Unsure
<b>Board of Management</b>	87.5	12.5	0.0
<b>Parents</b>	93.8	0.0	6.3
<b>Teachers</b>	100.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Community personnel</b>	50.0	43.8	6.3
<b>Chairperson</b>	87.5	12.5	0.0

The view of chairpersons that coordinators had communicated adequately the vision and practicalities of the HSCL to all teachers does not seem justified in the light of other evidence.

#### **Summary**

These findings show that:

- *Principals* saw the communication of the coordinator as "very good and very tactful" but that work still remained to be done with staff as there was a "problem about the way teachers perceive things". This perception is illustrated clearly throughout the interviews.

- According to *core groups* the outcomes from communication by the coordinator were a greater ease for parents in coming to the school, development for parents and parent-to-parent contact/leadership".
- Most *coordinators* perceived their communication with parents to be "very good" or as the giving of "quality listening time". In relation to staff the view of coordinators spanned a wide area. They claimed that staff may "know the rationale [of HSCL] but they might not necessarily accept it" while others said that staff "feel well informed" and "are very supportive now".
- A high percentage of *chairpersons* spoke in the affirmative regarding the coordinators' communication. However, their view that 100 per cent of teachers were adequately informed regarding the HSCL scheme would not appear accurate from the authors experience or from the interview data.

### **6.3.3 THE TYPE, FREQUENCY AND CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION**

Among the principals, thirteen stated that they preferred verbal communication with the coordinator while three used the written form. Fifteen coordinators favoured verbal communication with the principal, with six favouring written communication. There were three coordinators who used both methods. Twelve principals communicated through informal means, while eight used formal methods. There were five principals who used the two ways to communicate. All coordinators, excluding one, used informal methods of communication, five used formal methods, with four coordinators using both forms of communication. In summary the preference of principals and coordinators for communicating with each other was verbal and informal. This is in keeping with the lack of value placed on formal evaluation structures in 5.3.1.

#### **6.3.3.1 TYPE, FREQUENCY AND CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION ACCORDING TO PRINCIPALS**

In the following section we note the responses from principals relating to "adequate information in a clear way and on a regular basis" from the coordinator.

Twelve principals stated that they "definitely" had a "timetable, planning and records" from the coordinator. Other phrases used were "no matter where she is, she is working", and "I love the days she's here". A further principal stated the need for "a little more" information, "a general outline" from the coordinator. The two remaining principals claimed that if they lacked information it was their "own fault" and one held "I don't always listen" to the coordinator.

#### **6.3.3.2 TYPE, FREQUENCY AND CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION ACCORDING TO CORE GROUPS**

Twelve of the fifteen core groups of parents were very positive about the frequency and the clarity of information they received. The following statements give us a flavour of the views of core groups. Parents said that the "note system allows for open discussion", and that "children bring letters...you can come to school for more information". "We get constant information on everything" parents said, "ah yes, from courses to head lice, all notified straight away".

While another core group claimed that "there's definitely a better attitude there now" they also held that "ordinary parents need more communication". This group who had been responsible for publishing the school newsletter, until transition year pupils took it over, "wanted more information". Still another core group said "in general we don't get anything [information] from the principal, the coordinator gives it all to us". They had been involved in fundraising for the school and claimed that "where it [money] goes we don't know" and "we need to know the total". The final core group held that "communication is good [in the schools] by the coordinators" but that "if you have a problem with a teacher you have to complain to another teacher". Parents held that this practice is "futile" and that "an independent person" is required.

### 6.3.3.3 COORDINATOR'S OWN EVALUATION REGARDING THE TYPE FREQUENCY, AND CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION

On the whole, coordinators had made efforts to communicate with all parties although most would say "that the outcome from teachers left a lot to be desired". A small number admitted "deficiencies", the need "to improve" or "to work on" communication procedures. Coordinators said that principals were "very well informed", that "parents know as much as they need to know" and that "an end of year report [was given] to each staff member". One coordinator held that "I try to give plenty of information" and that "parent core groups have plenty of information". Another coordinator said that whilst non-core group members had information about courses, classes, and home visitation, there was still a gap with teachers. One coordinator put it succinctly on claiming that "parents have the clearest view, principals have a good overall view and teachers are least familiar with my work". While "accurate information on everything" was given to the base principal, the second principal "isn't always available or doesn't want my timetable" a coordinator claimed. Time was spent with teachers sharing information "hoping to inspire them and give them support".

#### Summary

The foregoing illustrates that:

- The preference for *principals* was for verbal and informal methods of communication with the coordinator. However a "timetable, planning and records" from the coordinator was also available to many principals".
- Twelve *core groups* were very positive about the frequency and clarity of information they received while three further groups required "more information".
- *Coordinators* seemed to prefer verbal and informal methods of communication but held that outcomes from their communication with staffs left a lot to be desired.

#### **6.3.4 DIFFICULTIES IN THE AREA OF COMMUNICATION**

The interviews sought information regarding difficulties in the area of communication from principals, core groups and from coordinators themselves. We now record the findings.

##### **6.3.4.1 DIFFICULTIES IN THE AREA OF COMMUNICATION ACCORDING TO PRINCIPALS**

Eight of the fifteen principals recounted no difficulty in their communication with the coordinator, "I have no unvoiced feeling...we have established an easy relationship" and "she is a good communicator". Principals held that "as a staff we're very communicative and happy together". Other principals said that "communication was very difficult" in a large staff, that "generally things are OK...sometimes you'd be told, sometimes you have to ask" and voiced the need to have matters "documented". The usual statement that "the parents we want, sometimes don't come in" was voiced. While another principal said that "only the touchy people" claimed that communication was not good. There were "difficulties a lot of the time" because "the teacher focus is the class" and the "coordinator is so focused " in a wider direction. In one case, the coordinator and principal were "strong minded people". However, the principal claimed that the coordinator "does defer" to the "wishes" of the principal who "from time to time had to mould/direct [the coordinator] in a kind of dictatorial way".

##### **6.3.4.2 DIFFICULTIES IN THE AREA OF COMMUNICATION ACCORDING TO CORE GROUPS**

Almost all core groups of parents recorded difficulties with communication while all were highly complimentary of the coordinator. Views of core groups can be summarised as follows: "if I had a problem I wouldn't hesitate going to the coordinator", "there is no person like the home-school coordinator" and "school would

not run without the coordinator". Another comment from a core group was that: "you can say anything to her...the coordinator is the only link you have really [because] teachers haven't got time".

Difficulties recounted by core groups were that some parents were very shy and that it was difficult to bridge the gap when a new lot of children begin in September". Core groups claimed that "a lot of parents would feel left out" while for others it was "difficult to get our suggestions done, [we were] listened to but difficult to achieve". Core groups held that "parents don't get enough recognition from public bodies and from the community".

#### **6.3.4.3 DIFFICULTIES IN THE AREA OF COMMUNICATION ACCORDING TO COORDINATORS**

*Coordinators* claimed that: the "only problem was lack of time", that "there was a difficulty in reaching parents...and teachers" and that the "Partnership and VEC were very annoying" regarding form-filling - "it's not what they do but the way that they do it". Coordinators claimed that because they know "parents now on a personal level" there is "no problem" even if "the message is sticky" and that the "biggest difficulty I would find is with staff" who are "unfortunately under great pressures". "Parents would be the most positive" about the HSCL scheme. "To an extent some teachers lack understanding of the scheme and some have got little or no in-career development" and that "it takes time to be accepted within staff and trusted". It was held that "important decisions were made without consultation" on the part of the principal while the staff communicated well with the coordinator.



## Summary

The foregoing illustrates that:

- Difficulties in communication ranged for *principals* from the size of staffs to "the parents we want sometimes don't come in".
- *Core groups* recorded difficulties with communication though all were highly complimentary to the coordinator.
- For *coordinators* communication problems spanned from "lack of time" for communication to the fact that "it takes time to be accepted within staff and trusted".

### 6.4 THE DEVELOPMENT BY THE COORDINATOR OF A SENSE OF TEAM, INTERRELATEDNESS, PARTNERSHIP

The "sense of team, interrelatedness, partnership" that the coordinator has, or has not developed, is really what this thesis is setting out to acknowledge. While we have been trying to establish, throughout the interviews whether the sense of team was present or not, we will focus directly on it in this section.

#### 6.4.1 FEELINGS ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR THE COORDINATOR

We shall examine what principals and core groups felt were "the most important issues for the coordinator" and what coordinators felt the "important issues" were for themselves. With the "issues" as backdrop we shall then proceed to look at the "ways" in which the coordinator fostered partnership.

##### 6.4.1.1 THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR THE COORDINATOR ACCORDING TO PRINCIPALS

Principals felt that the "important issues" for coordinators were: "to be seen in a positive light by parents", to develop "parent confidence and self esteem" through "classes", to have the HSCL scheme viewed "as an integral part of the school" and "to believe strongly in the value of what [they were] doing" as coordinators. Principals also felt that coordinators wanted to be involved "in the area of most need",

"to place the school in the community", to meet the "marginalised" through home visitation, to initiate the process of "organising", "coordinating", "networking" and "training" and "to have more male involvement" among parents. One principal sums the foregoing up by saying that the coordinator's role is one of "empowering parents...she is the one they would go to", there is "no red tape attached" to the coordinator. Another principal's view is that the coordinator "doesn't feel the full impact [of the work], I get reactions from teachers, pupils and parents". A further viewpoint was the hope a principal had that someone would take time to say "well done" to the coordinator.

#### **6.4.1.2 THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR THE COORDINATOR ACCORDING TO CORE GROUPS**

Core groups felt that "important issues" for the coordinator were: "getting to know people and being there for people", providing "courses" and a "parents' room" and going on "home visitation, a quiet but very important part" of the work. Other important issues according to the core groups were "bringing parents together...[hearing] views about the school, the system and everything...reaching out for parents who need a break", "explaining what's happening in the Department of Education...Acts, and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) ...your rights as parents" and communicating "between home and school... somebody that sees the overall picture". Instead of naming "important issues" for the coordinator some core groups listed the qualities of the coordinator. Some of the qualities named were that the coordinator was "available", "listens", "has confidence", was "friendly", was "a great organiser", "gets back to you", was "very confidential", was a "good explainer", was "reliable" was "responsible" was "a person you can approach" and "trust" someone who "never puts anyone down".

#### **6.4.1.3 THE COORDINATOR'S OWN VIEWS ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES**

Some of the "most important issues" voiced by coordinators were: to get "parent participation in children's education", to have them "consistent in attending" and to ensure "the involvement of parents in the school in a number of ways".

Coordinators also claimed to involve "everybody, but most of all the teachers". Another important issue was to be "available" to "encourage learning" and "to encourage parents of the need to communicate with children". Coordinators recognised the need "to concentrate more on home visitation". The main focus for coordinators was the development of parents and their involvement in their children's education. One coordinator evaluates the work against this criterion.

#### **6.4.2 HOW THE COORDINATOR FOSTERS PARTNERSHIP**

Partnership is a key theme on which this dissertation revolves (1.7, 5.3, 7.5.5). Interviewees were questioned as to how the coordinator fosters partnership.

##### **6.4.2.1 WAYS IN WHICH THE COORDINATOR FOSTERED PARTNERSHIP ACCORDING TO PRINCIPALS**

Among the sixteen principals interviewed many gave practical ways in which the coordinator fostered partnership and some spoke theoretically. We shall now review some examples from both categories. Practical examples from principals were that the coordinator was "constantly communicating...being positive, being open, pulling...community and school together". The Local Committee according to principals was a "valiant effort to get [partnership] off the ground" where the "parent point of view" was "always" put forward. Principals held that "activities and courses" run by the coordinator led in the "long term towards partnership" while "communication, either verbal or written", made it "right for parents to take

part". The coordinator "has managed to bring staff into the day-to-day running of the scheme by utilising...people's expertise" and schools had synchronised holiday time where they served the same families. The more theoretical views of principals could be summarised as follows that: the coordinator "communicated with teachers about the philosophy of the scheme" and that the coordinator created "a climate where parents are genuinely seen as partners in education".

#### **6.4.2.2 WAYS IN WHICH THE COORDINATOR FOSTERED PARTNERSHIP ACCORDING TO CORE GROUPS**

In outlining how partnership was developed core groups said that: coordinators "had opened up the school for parents" and had provided "classes and courses... building up confidence and assertiveness, parenting courses and communication skills". Coordinators had parents and teachers "working together on equal terms, feeling like you're an equal with the teacher". In the same vein another core group said that "partnership implies equality and in the old days the teachers were apart". Core groups held that there was "ease with the principals, that this is the best of all, you can say what you want to say... the coordinator gave me the idea of how to approach the principal". Home visitation "by the coordinator... to specialised houses to help children who have problems" were valuable according to core groups. Parents felt that "we can discuss problems together. I love coming here. You're made feel welcome by the principal, teachers and coordinator...activities all help partnership...one of her strong aims [is] to get [us] to know each other". A similar view point from another group was "sharing my kid's behaviour patterns with the coordinator for the help of the kid. They would be able to work on it in the school and I work on it at home". Core groups recommended the setting up of a "parent council, parents and teachers socialising together, sit-

ting together and enjoying it, at the museum together and a day out for parents, teachers and children once a year".

As already outlined, one core group had difficulties with their school and its teachers and expressed the view that "teachers are a law unto themselves". They also repeated that "you need an independent person when you come to school". A further feeling in this group related to "suspicion" about home visitation being done by the coordinator who was a teacher.

#### **6.4.2.3 COORDINATOR'S OWN EVALUATION ON HOW THEY FOSTER PARTNERSHIP**

Coordinators believed that they fostered partnership when they "treat everybody the same... giving information to whoever asks... never making people feel inferior". A similar view from another coordinator was "giving space to the views of parents where I can". Coordinators believed that they should keep "encouraging parents and teachers to work together...fostering partnership between various bodies". This is summed up well by another coordinator who aims at having "as many as possible involved in the child's education and life" working together. A further coordinator believed that "no one on [his/her] own builds partnership but all together" in a "non-judgemental" way. "Partnership is about trust" one coordinator claimed.

In order to foster partnership coordinators said that they needed to make changes in their own personal lives. One coordinator held that "teachers have an elevated status" and that "partnership involves taking a step back from that". She believed that "the weaker party has to be trained through a process of empowerment " because "handing over equal decision making involves a huge change".

Coordinators promoted joint policy making through "Parents and Teachers Working Together on Policy Formation" (2.4.1). They encouraged "outreach meetings" in order "to prevent early school leaving". They have "people listening to one another in a very active way trying to understand where the other is coming from" and then seeking "to marry the understanding and the communication".

According to coordinators they focused on the "new parent-teacher meetings" where parents discussed in small groups their hopes and concerns for their children, suggested a suitable amount of homework, appropriate pupil behaviour and outlined how the school might help parents through the person of the coordinator. This was reiterated by another coordinator whose constant question to parents was "are needs being met?" and by still another who "never made plans around parents behind their backs". Coordinators held Local Committee meetings "on a regular basis" where "principals, parents and local agencies meet on different issues" such as school "attendance", "after school activities", "making the school more user friendly" and "the motivation of students". Coordinators "constantly involve parents, teachers and students" together in "supervised study" or through "care teams" within the school.

### **Summary**

The evidence points out that:

- According to *principals* the "important issues" for coordinators were the development of the HSCL scheme as an "integral part of the school" and being involved as coordinators "in the area of most need". The fostering of partnership by the coordinator took place, according to principals, by "constantly communicating", by holding Local Committee meetings, by providing "activities and classes", by involving staff in the "running of the scheme" and by creating "a climate where parents are genuinely seen as partners in education".
- For *core groups* the "important issues" for coordinators were "being there for people", communicating "between home and school" and being a "friendly", "confidential" and "reliable" person. Core groups claimed that coordinators

fostered partnership by encouraging parents and teachers to work together in the interest of education.

- *Coordinators* viewed "parent participation in children's education" as an "important issue" and also the involvement of the teachers in the HSCL scheme. Coordinators fostered partnership through "respectful intervention", through "encouraging parents and teachers to work together", through Local Committee meetings and through the inclusion of "students" with parents and teachers.

## **6.5 HOW THE HSCL SCHEME COULD BE IMPROVED**

All interviewees were asked for their "ideas" on how the HSCL scheme could be improved. There were two reasons for this request. Firstly so that shortcomings in the current situation could be deduced and secondly to anticipate, to determine the way forward allowing prevalent needs and practice to inform the theory of HSCL. We recall the words of Burkan that "organizational change must be led top-down but must be engineered bottom-up" (Burkan, 1996: 190). This was Department of Education theory and it has informed the HSCL scheme since its inception in 1990. It seems to have been verbalised by Burkan only in 1996.

### **6.5.1 HOW THE HSCL SCHEME COULD BE IMPROVED ACCORDING TO PRINCIPALS**

The recommendations, for the future development of the HSCL scheme, from principals included the following: the provision of "in-career development for teachers" as a "module on Summer courses or as a "week in the Summer for teachers, a conference", a time when "class teachers and coordinator would be more involved in planning together". Another was the inclusion of HSCL theory as "modules in teacher training colleges". Other recommendations related to resources such as the appointment of more HSCL coordinators to allow one school per coordinator, of more teachers of remedial education, of child care workers and of a secretary for the coordinator. The distribution of more finance to coordinators was also named. Principals claimed that there was a need for the encourage-

ment/inclusion of "more parents", better "attendance at parent-teacher meetings", of more "involvement of staff" and more "home visits" as coordinators are "still not reaching the uninvolved". Principals said that coordinators sought to protect the fact that all are involved in making the school "the best possible place for children" and that all "work together, really, instead of against each other".

Only one of the fifteen principals interviewed could see the role of coordinator being filled by anyone other than a teacher. That particular principal said that a local mother could fulfil the role "if she came in through the HSCL scheme with the coordinator". The other fourteen principals held that a non-teacher "wouldn't be accepted from the point of view of staff", "wouldn't be as effective", would be more threat "for the most needy people", would require "qualification /credentials", and qualities such as "sympathy, understanding, psychology training, discretion, confidentiality and sensitivity".

#### **6.5.2 HOW THE HSCL SCHEME COULD BE IMPROVED ACCORDING TO CORE GROUPS**

Recommendations for improving the HSCL scheme, according to core groups were: "to expand" the scheme and "to make it better" by providing more "coordinators", "more money", "a secretary for the coordinator" and "more publicity about HSCL from the school". Core groups recommended that the services to schools of "school books at post-primary level", of "computers" and of "swimming classes out of school hours" should be extended. Parents believed that "talks on drugs from parents" for parents, a "counselling service" for pupils and families and the maintaining of "the community aspect of the HSCL scheme" should be developed. Parents also felt that administration issues such as better heat, access to the building, safety in the building and environs and respect for the basic needs



of children should be promoted. To ensure anonymity specific examples are not given here in this text but were given at interview.

Ten core groups maintained that it was an "advantage to have an experience of teaching" for the role of coordinator while four groups claimed that someone from the community "could be trained" if "you have children and were around forty". One core group held that "you need an independent person" from "the area", who has "more in common with parents" and does not "go at 4.00 p.m.", someone for whom the principal is not "the boss".

### **6.5.3 HOW THE HSCL SCHEME COULD BE IMPROVED ACCORDING TO COORDINATORS**

The coordinators in their recommendations suggested the team approach through: a "network of parents", a "network of principals", and through coordinators "working as a local team...operating like a huge Local Committee" working in "each others schools". Coordinators also recommended "better cooperation from within the staff" with "time for staffs to work on and focus on issues of home and school...staff need to work on their own, and then come together" with parents. "Parents and staff could set up programmes for children during summer months" they suggested. A further point relating to staff was to broaden the coordinator's role with teachers to include "new ways of looking at curriculum and instruction". Setting "a precedent of six years" on the length of time a teacher spends in the role of HSCL coordinator would improve matters. This would spread the interest in the role throughout the staff and ensure more first-hand experience of liaison. Extending the National Coordinator services so the local coordinators could have "more visits on the ground" would improve the HSCL scheme according to some coordinators.

Of the eighteen coordinators interviewed, one claimed that "a dynamic person [parent] with training" could do the role of coordinating but that "at this point it would be inconceivable". Seven other coordinators agreed it could be someone other than a teacher but in each case qualified their view with "I don't think it would be ideal", or "the teachers trust me" as a colleague, or "it makes a huge difference to have a teacher".

#### **6.5.4 HOW THE HSCL SCHEME COULD BE IMPROVED ACCORDING TO CHAIRPERSONS**

Fourteen of the sixteen chairpersons circularised had ideas about how the HSCL scheme "could be improved". They claimed that:

- improved "staffing/funding" (31.0 per cent);
- "awareness in the community" (27.6 per cent);
- "awareness" of staff members (20.7 per cent);
- "awareness on BOM" (6.9 per cent);
- "a policy on HSCL" (6.9 per cent) could improve scheme practices.

The remainder, 6.9 per cent of chairpersons, were satisfied with the scheme as it was.

#### **Summary**

At this point it can be said that:

- For *principals* and *core groups* the appointment of further personnel to the schools in the HSCL scheme was a priority. So too was the allocation of further finance to HSCL scheme schools. A wider involvement of parents in HSCL scheme activities and the provision of modules on parent development/partnership in teacher training colleges and in-career development for teachers were also named.
- *Coordinators* emphasised the "team" approach as the way forward for themselves and those they worked with.
- *Chairpersons* spoke of increased staffing/funding. They also emphasised a deeper "awareness" amongst staff members, community members and on the

part of the BOM. They believed that a policy on HSCL would improve matters.

- Almost all interviewees stressed the need for the role of coordinator to be filled by a teacher. The chairpersons were not asked this question.

## **6.6 OUTCOMES FROM QUESTIONNAIRES SENT TO INDIVIDUAL PARENTS OF THE SIXTEEN SELECTED SCHOOLS**

Throughout the interviews we have been examining the perception of the coordinator by principals, core groups of parents and the coordinator's own evaluation. We have explored the values and beliefs that the coordinator holds, how coordinators develop a sense of team, interrelatedness and partnership, in short if and how the coordinator performed as leader. The interviews were valuable in that they authenticated the positive evaluation of coordinators by themselves and by others.

Since the "core groups" of parents interviewed were in all cases parents who had involved themselves closely with the work of the coordinator it was decided to acquire information from another cohort of parents. A questionnaire was sent to a representative sample of parents in the sixteen schools selected for an indepth study. A total of 123 parents were circularised. The response rate was 93.5 per cent (Table 3.1). Just over half of the questionnaire was directly associated with the role of the coordinator and sought similar information to that pursued in the interviews (6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4). Parents were given statements and asked to tick "which expresses your views in relation to this school". Statements given to parents which were directly related to the work of the coordinator are as follows in Table 6.2

**Table 6.2 Responses from Individual Parents Regarding the Coordinator's Work**

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Yes	No	No reply
I know the Home/School Teacher (Coordinator) very well	25.2	48.7	13.0	11.3	1.7	n/a	n/a	0.0
I get a lot of news from the Home/School Teacher (Coordinator)	18.3	51.3	13.0	13.9	1.7	n/a	n/a	1.7
I feel that I have a friend in the Home/School Teacher (Coordinator)	21.7	51.3	15.7	10.4	0.9	n/a	n/a	0.0
I have got great confidence from working with the Home/School Teacher (Coordinator)	22.6	38.3	27.8	9.6	0.9	n/a	n/a	0.9
I feel the benefit of working with the Home/School Teacher (Coordinator) when I am at home with my child/children	13.0	41.7	32.2	9.6	1.7	n/a	n/a	1.7
I go to the Parents' Room in the school	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33.9	64.3	1.7
Spending time in the Parents' Room is helpful to me as a parent.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33.9	8.7	57.4
Last year I did a course/courses in this school.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23.5	64.3	12.2
I like the Home/School teacher (Coordinator) to visit me in my home.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	60.0	35.7	4.3

Among these randomly selected parents 73.9 per cent felt they knew the coordinator "very well" and 73.0 per cent considered him/her as "a friend" while 69.6 per cent got "a lot of news" from the coordinator. From the foregoing we can deduce that the coordinators' communication ability seems high and their acceptance by parents was likewise. Just 33.9 per cent of the parents went to the parents'

room and 23.5 per cent had done a course/courses in the previous year. Of the 23.5 per cent who did courses, 5.2 per cent did not attend the parents' room. Of the 115 parents who returned questionnaires 39.1 per cent met the coordinator in the parents' room or at courses. While this percentage of 39.1 is very hopeful there is still a large number of parents in the "no opinion/strongly disagree/disagree" categories in Table 6.2.

Regarding contact with the coordinator through home visitation, 60.0 per cent of parents liked the coordinator to visit them in their own home. Just under half of these parents either attended in the parents' room or did a course/courses while for the other half, home visitation was the only contact between the parent and the coordinator. Of the 115 parents who responded 70.0 per cent met the coordinator in at least *one* of the following locations: the parents' room, at courses, or during home visitation. This finding in itself seems very positive. It should also be acknowledged that home visitation could have taken place with the 35.7 per cent who did not like the coordinator to visit them at home and the 4.3 per cent who did not comment. However, if this is the case parents have never voiced their disapproval to the coordinators. It could also be a fact that those who did not have a home visit were among the middle income sector of the post-primary school and not within the brief of the coordinator. Home visitation has been noted as a neglected area throughout Chapters Four and Five and it is more likely that this 40.0 per cent of parents just never had a home visit.

Some gains accepted by parents, from working with the coordinators, were "great confidence" (60.9 per cent) and "benefit" when at home with children (54.7 per cent).

Within the sixteen randomly selected schools, one primary school and three of the schools at post-primary level have a middle income sector for which the coordinator does not have responsibility. This could account for some of the parents who have not attended in the parents' room or at courses. It could also be part of the reason why 40.0 per cent of parents may not have had a home visit.

## **6.7 SUMMARY**

### **Principals**

It can be said that principals saw the coordinator as "ideal for the role", with a "sense of vision" and as someone who had "done fantastic work". It emerged that principals enjoyed a "very good working relationship" with the coordinator. Staff still required training in the area of teachers "taking ownership" while they were now more "open, receptive and warm" (6.1).

Principals spoke highly of the value and belief system of coordinators. They gave examples of coordinators "valuing the parent", of having "great compassion" and a "belief" in the long term strategy, of showing "loyalty", and a sense of "commitment". Principals also held that the coordinator built "a relationship-bridge-link" between home, school, and community. Personal comments included the view that the coordinator was "a fine quality person" and people who worked with "a very genuine, sincere, open desire" (6.2).

Many principals viewed the coordinator as a leader. They were people who held "a long term view", who created "ease around the school", who were "very concerned about staff...parents and school needs" and who were "a valuable witness for other teachers". Principals viewed the communication of the coordinator as "very good and very tactful". They held that the HSCL scheme was "adequately announced among the parent body" by coordinators but that there was dif-

ficuity with the scheme being accepted "as an integral part" of school life because it was "not aimed at children". So work still needed to be done with staff as there was a "problem about the way teachers perceive things". On the whole, principals stated that they "definitely" had a "timetable, planning and records" from the coordinator.

Half of the principals recounted no difficulty in communicating with the coordinator. Other comments included "sometimes you'd be told, sometimes you have to ask", that the "parents we want sometimes don't come in", and that "only the touchy people" claimed that communication is not good (6.3).

Some "important issues" for the coordinator, according to principals, were to be involved "in the area of most need", and to initiate the process of "organising", "coordinating", "networking" and "training". Principals held that the coordinators fostered partnership by "constantly communicating", and through the Local Committee where the "parent point of view" was "always" acknowledged. Another way of forming partnership was through bringing staff "into the day-to-day running of the scheme utilising...people's expertise". In short, the coordinator "communicated with teachers about the philosophy of the scheme" and the coordinator created "a climate where parents are genuinely seen as partners in education" (6.4).

Principals held that the HSCL scheme could be improved through the provision of "in-career development for teachers" and through the inclusion of HSCL theory as "modules in teacher training colleges". They also sought "more HSCL coordinators" and "more finance". Principals believed in the encouragement and the inclusion of "more parents", better "attendance at parent-teacher meetings", of more "involvement of staff" and more "home visits" as coordinators are "still not

reaching the uninvolved". Working "together" in order to "make the school the best possible place for children" was also a priority (6.5).

From the foregoing it is obvious that:

- Principals held a very positive view of the coordinator as a person and as a link agent.
- Principals spoke highly of the values and belief system of coordinators.
- Principals saw and acknowledged the leadership role of the coordinator while recognising that work still needed to be done with staff in order to accept the HSCL scheme "as an integral part" of school life. Coordinators on the whole kept principals informed.
- Principals claimed that coordinators fostered "partnership", by being involved "in the area of most need". In addition they were constantly "organising", "coordinating", "networking" and "training". They also tried to involve staff in the "day to day running of the scheme". They created "a climate" where parents were "genuinely seen as partners in education".
- Principals believed in the need for in-career development for staff, better resources, the inclusion of the more "marginalised" and "team work" in order to make the school "the best possible place for children".

### **Parent Core Groups**

Parent core groups acknowledged that the coordinator was "approachable, very caring, enthusiastic and good fun". They valued the coordinator as one who got "involved with parents" and who aimed at including "the quieter parents". It would appear that the coordinator was very accepted by parents in the core group (6.1).

Core groups spoke of the job enjoyment of the coordinators, "she loves it...she likes working with parents" and "they enjoy their work". One can gather the sense of self-worth of parents who are valued so much by the coordinators. Job qualities of coordinators, listed by core groups, included that he is "patient, a low key person, [has] great understanding" and "is always available". The fact that the coordinator had a clear job focus was intimated by many core groups. The coor-



dinator went out of his/her way "to accommodate people", helping parents to become "involved in the school" and "building community". This, according to core groups, had consequences for the pupils "who are more secure", who are "going to the library as a result" and whose parents read to children "every day". The "whole life" of the coordinator, parents say, "tells us that we are partners in the education of children" (6.2).

The leadership/facilitation role of the coordinator can be deduced through the "ease of access" parents spoke of. "More help", the "breaking down of barriers", the seeing of another "perspective", the value of "courses" and support of their children were also recounted. Core groups stated that coordinators "listened to" parents and communicated in many forms, using non-verbal, verbal, and written methods. However, some groups held that it would "take years for the school to be looked at as a safe place" despite the fact that they were very positive about the frequency and the clarity of information they received from coordinators. Core groups also held that it was "difficult to get our suggestions done, [we were] listened to but difficult to achieve". They believed that "parents don't get enough recognition from public bodies and from the community" (6.3).

Core groups felt that the "important issues" for coordinators were "being there for people", communication "between home and school" and being a "friendly", "confidential" and "reliable" person. Core groups claimed that coordinators fostered partnership by encouraging parents and teachers to "have children's education as interest", by providing all types of training, and through home visitation (6.4).

When asked how the scheme could be improved core groups sought an extension of the scheme and of its services, further finance, a counselling service and the improvement of many administration issues within the school in general (6.5).

The foregoing illustrates that:

- Core groups acknowledged the personal and work traits of the coordinator.
- Core groups claimed that coordinators enjoyed the job, were people of high quality in relation to work and were very focused.
- Core groups clearly outlined the role of the coordinators in leadership /facilitation including their ability to communicate.
- Core groups spoke of the fact that coordinators fostered partnership by encouraging parents and teachers to work together in the interests of children.
- Core groups sought an extension of HSCL scheme services and finance and the improvement of administration issues within the school.

### **Coordinators**

Coordinators held positive views about themselves as persons and in relation to their work. In short they viewed themselves as "warm", "non-judgemental" and "competent". They believed that staff would view them as "organised and talented" and as unafraid in trying "to build on the strengths and opportunities available to staff". Other coordinators held that they were still viewed as "some sort of ambulance service" while staff would approach them "much more than in the beginning". Coordinators were aware of the need "to listen more" and to bring staff on board (6.1).

"Respect" was a value for coordinators. Keeping "in touch with the home and with parents" was also a value. It was "the most powerful aid you could have to a successful life as a teacher". Having parents "more involved in education" and "the opening of teachers' eyes, very slowly" was a priority for coordinators. All coordinators had very positive comments about the HSCL scheme and all admit

that their perception of parents, teachers, possibilities, and personal power had changed. Coordinators aimed at reaching the marginalised. They also felt more "grounded" in their role (6.2).

On the whole coordinators expressed the view that they saw themselves as "leading" rather than "reacting". In relation to their leadership role coordinators held that they directed parents to their own learning, quietly being an influence to teachers, challenging both parents and teachers, taking on personal responsibility as coordinator, opening up new initiatives, and being involved in planning. Most coordinators perceived their communication with parents to be "very good". Their communication with staff varied from staff feeling "well informed" and "very supportive now" to staff "knowing the rationale" of HSCL but "not necessarily accepting it". Coordinators seemed to prefer verbal and informal communication methods but held that outcomes from their communication with staff left a lot to be desired. Other communication problems for coordinators were named as "a lack of time" difficulties with the "Area Partnerships (2.4.2.1) and the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) " in relation to "form filling for funding" and the fact that staffs were "under great pressures" (6.3).

Some "important issues" for coordinators were to get "parent participation in children's education" and to involve "everybody, but most of all the teachers". Coordinators believed that they fostered partnership when they "treated everybody the same", kept "encouraging parents and teachers to work together", made changes in their own personal lives, promoted joint policy making, encouraged "outreach meetings" in order to "prevent early school leaving", held Local Committee meetings" and "constantly involved parents, teachers and students" (6.4).

Coordinators emphasised the "team" approach with all groups as the way forward for coordinators themselves and for those they worked with (6.5).

From the foregoing it can be concluded that:

- Coordinators had a positive self image in relation to themselves and their work.
- Coordinators held "respect" for others as a value, so too was "keeping in touch with the home", the "opening of teachers' eyes" and being "grounded" in their role.
- Coordinators spoke of their leadership, of directing parents towards their own learning, of being an "influence" to teachers and of being involved in planning.
- Coordinators spoke of many ways of fostering partnership but their views can be summed up as "encouraging parents and teachers to work together".
- Coordinators emphasised a "team" approach as the way of the future.

### **Chairpersons**

Almost half of the chairpersons of the sixteen selected schools held that "empowerment of parents" and "partnership" were part of the value and belief system of the coordinators. Other values were "community development", "staff-school change" and "benefits for children" (6.2).

A high percentage of chairpersons spoke affirmatively regarding the coordinator's communication with the Board of Management, parents, teachers, community personnel and with the chairperson himself/herself (6.3).

In order to further develop the HSCL scheme chairpersons spoke of increased staffing and funding for schools. They also emphasised a deeper "awareness" amongst staff members, and community members, on the part of the BOM. They believed that a policy on HSCL would improve matters (6.5).

### **Individual parents in the sixteen selected schools**

Since the "core groups" of parents interviewed had involved themselves closely with the work of the coordinator the view of a cohort of "individual parents" was sought. A total of 123 parents were circularised and 93.5 per cent responded. This questionnaire sought similar information to that pursued in the interviews (6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4).

Among the randomly selected parents a high percentage knew the coordinator "very well" and felt him/her to be "a friend". Over two-thirds of the parents got "a lot of news" from the coordinator. Just over one third of the parents went to the parents' room, while almost a quarter had done courses. More than half of the parents liked the coordinator to visit them in their own home. Of the 115 parents who responded over two-thirds met the coordinator in at least one of the following locations: the parents' room, at courses, or during home visitation.

Some gains mentioned by parents, from working with coordinators were "great confidence" and "benefit" when at home with their children.

From the foregoing it can be concluded that:

- The communication of coordinators seems high and their acceptance by parents was likewise.
- About one third of the parents went to the parents' room, almost a quarter had done courses while more than half were met on home visits. All of this portrays the role of the coordinators in a very positive light.
- "Great confidence" and "benefit" when with their children were recounted by parents.

### **6.8 CONCLUSION**

Chapter Six was an obvious and necessary piece of research as it allowed for a cross-check on the research findings of Chapters Four and Five. Being qualitative research and interview it allowed people to be more at ease and to mention the things both positive, and negative, that may not have emerged in the question-

naire. The author as interviewer completed those interviews over a period of three months. It is perhaps important to note that at the time of interview and immediately before, the author had done substantial analysis on the questionnaires and was therefore very alert either to confirmation or negation of the main questionnaire findings.

That being said, one can view Chapter Six as not affording any seriously new insights. The interviews did not give evidence of negative elements which had not already surfaced in the questionnaires. One result of the interviews which is not susceptible of scientific quantification is the warmth and enthusiasm of others for the coordinators. The author would have been slow to speak so eagerly about the coordinators merely on the basis of the questionnaire but the interviews have done it in a different way. Likewise one can see a sense of personal commitment, fulfilment and professional satisfaction on the part of the coordinators themselves.

All this being said, the interviews, in recording a strong positive appreciation of the HSCL scheme and particularly of the coordinators, nevertheless are not starry-eyed, in that whilst recognising achievement, everybody involved acknowledges that much more needs to be done. Home visitation is not fully implemented but the interviews show how much appreciated it was by parents. Theoretical worries about home visitation that it might for instance be regarded as intrusive, particularly in low-income families, are not borne out by the interviews. Another issue that one might wonder about, namely, whether the coordinators might be other than a teacher seems decisively answered on the part of parents who value what is probably a combination of the status, professionalism and experience of the coordinator. It was similarly responded to by the coordinators themselves who sense that acceptance on the part of other teachers and perhaps

the principals is to a large extent conditioned by the coordinator being a teacher. Furthermore, though a lot of the coordinator skills such as partnership, listening and HSCL philosophy, could be taught to open minded parents, it is hard to see how familiarity with curriculum and the actual tensions of the classroom, which a teacher brings to the job, would somehow be an essential element in the coordinator's background.

***PART THREE***

***EVALUATION***



## CHAPTER 7

### SOME COMPARISONS WITH SCOTLAND

It had come to the attention of the writer that an area in the then Strathclyde region of Scotland might provide a comparative model for the HSCL scheme in Ireland. During a preliminary visit to Glasgow in May 1995, when some interviews were held with key personnel and visits to schools took place, the Ferguslie Park area was identified for research purposes. The "Partnership" had been established in 1988 to bring together key agencies, the community and the private sector in a joint policy to regenerate target areas suffering from multiple deprivation (see Gaster et al. 1995: 13-24 and 121 - 166). The core issues for development identified by the Ferguslie Park Partnership Strategy in 1989 were unemployment, poverty, the environment, housing and training. In 1990, education was added as a further core issue.

Ferguslie Park was chosen for comparison because, from a socio-economic point of view, it closely resembled the areas in which the HSCL scheme had been established in Ireland. From the point of view of partnership being central and the involvement of parents in education there were also similarities. Listening to parents, the identifying of local needs and responding where possible, networking with other professionals and agencies and with local people were common strands. The establishing of area-based committees was another similar feature as was the vital role of a focused individual, the coordinator.

However, there is one crucial difference between the two schemes, the Irish HSCL scheme was initiated by the Department of Education while the education component of the Partnership Strategy at Ferguslie Park was identified, at local level in 1990, as a missing feature. Most significantly however, the educational initiative took place in the context of a wider socio-economic initiative in Strathclyde Regional Council, therefore it is useful to begin with an outline of the integrated approach before focusing more narrowly on the educational aspect. It was envisaged by the Irish Government that the wider approach would take place in Ireland through the Area Partnerships (2.4.2.1) chiefly from 1992 onwards and through housing regeneration from 1995 approximately. Strictly speaking the Department of Education initiative took place first.

The two research visits to Scotland in May 1995 and November 1995, proved fascinating in terms of involvement and commitment of local people and local agencies.

## **7.1 BACKGROUND TO FERGUSLIE PARK**

In March 1988, H.M. Government published *New Life for Urban Scotland* (Scottish Office, 1988). This document recognised that since the 1970s much had been done to revive Scotland's urban areas and in particular to bring new life to inner city areas. In the 1980s, it was acknowledged that the people living in large peripheral estates were suffering most from social and economic deprivation, had little choice in the type of housing they occupied, had little say in the running of their communities and were most dependent on state benefits and services. All of this led the Government to announce major initiatives in four of Scotland's peripheral housing estates: Castlemilk in Glasgow, Wester Hailes in Edinburgh,

Whitfield in Dundee and Ferguslie Park in Paisley. In each of the estates a Partnership Group, led by the Government's Scottish Office, was set up.

Ferguslie Park is a housing estate which in 1988 was owned and managed by Renfrew District Council. It lies to the north of the town centre of Paisley. Paisley, in turn, lies to the south west of the city of Glasgow and adjacent to Glasgow Airport. At its peak in 1971 Ferguslie Park had a population of 12,200, it currently has about 5,000. Economic and social difficulties in the area led to the demolition of many of the properties. Increasing problems in the area were compounded by its isolation: physical isolation as it was surrounded by four railway lines and social isolation as a result of the stigma and exclusion which local people experienced. Poverty was, and is, a major problem in Ferguslie Park. "It is related to high levels of unemployment which have been a feature of the estate and to the fixed low incomes which are widespread" (Strathclyde Education Department, ca.1993: 5). The rate of male unemployment was just under forty per cent in 1988 and only sixteen per cent of school leavers found employment.

During the 1970s and 1980s initiatives were undertaken to improve conditions in the area. A group of local people became active and entered into dialogue with local agencies. Their agenda was for further development of the area. This group was known as Ferguslie League of Action Groups (FLAG) and later it played a prominent role in the Ferguslie Park Partnership.

## **7.2 THE FERGUSLIE PARK PARTNERSHIP**

The Ferguslie Park Partnership was initiated in 1989, it is commonly referred to as "the Partnership". The Partnership committed itself to achieving sustainable regeneration of the area over a ten year period. Priority areas for action were:

- Housing and Environment (7.2.1);

- Poverty and Social Issues(7.2.2);
- Training and Employment (7.2.3);
- Education, a further core issue which was added in 1990 (7.2.4).

The views of the local community were heard through Ferguslie League of Action Groups (FLAG) and the private sector also joined as partners by means of the Business Support Group (BSG). These two groups had agents of each of the sectors they represented and acted as a support group in each case.

The Ferguslie Park BSG is one of fourteen Business Support Groups operating in Scotland, under the auspices of a quango, Scottish Business in the Community. Their aim is to promote the involvement of business in local communities. Through the vehicles of Training and Employment and Education the BSG complements and supports the work of the Ferguslie Park Partnership. The initiatives are "largely aimed at young people and designed to broaden their horizons, encourage enterprise, reduce dependency and identify and support opportunity" (Ferguslie Park Partnership, ca.1995b). They include placements for pupils, business awareness programmes and training programmes. The BSG "does not seek financial contributions but rather asks members to give advice, expertise, time and commitment to what is a medium and long-term association with the communities in Ferguslie" (Ibid.).

Ferguslie Park Community Forum took over the lead community role from FLAG in 1993. Its aim was to spread the task of representing local opinion throughout the regeneration structures which the Partnership had developed and to ensure communication. The Forum was clear that its role was not to dictate policy to various organisations but rather to formulate policy on the basis of advice received from these organisations.

### 7.2.1 HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT

On housing the partnership declared its objectives:

- to achieve sustained improvement in the supply and quality of housing and its immediate environment;
- to build upon community involvement and responsibility in the ownership and management of housing;
- to provide greater choice through diversification of tenure and management (Ferguslie Park Partnership, 1989: 28-29).

Community involvement and responsibility has been central to the whole process of agreeing the strategy for land use. The growth of Ferguslie Park Housing Association, with its management committee of local tenants, has given a key role to local people to exercise responsibility over a major part of their lives. The Community Forum has been a partner in all the Partnership decisions regarding the physical regeneration of the area, the design of new houses and the modernisation of existing houses. By the end of the Partnership, it expected that the local authority would account for fifty to sixty per cent of houses with the balance fairly evenly split between housing associations and owner-occupier.

The objectives of the Partnership relating to the environment are as follows:

- to achieve sustained improvement in the quality of the environment for the benefit of local residents;
- to ensure that local facilities are provided to meet the needs of existing and future residents (Ibid., 33).

When the Partnership started there were many large neglected spaces in the Ferguslie Park area. The Partnership aimed at creating "high amenity areas" with an emphasis on safety. Three "village greens" were in different stages of development with work on two of them under way and a third one just beginning. According to local people the most significant development environmentally was the construction of a new road, breaking out from the estate through an old railway

embankment, thereby reducing physical isolation and linking the estate with the rest of Renfrewshire.

The provision of a Community Centre was seen as vital for services and also as a focal point in Ferguslie Park. An application for funding was made early in 1992 to the then European Commission and funding of 1.5 million sterling was granted in May of that year. The project cost 4.6 million sterling and was completed, with continuing consultation with the local community, in April 1995. The new Tannahill Centre is controlled by Ferguslie Park Community Centre Limited (FPCC Ltd.). The Centre's facilities include: covered-in open space, Community Forum, Health Project, Elderly Forum, Community Library, Clinic, Surgery for GP, Community Nursery, Housing Association Offices, three shops, multi-use hall and a café. The provision of high amenity and good quality services close to where people live was designed to be a substantial help to those whose low-income makes travel to more distant facilities difficult.

The Centre is built around a central space. A café is run by a franchise appointed by Ferguslie Park Community Centre. As well as catering for functions in the multi-use hall the café has the use of most of the open space. There are two main areas designated for community use, the Ferguslie Park Community Forum offices and a suite of rooms for the elderly. In the Tannahill Centre the health clinic has consulting rooms for general health issues, dental surgery, chiropody and health and welfare, with accommodation for visiting nurses and three general practitioners.

Ferguslie Park Housing Association now acts as landlord for many residents in the area. The Association, with a management committee of local tenants, has a suite of offices, a meeting room and a small reception area in the Centre. The

residents of Ferguslie Park state that there is "ease of access" for them to the various facilities. In addition to the public open space the other main focal point of the Tannahill Centre is the multi-use hall which can accommodate up to 200 people and many more when the foyer area is opened up and the public open space is included. The Hall, which has high quality technical equipment, is available to the local community and to public sector, private and commercial users. The hall is used for community events, theatre performances, video shows, seminars and is designed to be an attractive venue for weddings.

### **7.2.2 POVERTY AND SOCIAL ISSUES**

The Poverty and Social Issues Group seeks to tackle the social deprivation that exists within Ferguslie Park. There is a high level of dependency on benefits among residents so a comprehensive advice service with seven different agencies is provided. The agencies range from welfare rights through to benefits, to money advice and fuel advice services. Issues worked on so far include diet, chiropody services and child safety. "On the agenda for the future is the issue of teenage pregnancies, which at twenty-three per cent of all births in Ferguslie Park, is more than twice the average for Renfrew District" (Ferguslie Park Partnership, ca.1995b.).

Ferguslie Park has a higher proportion of young people under twenty-five years of age than any other area in Paisley. The main principle underlying the Youth Strategy is "to empower the young people, who account for fifty-five per cent of the population of the estate and to consult with them on any developments within Ferguslie Park" (Ibid.). A Youth Challenge Budget has been established and is managed by young people.

### 7.2.3 TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

The Training and Employment initiatives are designed to train people for specific employment prospects. Many of the facilities that the Partnership offers, such as the Employment Office and the Job Club, are available nation-wide. However, they are more effective, according to local people, because they can be accessed from the Partnership Offices in the heart of the estate.

From a visit to the COATES unit (Community Access to Training, Education, Employment and Study) and in meeting with personnel who headed these initiatives and with recipients of the services the following can be noted. *Skillbase* enables sixteen to eighteen year olds who lack basic skills in reading and writing to acquire them. Adult Basic Education can also be offered where numeracy and literacy problems are a major drawback. *Skillbase* also prepares young people for interviews. *Training for Work* is designed to train people for a particular form of employment. Among the courses run in Ferguslie Park have been caring for the elderly, builders' labourers, bus drivers and those in warehousing. *Skillbase* and *Training for Work* is sponsored by the conglomerate Grand Metropolitan, called the "Grand Met Trust Training in Partnership"; British Telecom is also a major sponsor. Grand Met Trust covers the United Kingdom. *Jobclub* provides the unemployed with free access to phones, newspapers and stamps for job hunting. Advice is given on the filling in of Curricula Vitae and interview techniques.

*Employee Upskilling* is run through the Partnership to improve the skills and qualifications of people already in work, for example, a labourer training to be a forklift driver; a more long-term example would be such as an employee working for a college qualification on a day-release basis. The unemployed may also use this facility to update and improve skills. *Customised Training* takes place when



the Partnership identifies niches in the labour market. When opportunities are identified, training can be designed accordingly. Customised Training has included such jobs as construction, hotel and bar work, clerical work, nursery care and industrial sewing. Many of these activities have received European Social Funding (ESF). *Opportunistic Training* is the term used by the Partnership for such matters as the relationship with some employers who approach the Partnership requesting trainees for particular jobs. Opportunistic Training has included driving car, bus and forklift and first aid courses.

*Support and Aftercare* is provided. The Training and Employment team make every effort to ensure that the transition from unemployment to work is as smooth as possible.

#### 7.2.4 EDUCATION

In its strategy document *A Pattern for New Life* published in 1989 the Ferguslie Park Partnership set an objective for education "to improve employment prospects and the general quality of residents' lives through education and training" (Ferguslie Park Partnership, 1989: 41). The Partnership encouraged the community to have a confidence in and commitment to education "as a means of enhancing their marketable skills and therefore their employment prospects" (Ibid.). Subsequently, the Partnership recognised education as a vital means of underpinning the whole regeneration process, economic, physical and social, in Ferguslie Park, "supporting long-term stability and realising the potential of the young people" (Ibid.). At this point the Partnership approached the schools in the area.

Over the years the problems associated with education in an area of multiple deprivation became obvious in Ferguslie Park. In *Education and New Life* they are named as:

- poor attendance;
- lack of confidence and self- esteem;
- low attainment;
- behavioural standards which have rendered ineffective the usual discipline procedures;
- family situations with such major stress that little energy is left for parents to support children and young people (Strathclyde Education Department, ca.1993: 6).

Statistical information had been collected in June 1991 to develop an "education-map" in Ferguslie Park of secondary age pupils. In addition to the above points the following emerged "[a] high leaving rate at the earliest opportunity, limited opportunity for high level training or employment, [and] few entering further/higher education" (Ibid., 19).

Education in Ferguslie Park has to be seen in the context of the Strathclyde

Mission Statement:

Strathclyde Education Department aims to:

- provide a full range of courses and services;
- enable all individuals to achieve their potential;
- supply suitable premises and resources;
- encourage access to education throughout life;
- foster genuine partnership in education;
- promote equal opportunity and social justice;
- support economic growth and prosperity (Strathclyde Council Education Department).

In the Spring of 1991, the process of drawing up an Education Strategy for Ferguslie Park was initiated when the education sub-group of the Partnership was formed. The strategy was developed over a two year period. Central to the preparation of the strategy was the conviction that "the education of young people places responsibilities on various partners - school staff, parents, young people themselves, representatives of industry and others not directly involved in the formal education process" (Ferguslie Park Partnership, ca.1993: 15). The sub-

group recognised the value of regular consultation locally "to inform its discussions" (Ibid.,17). Throughout, the priority was consultation with parents, school board members, community representatives, staff of the Education Department, young people and the many partners in the Partnership. The "lengthy and careful consultation" with the community brought to light the following key areas for action:

- Improving Relationships;
- Attendance/Truancy;
- Bullying;
- Consultation and Communication;
- Consultation with Young People;
- Primary - Secondary Transfer and Continuing Progress;
- Pre-5 Education;
- Post-16 Education and Support;
- Support to Partnership Strategy.

These are the nine elements in the Education Strategy of the Ferguslie Park Partnership. The Partnership and the education authority, through Renfrew Division, came together to develop the Strategy. Together they aimed to meet the on-going needs of the community. In each element there is a pledge made by schools/services, the Education Department and the community. New action is then highlighted. We will now outline the nine key areas for action in Education identified by the Education Strategy and including local parents.

**Improving Relationships** was the first element identified by the Education Strategy. The issue of Partnership is addressed by three pledges, one for each category.

*The pledge for schools/services* included the provision of a warm welcome for parents, regular communication, a fuller understanding of how Home School Employment Partnership (HSEP) can support families, an understanding of the needs of the area and ways of encouraging more parental involvement in their children's education. *The pledge for the Education Department* included: staff development, an opportunity for parents and teachers to attend courses, for example, drug awareness and the provision of facilities in all schools to enable parents to become involved in their children's education. *The pledge for the Community* was to work with children to develop an atmosphere in the community to enable them to benefit from educational participation. Above all, the new action would need to provide opportunities for contact between parents and education staff.

**Attendance and Truancy** was identified as a key area by the Education Strategy and parents. *For the important area of attendance and truancy the pledge emerged* as follows: the development of reward-based systems and group work to assist attendance, the reviewing of homework policies, the provision of homework support and the development of methods to assist pupils who are absent through illness. On-going encouragement by the community was considered essential. The new action deemed necessary was "to provide access to crèche facilities to allow young parents to complete a basic education" (Ferguslie Park Partnership, ca.1993: 24).

**Bullying** was the third element in the Education Strategy of the Ferguslie Park Partnership. *Schools pledged* to "make a prompt response to bullying...consistently as a staff...the issue will be treated seriously and confidentially...self-evaluate on bullying...teach constructive play and social activities" (Ibid., 25). The Education Department pledged to provide for constructive play

and support materials. The community pledged support for anti-bullying campaigns and for the provision of a "safe environment" (Ibid.). Immediate action was required to make play grounds "more suitable for constructive play", and "parental/community involvement in structured play activities in school" was welcomed (Ibid.). Closer liaison with Strathclyde Police "to continue initiatives against bullying" was highlighted (Ibid.). Later we shall refer further to an interview with the Strathclyde Community Police which will be outlined.

**Consultation and Communication** enabled schools "to review arrangements to assist contact with parents" holding meetings in the community for parents of secondary school pupils (Ibid., 26). Efforts to provide workshops for parents to support children's learning were made and access to parents' rooms was encouraged. The Strathclyde Education Department *pledged support for work-shadowing* by school staff in the community and highlighted a complaints procedure. The Community sought to train educational staff in new community structures. The summary of action that required immediate attention included "regular dialogue between parents, professionals and Partnership agencies at local conferences" and at social events (Ibid.). The need for an education newsletter was also highlighted.

**Consultation with Young People** was identified as a key element of the Education Strategy. Opportunities to include *young people formally in curriculum discussions was pledged by schools*, as part of the Education Strategy and their involvement in class and year councils was encouraged. A commitment to help "to develop young people's negotiating skills" was made (Ibid., 27). The Education Department promised to give support to pupil councils and "to support a young people's conference" (Ibid.). In order to achieve its aims it *pledged support to meeting "staff development needs"* and to "review the delivery of the curriculum"

(Ibid.). The Education Department sought "further collaboration between the community education service and the schools sector" (Ibid.). *The pledge from the people of the community* embraced taking up "opportunities for consultation" the "practice of negotiation" and "the discussion of educational topics" (Ibid.). Immediate action included the need to involve young people from Primary 4 to Secondary 6, ways of promoting "informal self education and social education" and opportunities for business people and young people "to discuss each other's expectations" (Ibid.).

**Primary-Secondary Transfer and Continuing Progress** was the sixth element in the Education Strategy and dealt with transfer from primary to secondary and with progress. The aim of the schools was to begin primary-secondary transfer initiatives before Primary 7 with opportunities for increased contact with secondary schools in the final term of Primary 7 (P7). Their commitment was to support pupils particularly in Secondary 1 (S1) and to ensure the "best possible start at this level" (Ibid., 28). The Strathclyde *Education Department pledged to review "the effects of the gender balance in school staff on pupils"* and "to review the operation of Compact in relation to goal setting" (Ibid.). "Compact" is an agreement between young people in their final years of compulsory education and local employers. Community members committed themselves "to discuss primary-secondary transfer procedures in local schools" and "to clarify concerns about S1 and beyond" (Ibid.).

**Pre-5 Education** figured as a key element in the Education Strategy. As will be noted below from interviews etc. one has the impression that much of the commitment pledged by pre-5 services has been delivered. For example, the involvement of parents in their children's education and their participation in pre-5 serv-

ices together with an awareness raising of the pre-5 curriculum is much in evidence. Coordinated links with primary schools and the encouragement of "parents' confidence in their own skills and knowledge" is also obvious (Ibid., 29). *The Education Department pledged a response to local needs.* The Community promised "an area link-up group with professionals" and the development of parental skills and confidence "through activities in the pre-5 facilities" (Ibid.). The immediate reaction required from the Partnership was "increased levels of pre-5 education and care for parents in employment/training" (Ibid.).

**Post-16 Education and Support** for those over sixteen years was another element in the Education Strategy. *Schools pledged to liaise with employers* "to increase young people's awareness about the world of work" (Ibid., 30). They also promised on-going educational opportunity within the community. In addition the Education Department promised "continuing education for young people...bursary application forms...access to higher education...market the potential of young people...support families of young people with special education needs" (Ibid.). The community had the same commitment with an additional view of highlighting "the financial difficulties which prevent many young people from entering further education or training" (Ibid.). Among the plans for immediate action were "a Compact for vulnerable 16-18 year-old leavers" with education and training provision within the community and "increased access to higher education, particularly at the University of Paisley" (Ibid.).

**Support to the Partnership Strategy** was *pledged by all the partners for economic, physical and social regeneration* through the "promotion of good practice and successes in the area", thereby raising the image of Ferguslie Park (Ibid., 31).

### 7.3 MAINSTREAM PROVISION IN EDUCATION

Education in the Strathclyde region was managed operationally in six divisions, with Renfrew Division having responsibility for Ferguslie Park at the time the writer was researching there. A full range of the Strathclyde Education Department's mainstream resources were available to families in or near the Ferguslie Park Estate. The following supply **Pre-5** services in Ferguslie Park: Ferguslie Park Community Nursery, Craigielea Nursery Class, Douglas Street Nursery, Glencoats Nursery School, St. Fergus' Nursery Class and Hillview Nursery. The following **Primary Schools** serve Ferguslie Park: Craigielea, Ferguslie and St. Fergus' (inside Ferguslie Park), Mossvale, St. James', St. Mary's and West (outside Ferguslie Park). Castlehead High, Merksworth High and St. Mirin's High (all outside Ferguslie Park) are the **Secondary Schools** which serve the Ferguslie Park area.

*Community Education Service* is provided through the north Paisley area to young people and adults in the Ferguslie Park community. This service develops social and personal skills with young people in preparation for employment. *Special Educational Needs Provision* offers support for children and young people with learning difficulties. Behavioural support and support for children with disabilities is also available. The psychological service provides advice on all special needs and every school serving Ferguslie Park has a psychologist who visits on a regular basis. *The Careers Service* allocates careers officers to secondary schools "to provide information and guidance to young people and also placement assistance for school leavers into suitable employment, training and education" (Strathclyde Education Department, 1993: 9). An outreach careers officer visits Fergus-



lie Park on a weekly basis "to provide continued support for unemployed young people" and "guidance and information" to adults (Ibid.). The Reid Kerr College offers outreach in Ferguslie Park through the Open Learning Centre.

### **Services in Areas of Priority Treatment (APT)**

*Additional teaching staff* have been appointed to all of the Strathclyde Region's designated areas for priority treatment. According to *Education and New Life* "there is full co-operation and collaboration between the Departments of social work, police, health and the Departments of Arts and Libraries and Sports" (The Scottish Office, 1993: 9). The Education Department "brings substantial resources and commitment to the Partnership setting, where there are opportunities to enhance the service to the local community" (Ibid., 9-10).

Schools visited did not view the Education Strategy of the Partnership as something imposed on them. The head or a senior teacher from most of the schools was a member of the education sub-group, as were members of the Home, School, Employment Partnership (HSEP). "School and services development plans" were not side-stepped, on the contrary they worked within "the development planning context" which is recognised as "the national vehicle for managing change in the education service" (Ibid., 32).

The expectation was that schools and services would: "fully reflect in their development plans the needs of the area, identify key areas of concern for their own school/service and set targets accordingly and develop practical action in the light of the particular needs highlighted" (Ibid.). This expectation still prevails.

### **The Home School Employment Partnership**

The Home School Employment Partnership (HSEP) is an Urban Programme project which has been developed in Ferguslie Park and Shortroods in Paisley. The

main aim of the project is to increase the educational attainment of young people by developing close relationships between home and school and ensuring that the educational system responds in an appropriate way to the needs of young people and their families. As already noted above, Ferguslie Park is one of four government led multi-agency Partnerships with a strategy for regeneration of the area. The HSEP is recognised as central to the overall regeneration strategy and 2.5 million sterling funding, over seven years, was agreed for the project through the Ferguslie Park delegated Urban Programme budget.

Twelve project staff were recruited in 1991 from a variety of professional backgrounds in all sectors of teaching, adult and community education, social work, pre-5 and careers. The principal project officer, whose background is community work, leads the team and the day-to-day running of each area team is overseen by an area team officer. The HSEP teams work with four pre-5 establishments, seven primary schools and three secondary schools. They also link with four schools for children with special educational needs. They are based in the three local secondary schools, Castlehead High, Merksworth High and St. Mirin's High.

In the review of the work of HSEP in October 1992 a comprehensive structure for continuing communication had been established. A parents' representative group was meeting bi-monthly, a project advisory group was advising the principal project officer and there were regular home, school, community liaison meetings including home visitation. At this early stage the project was seeking to establish a transferable model and not just one restricted to special initiative areas.

During the mid-term evaluation of HSEP in 1995, it was established that HSEP had working contact with 640 of the 1,000 families in the Ferguslie Park area.

The evaluation found "considerable" success rates in forging links with families. Home visiting "has been endorsed as successful by parents, by both secondary and primary school staff, by young people...by HSEP team...(and by) social workers" (Robertson, 1995: 49). There was much apprehension by parents in communicating with the secondary sector. Parents valued information, encouragement and the easy and responsive contact with HSEP.

Increased attendance at school was seen as "encouraging" and identifying key times in schooling as priorities for support, for example, transition "seems to have paid dividends" (Ibid.). The links between the work of guidance staff, teachers and HSEP staff brought home to many young people "the idea that home and school were linked and had shared goals for young people" (Ibid., 50).

Future challenges for HSEP, according to the evaluation, include directing and supporting young people towards and in work. The content and delivery of the curriculum "remains a considerable challenge" for HSEP. While links with parents, young people, guidance, learning and support specialists "have been successfully developed" the links "between class teachers and some levels of school management seem less robust" (Ibid., 51). The report states that the "further development of partnership with class teachers is an apposite task for the future" (Ibid.).

HSEP workers viewed home visitation as a key strategy in establishing contact with parents, which they believed had to be done with sensitivity and not confused with the role of attendance officers. They aimed to establish that any participation on the part of parents had to be on a voluntary basis. From June 1994 to June 1995 the HSEP team had contact with parents on 2,051 occasions. The focus of their visits was as follows: curriculum 22.3 per cent, transition 11.2 per cent, attendance 11.9 per cent, supervised study 1.5 per cent, behavioural issues 9.3 per

cent, requests from parents 8.6 per cent, careers related issues 13.1 per cent, requests from school 9.7 per cent, general issues 12.4 per cent. The outcome from these visits was a further 2,606 visits: dealing with follow up issues 19.3 per cent, contact with schools 26.6 per cent, interview with pupils 8.1 per cent, further meeting arrangements 14.9 per cent and inter-agency contact 8.2 per cent. No further action was required by 22.9 per cent of cases. The focus and outcomes are substantiated in the Ferguslie Park, *Home School Employment Partnership Annual Report 1994-95*.

The parents who were interviewed expressed appreciation of the method and process used by the HSEP team. The parents were very much low income people with minimal formal schooling. Their appreciation of the HSEP team members is very similar to that of parents and coordinators in Ireland. It was obvious that trust at a very deep level had developed.

In the year prior to the research visit, the HSEP team involved teachers in home visitation. Both Ferguslie and St. Fergus' Primary School pre-entrants were visited by a HSEP member and the teacher from Primary One (P1). Home visits were made jointly with guidance staff at Merksworth High to facilitate the transition from Primary Seven to Secondary One (P7-S1). Materials for training purposes during home visitation were also devised.

The HSEP team supported young people at secondary level through supported study and through their collaboration with the guidance staff. They contributed to the organisation of work experience for pupils in S3 and S4. HSEP liaised with agencies such as the psychological services and social work department to facilitate the most appropriate support for young people with difficulties. In the evaluation mid-way in the seven year span of HSEP, a report in 1995 stated that

there was a high level of contact with pupils from S1 to S4. In talking to HSEP workers the question in their minds related to the quality of their work and the possibilities of raising educational achievement. Above all HSEP sought "to improve the service it provides to the local community, its client" (*Quality in Education, University of Strathclyde: Partnership For Progress, 1995: 11*). One might note this usage of "client" in Strathclyde: its primary meaning is the community which clearly involved the pupil in a significant place.

In an interview with the principal project officer and five other members of the HSEP team, over two visits to Ferguslie, the following emerged: there was "a high level of job satisfaction among HSEP workers". Working hours and length of terms were "much longer than those of schools but these did not arise as issues". HSEP members had "no formal teaching commitment" and "were available to families through home visitation" and they "organised activities in schools and in the Tannahill Centre". The focus of their work was "on transition programmes from pre-5 to primary to secondary, support in S2 with choices for standard grade courses and transition between school and further/higher education".

#### **7.4 INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

The Director of Education in what was the Strathclyde area, made himself available for interview in May 1995. The interview with him lasted about two hours.

Topics covered included:

- The School Board;
- Parent Associations;
- Strathclyde Mission Statement;
- the Inspectorate and Parents;
- Parents' Consultation Group on the Curriculum (PCGC);

- homework/home learning and Parent Prompts and
- the six challenges of Partnership.

We now outline each of the topics as covered in that interview.

**The School Board:** In 1988 School Boards were set up in Scotland and given some power by legislation. Of the schools in Strathclyde 81.8 per cent had a School Board by January 1994. According to the Director the boards tend to be dominated by the middle class as a short article of 300 words has to be written by prospective candidates, outlining reasons for becoming board members. Boards do not assess the curriculum in any way and despite legislation there is little interest in home/school liaison. The Director advised "to treat with caution" the legislation on home/school contact. He claimed that "nothing much is happening" on school boards.

**Parent Associations:** The Director regretted that parent/teacher associations were not set up. Parent associations were really involved in fund-raising and in the handling of complaints in order to support teachers.

**Strathclyde Mission Statement:** The Director outlined the Strathclyde Mission Statement which seeks:

- to provide a full range of courses and services;
- to enable all individuals to achieve their potential;
- to supply suitable premises and resources;
- to encourage access to education throughout life;
- to foster genuine partnership in education;
- to promote equal opportunity and social justice;
- to support economic growth and prosperity.

**The Inspectorate and Parents:** Inspection procedures of schools included the interviewing of parents and pupils, members of the community and support agencies. The inspector conducts a survey of parental opinion on issues such as school buildings, how the school deals with enquiries, the dissemination of information, types of contact parents have with the school, parents' views on homework, the children's progress and parents' comments on what they like/dislike about their school. These Inspectors' reports are published.

**Parents Consultation Group on the Curriculum (PCGC):** In January 1992, a consultation group was set up by the Director of Education to discuss learning and teaching issues. This group of thirty parents was drawn from all sectors in each division. The group met on a six-week cycle under the leadership of the Director who had appointed a retired head teacher as consultant for the group. The Education Development Officer for parents met with the group also. The Director pointed out that head teachers at both levels had expressed their discontent that he, as Director, should meet and have direct access to parents. The Director considered that the group had served its purpose, parents were being consulted and he was willing to pass the leadership to the head teachers.

**Homework/home learning and Parent Prompts:** The Director was keen to change the concept of homework, which often caused distress to families, to that of home learning. The Education Department in Strathclyde recognised the importance of parents having information on their child and believed that parents should be informed and involved in the 5 - 14 programme. An important feature are the Parent Prompts which are supplied by the school to enable parents to enter more fully into their children's learning. Prompts can be a page of guidelines, or other appropriate material. Parent Prompts form the basis of a simple activity to

be undertaken within the home to complement the child's learning in school. Parent Prompts draw from the learning which is already occurring within the home. The use of Parent Prompts does not require the parents "to teach" the child nor a teacher "to mark" the outcome. The Prompts provide an opportunity for parent and teacher to talk and to plan together the shared nature of the child's learning.

Around 1992 Logans Primary School in Motherwell was asked to pilot Parent Prompts in P7 at the transition to secondary. The initiative involved materials designed for children and parents to work on together in the home. Parents were given the opportunity of coming to the school to learn about Parent Prompts but "it was the children's enthusiasm for it that counted" according to the head teacher. The writer visited Logans primary school for research purposes in May 1995. Logans had then developed its own "Parent Prompts" programme on social issues. There is a tangible team spirit and an extremely high level of quality preparation for classwork in Logans Primary School. All teachers welcome parents and have parent helpers in the classroom for a number of hours daily. Teachers view parents as "very skilled and more talented than some teachers". The head is particularly quick to praise her staff, explaining that they have been open to the needs of parents as well as showing a keen awareness that what is done in school has consequences in the home and vice versa. Parents and teachers share the same staffroom.

During the interviews, the Director of Education named six challenges to partnership, they were:

- reducing language barriers;
- linking home, school and community;
- capitalising on existing links;



- recognising points of contact;
- finding a framework;
- going beyond programmes.

References to parents were now included in almost every policy document with the role of parents reflected in: policy, practice, programmes, performance, personnel and process.

The Director drew attention to work done by the Regional Development Officer who supported schools in their work with parents. In an interview with the latter the above six areas in which the role of parents is reflected were detailed by him.

**Policy:** The Director sent a report to the Education Committee in 1992 and stated that "time be found for workshops with parents". He addressed the partnership dimension with parents and added that it was "not an option".

**Practice:** Practice shows that many of the programmes with parent involvement have been developed in Areas of Priority Treatment. In the case of Pre-5, play workshops, pre-entrant programmes and family health groups have been organised. In primary schools, class projects, parent-run libraries and home visiting have taken place. At secondary level, supported study, paired reading and course choices were run for parents.

**Programmes:** The Regional Development Officer stated that some programmes have been developed which are unique to Strathclyde including Parent Prompts, Supported Study and Working with Parents for Change. The Parent Prompts programme outlined for Logan's Primary School was initiated by him.

**Performance:** To assist in the monitoring of the effectiveness of the links between policy and practice, the quality of education in Strathclyde establishments is

assessed through the Mission Statement, outlined earlier in the interview with the Director of Education. This includes the evaluation of the quality of the relationship with the parent as it relates to the child's learning. Quality Pointers (QPs) are provided for each of the seven strands of the Mission Statement. Within these QPs are a number of Examples of Good Practice (EGPs). All establishments in Strathclyde are provided with EGPs in each of the Mission Statement strands. In the Mission Statement strand "Foster genuine partnership in education" the Quality Pointer is "Partnership with parents". In this way parents are given advice on how to help with the children's learning and development. In the Example of Good Practice parents are given information about the work of their child, the learning and teaching methods used by the establishment, how they can help their child and pointers relating to their child's progress. For further details see *Partners in Learning 0-5, Quality Assurance: Pre-Five, Primary, and Secondary: Strathclyde*.

**Personnel:** A Regional Development Officer for parents was appointed in 1991 to assist with the development of a number of parental initiatives within the 5 — 14 development. The psychological services staff have developed expertise in working with parents.

**Process:** Parents are now included in the consultation process. The following are examples:

- There is a Parents' Consultation Group on the Curriculum PCGC (described above).
- Parents have been included within regional conferences and parents from the PCGC ran workshops at these conferences.

- Parents from PCGC helped to design a leaflet entitled *The Open School* which featured a list of items which parents considered to be significant in making the establishment a welcoming place.
- Establishments were encouraged to consult with parents in the course of designing their development plan; this included meetings and questionnaires.

As already stated the purpose of visiting Strathclyde in May 1995 was to identify an area for a comparative study with the HSCL scheme in Ireland. The research was initiated in May 1995 and completed in November 1995 with a return visit to Ferguslie Park. During the first visit the COATES unit was visited, as was HSEP, both in Ferguslie. An indepth understanding of mainstream provision in education and services in areas of priority treatment was achieved through visits to schools. The Regional Development Officer for parents accompanied the writer for the three days in May 1995.

## **7.5 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH IN FERGUSLIE PARK**

During November 1995 a further six days were spent in Ferguslie Park when interviews were carried out chiefly in schools.

We will now examine the results of interviews held in the following schools:

- three pre-5 personnel in Ferguslie Park Community Nursery;
- two primary teachers in St. James' Primary School, a four teacher school;
- three primary teachers in Mossvale Primary School, a ten teacher school;
- the head and four parents in St. Fergus' Primary School.
- two Secondary teachers in Merksworth High.

For this report the results of a Likert Scale on "Attitudes and Perceptions of Partnership" and originally developed to assess attitudes to partnership in Ireland, are also included.

The Likert Scale administered in Scotland was the same as the one distributed as part of the questionnaire in Ireland. However, it proved to be very suitable for the Scottish scheme, which has many of the key characteristics and values of the HSCL scheme. Furthermore, the level of reliability of the scale, when administered to the Scottish personnel, proved to be high, with a score of 0.8832 on the scale "Perceptions of Partnership" and 0.8678 on the subscale "Attitudes to Partnership".

The interview schedule in Ferguslie Park took up the key issues of the written questionnaire given to Irish principals, coordinators and teachers and was divided up according to valuing people, communication, structures, development, partnership and outcomes.

#### **7.5.1 VALUING PEOPLE**

**Teachers:** Eight teachers stated that the curriculum was the area they sought to develop most as teachers. On further questioning, curriculum development did not relate to the integration of community needs or views, but to the development of literacy and numeracy. Partnership with parents and the community was named by one head and four teachers. This linked into curriculum development in so far as it sought to involve parents in reading with their children.

The Education Strategy of the Partnership aimed to align with school development planning to meet area needs and embraced much more than parent involvement in children's reading, laudable as this is in itself. The fact that most teachers interviewed at primary level were not aware of the involvement of HSEP with families shows some breakdown in communication and perhaps some contradiction with the ideal. Secondary teachers were aware of HSEP and knew the team members. This could be because the three HSEP teams had secondary schools as

their base. Heads were members of HSEP planning teams but information had not filtered through to primary staff.

Staff development was named by three teachers as an area they would like to develop. From experience in Ireland, this would seem to be an outcome of school development planning. If schools start with parents and the community, then the need emerges for staff/personal development to enable this process to grow. One staff spoke of the openness of the head and of her availability to listen. A deputy head, in Scotland called "depute", got the same rating from staff.

In speaking with teachers it was obvious that they had not given much thought to their own personal/team growth; curriculum development was the priority. Phrases used included that "there was a need of support from the head in discipline issues". This was backed up by "a lack in the support structure in the school" and the view that there was an "inability to meet the needs of teachers". This would seem to be a call for a team approach and for the training underlying it. In voicing the lack in interpersonal relationships in the schools, teachers were also making a statement about their need for personal/team development.

**Pupils:** The development of children and the raising of their self-esteem through "mutual respect...by being fair and consistent" was mentioned by two teachers. All teachers answered in the affirmative to the question relating to respect for pupils, and nine named respect as a priority. Four teachers saw "positive reinforcement" and four others the "recognition of achievement" linked to respect for pupils. This could obviously be linked to the growth of self-esteem. Raising achievement and attendance levels, "whole-school discipline policies" and "equal opportunity" were each named once by teachers as priorities. The pastoral aspect of the schools could be noted in their "care for the well-being and needs of pupils"

which were named by three teachers, the willingness of two teachers "to involve the family in education" and two others "to improve communication between teachers and pupils". The pastoral aspect was visible in Merksworth High in the way teachers spoke to and treated pupils. Responding to "pupil requests", making pupils feel "welcome in school", giving them "freedom of choice", visiting them at home and "relating the environment to the curriculum" were each named once by teachers as a way of respecting pupils. This range of view came from Ferguslie Park Community Nursery and St. James' Primary School and was in keeping with the general atmosphere and views of the heads and teachers.

The findings relating to respect for children can be interpreted as a way of developing the whole child. Formal language such as the integration of the physical, mental, moral, social cultural and religious development of the child used by psychologists and linking into Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" was not used. However, a pastoral type language was in evidence.

"Freedom of choice" was a phrase which spanned from the pre-5 community nursery into the secondary school and shows a respect for the child's decision-making capabilities and the growth of self-esteem. It is generally accepted in the educational field that the child with high self-esteem retains a natural curiosity for learning and is enthusiastic when presented with a challenge. Teachers in the nursery and the secondary were sensitive to the need of keeping realistic the tension between their expectations and the pupil skill levels according to age.

"Positive reinforcement" and the "recognition of achievement" were two other phrases used. The former could be viewed as recognition of effort and would seem laudable. The latter with its emphasis on performance could eventually lead to apathy and avoidance. Every effort on a pupil's part should be regarded as

achievement; the aim is to seek the optimum of pressure which challenges but does not distress.

The central role of the pupil in the school was not highlighted. No one spontaneously mentioned the procedures used in bullying situations, although bullying was discussed when the topic was raised. Bullying is one of the nine elements in the Education Strategy in Ferguslie.

**Parents:** In the area of valuing parents, six teachers named "having a welcome" for them as a priority while four teachers named "availability for parents" as important. It is interesting to note that respect for the parent as prime educator was named only once, though in another case the parent was named as the primary carer. The fact that teachers would show respect for parents "by listening to them" was named twice, as was the value of having a room for parents. Home visits surfaced only once despite the fact that HSEP members recorded the focus and outcomes of visits since December 1993. The record for June 1994 to June 1995 has been outlined above, and pertains to visits where HSEP workers found parents at home. Focus and outcomes were only recorded for visits where workers found parents at home.

The following were all cited once: informing and involving parents, welcoming their problems, allowing them to visit classrooms, helping them with pre-entry programmes and paired reading and having them "represented in decision-making" procedures.

Support for parents experiencing difficulties with children was not raised by teachers but was raised by HSEP workers. The parent was named as the "prime educator" once, at no stage did teachers reflect on the parent as an "equal partner" or even as a serious partner. Apart from fund-raising and the limited involvement

in classroom activities, the parents could be viewed as recipient and passive. Real core issues such as parent involvement in decision-making and their knowledge of and ease with curriculum demands barely surfaced. It is not easy to see the Education Strategy of the Ferguslie Park Partnership in evidence here. Perhaps this is another example of the ideals of the Education Strategy not being realised at ground level.

It would appear that little has been done to define what is meant by parental involvement, nor is it linked to particular outcomes. Training and guidelines are required for school personnel about parents, as well as for parents about schools. Such training is important in view of the near universal conviction of educational theorists of the difference which parents made to children's development and learning (Chapter One).

#### **7.5.2 COMMUNICATION**

**Parents:** All teachers stated that they had communication with parents both individually and collectively in the previous academic year. Communication with parents on an individual basis was related to concerns, fourteen times, which meant that some of the ten teachers interviewed named concerns on more than one occasion. The giving of information was cited six times. The giving of support/encouragement and the allowing of access to curriculum and policy were mentioned once. Meeting parents collectively was specified eight times as a vehicle for communicating information and for enlisting their help and support with the curriculum. The opportunity for hearing parent views was singled out once. In the context of future development teachers spoke of "listening to parents" and of "doing something" about non-attendance at parent meetings.



Despite the fact that the Strathclyde Mission Statement, outlined above, aims at fostering genuine partnership and seeks to develop the potential of the child, there was almost no evidence of this in the labelled priorities of teachers, their valuing of pupils and of parents, and in their communication on an individual and collective basis with parents. Their actual communication was aimed at gaining parental support for the work of the school. This highlights the discontinuity debate between home/community and school outlined in Chapter One. It would appear that parents were on the receiving end with no named opportunity or forum for voicing opinions.

**Teachers:** Communication between staff members seemed to be on a firmer footing. Teachers identified verbal communication seven times, meetings five times and diaries four times among their methods of communication with each other. They checked the nature and quality of this communication through consultation, which was highlighted four times as was communication on a one-to-one basis. The value of an open forum type of situation was noted three times. Listening, being open and honest, and team reviews were each named once. This would imply some level of development in interactive skills and trust building and acceptance. With regard to staff meetings there was no mention of preparation, purpose, content or outcomes. There was hesitancy about the type and function of staff meetings. There was no overall vision relating to staff development, nor to its value in contributing to the quality of pupil learning through increased staff potential.

While teachers supported one another and continued to do so there was little mention, only twice, of a team approach or partnership. The Education Department and the School Board were scarcely mentioned. The Education Strategy sur-

faced a few times. Local community and voluntary and statutory bodies were not mentioned in relation to school involvement, with the exception of the Strathclyde Community Police. The HSEP workers were known to all heads and to the secondary teachers interviewed. It does appear that services could be more valued in terms of rights and responsibilities, of gifts and talents. When these are not given scope within the school community, the focus of education is quite narrow.

Where there is discontinuity between the home and community life and the school life of pupils and parents, is it possible to have quality communication? One would have to question how the school's sense of purpose could be communicated from the management structure to staff, parents and the wider community. Only two of the schools visited spoke of the importance of the school ethos and had a sense of its various aspects.

### **7.5.3 STRUCTURES**

In relation to the development of the School Plan/Vision-Mission Statement, four teachers claimed that they were involved in it on four occasions, one claimed they were involved 2-4 times and five claimed that they were involved once. In its revision, three claimed that they revised it more than four times, while three claimed they revised it 2-4 times. Two teachers said that there was no revision. There was consistency across schools in these outcomes. In relation to consultation on uniform, homework and discipline, six teachers claimed that parents were not consulted at all in any of the three areas. Two teachers said that parents were consulted once about uniform, and two said that they were consulted 2-4 times. In relation to homework, one teacher said that parents were consulted once, one other teacher said that they were consulted 2-4 times, while two others said that they were consulted more than four times. On discipline issues, two teachers said that

parents were consulted once, two teachers said that parents were consulted 2-4 times and one teacher said that this happened more than four times. This reflects the findings of the question dealing with feedback from individuals, groups and agencies. Relating to individuals, feedback from parents was sought through questionnaires on three different occasions, verbally four times and from individual parents in a parents' room twice. On the group level, feedback was sought through parent meetings twice.

All schools, however, identified a very low attendance at meetings, often with more teachers present than parents. At agency level, feedback was sought through the Education Strategy group twice and through community meetings once. Parents were part of these groups. This shows some consistency with the ideals of the Strathclyde Mission Statement and the Ferguslie Park Education Strategy. However, the parents' voice on the School Board was almost nil and there was little mention of parent councils. In fact neither was volunteered in any answer until it was brought up in the interview. It would appear that the perception of teachers is that parents are consulted but the nature, value and influence of that consultation has not emerged with any clarity nor has it had major significance. This is confirmed in the interview with the Director of Education in May 1995, outlined above (7.4).

Evaluation in school subject areas was carried out in English and Mathematics through standardised testing methods. In other curricular areas including History, Geography, Civics, Computers and Science, performance was matched to teacher planning by individual teachers. Observation in the classroom setting and video observation was used by the three teachers interviewed in one primary school. Artwork was displayed in the three primary schools visited. One of the two sec-

ondary teachers interviewed said that final examination results were analysed and that this was the primary way of evaluating the whole school.

Despite the level of community involvement in the Ferguslie Park Partnership and pledges from the Community outlined above in Ferguslie Park, Education Strategy teachers did not mention voluntary or statutory individuals, groups or agencies as having an influence on the life of the school from the standpoint of input and evaluation. The Strathclyde Community Police was the one exception.

During an interview with two members of the Strathclyde Community Police they outlined their role as one of affiliation with schools, local tenants associations, residents' associations and the community in general. They "guided" one school in a situation where "violence was threatened from outside", they visited the classes of the area frequently, they held mock trials which were drug-related in the secondary school and they took part in school plays. In 1992 before the appointment of the Community Police, the crime rate in Ferguslie Park and the Shortroods area was 1,200 reported incidents. In 1993 this figure fell to 1,000 and in 1994 to 754. In December 1995 the crime rate was up by 10.6 per cent on the previous year. The Community Police thought that the fact they had been allocated other police duties could have been a contributing factor.

In the schools visited, planning and evaluating, negotiating and decision-making took place although there was no formal structure. Staff meetings in one school were held once a week for the last half-hour of lunch break and it depended on the good will of the teachers. It would be very difficult for a head to introduce change or deal with controversial issues in this setting.

Despite the fine and very detailed programmes *Quality Assurance: The Quality Process for Pre-5, Primary and Secondary* from the Education Department in

Strathclyde there is no evidence of a consistent planning, monitoring and evaluating system. By this one would mean a plan:

- where change in the performance of an individual teacher is monitored;
- where individual change links into the effective organisation of the school as a whole i.e. head, other staff, parents, school board and wider community thus affecting pupil performance;
- where these changes of individuals and the group can bring about the overall vision of the school (Bramley, 1991: 9-36).

Like principals in Ireland, the heads in Scotland did not take account of the manifold aspects of vision: its dimensions of hindsight, foresight, depth and perception as outlined in Chapter One and in Chapter Five. Local community needs and experiences did not seem to enter significantly into awareness. Among the many authors writing on vision today, Block holds that articulating a vision forces us to hold ourselves accountable for acting in a way that is congruent with that vision (Block, 1987: 105). Inherent in the creation and communication of the vision is the will to evaluate our actions. Hence, though in one sense the Ferguslie Park Education Strategy seems to emerge from the grass roots of local needs and experiences, there is a sense in which there is a top-down dimension which has not been successfully integrated in the whole study. A key lack would seem to be training.

#### **7.5.4 DEVELOPMENT**

Nine teachers saw the provision of courses for teachers to be of paramount importance. While the Strathclyde Regional Council and the Education Strategy pledged development for staffs, very little staff development had taken place. Two teachers named "mutual support" and "good communication" as being significant, while others sought "leadership from the head", "involvement in deci-

sion-making", "sharing of expertise", "self-evaluation", "appraisal" and being "given responsibility" as important. These points which all surfaced once, came from different schools and would seem to imply that teachers are working, to some extent, at the traditional level. The fact that teachers are seeking these procedures portrays a move in forward thinking. Four teachers saw the provision of a parents' room and three saw the valuing of parent opinion, as important in parent development. They used phrases such as "empower parents", "support the family", "education for parents" and "access needs" without any named ideas on how this could be done and without any reference to HSEP.

Regarding pupil development, eight teachers viewed responsibility on the part of the pupil for his/her own learning as vital but with little thought about how this could be done. Target setting by teachers with pupils was named by three teachers as was the reinforcement of pupils by teachers. These could be viewed as methods of promoting individual responsibility among pupils. Guidance, the raising of self-esteem, good communication and social skills development, were all named once by teachers as ways of enhancing the life of the pupil.

Development in relation to teachers, parents and pupils would seem to incorporate effective delegation, the sharing of responsibility and the building of trust leading to team-spirit (Dubrin, 1997 and Diggins, Doyle, and Herron 1996). Among the small number of heads interviewed it was obvious that one particular head in the secondary school empowered his colleagues, particularly the depute head and senior teachers, and he encouraged their participation and their excitement in achieving change. Staff there were given the responsibility of completing work. The authority of this head was enhanced in the eyes of staff. There was no

clear process of how the work would be monitored. In the case of other heads there was not the same clarity.

As already outlined, the HSEP team would have much better knowledge of, and relationships with, parents and some pupils than would heads and teachers. It is questionable if anyone should usurp the relationship that a parent could have with their child's teacher(s) or that of a pupil with his/her teacher(s). Recent research from the Irish Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) points out that pastoral care teams need to proceed with caution respecting the relationships of a pupil with his/her teachers, particularly at second level. This is of paramount importance (Hannan, Smyth, McCullagh, O'Leary and McMahon, 1996). The fact that eight teachers spoke of encouraging responsibility for learning among pupils seems very hopeful although they had not devised a strategy. It would seem valuable to get senior pupils to devise ways in which they could record and talk about their own achievement. Self-evaluation is difficult and may be impossible for some. One needs to believe that every pupil has a right to opinions (Goldman and Newman, 1998). Self-assessment could also contribute to self-worth. This principle seemed more prevalent at the junior end of primary schools (Fisher, 1996 and Geldard and Geldard 1997).

#### **7.5.5 PARTNERSHIP**

It is interesting to note that teacher-to-teacher support was named by seven teachers as the most enriching example of partnership. While good in itself, this could portray a narrow view and experience of the educational process. "The breaking down of barriers" between parents and teachers, named five times, shows some movement outwards towards the community. The involvement of HSEP with families was named as an enriching experience twice. One head and two teachers

disagreed with the variety of professional backgrounds among HSEP members which included all sectors in teaching, adult education, community work, social work and careers. Teachers showed a preference for a teaching background for members of HSEP.

Of the ten teachers interviewed, seven did not have "negative or unproductive experiences of partnership". The three who had difficulties named the following: miscommunication of information, difficulties working within the "local authority policy framework", input to the curriculum by parents and dissatisfaction with the psychological services. Difficulties working within the local framework and fear of input to the curriculum by parents were each named only once. Whilst others did not name these difficulties, nevertheless they did not seem to be active in partnership.

The areas that proved helpful and effective for heads and for teachers to delegate were routine administration, named twice and policy implementation and people management, both named once. These points related to the two heads and the one deputy head interviewed. Other areas delegated by teachers were computers, which were named once, extra-curricular activities, named twice, as was delegation to the school assistant. The delegation of tutorial work to senior pupils was named once and is a creative concept, as is the "key worker system" in the Pre-5 nursery. It links individual children with a member of staff who offers educational and emotional support to them and their parents during their time at the nursery. Apart from the head, the key worker is the staff member who liaises with the particular parents whose children are under his/her direct care.

Delegation to parents, the frequency of delegated tasks and the purpose for doing them proved interesting. Involvement with curricular activities happened on a



daily basis according to five teachers, in order to help children generally and give a "sense of security to one's own child". No teacher had a parent in the classroom more than once in the week. The help included working with infant activities and language development. Class teachers found this of significant value. One of the parents interviewed works for one and a half hours a week with games related to language development. These games can be played on wet days and provide experience in social issues such as that of winning and losing. The parent noted the need for "confidentiality" and said that "all parents had been informed of the initiative within the classroom by the class teacher". The chief value for the parent was her "identity with the school" where her three children attend. Her anxiety was around "lack of time for planning with the teacher" and fear in relation to handling "pupil tantrums". This highlighted a lack of clarity around the role of the parent in the classroom and adequate preparation for and evaluation of it.

In one of the primary schools the parent-run library started when staff and parents talked about making more use of the library within the school. The parents were highly enthusiastic when interviewed and said that they got a lot of support from the head. Their aim was to promote "reading for all and a lasting enjoyment of books". They were supported by the Local Community Library and by HSEP. In addition to running the library parents were involved in story telling with children, the filling in of work sheets and library reference skills suitable to the age of the child.

Teachers were only aware of the Ferguslie Park Community Library situated in the Tannahill Centre at the heart of Ferguslie Park. This library has facilities for all age groups. It has a specific area for junior activities such as painting, drama and crafts. In addition to a substantial supply of books, audio-visual facilities are

part of the design. A significant feature of the library is two circular towers at its front corners; one of these provides a story pit for children and the other provides a small meeting or private reading room.

Fund-raising was identified by six teachers as a task delegated to parents. Fund-raising activities were held on a fortnightly basis to provide "much needed equipment" in the schools. Two of the primary schools were completed in the Summer of 1992. They are quite unique in that they operate within one new building and share common facilities but each is independent. One is a Roman Catholic school and the other is non-denominational. They are both 100.0 per cent open plan as a means of curtailing building costs. Nevertheless, both schools are well furnished and equipped with materials. In still another primary school parents raised funds for the "Never Ending Stories Parent-Run Library".

Fund-raising for general equipment was not of major significance in the secondary school visited. This secondary school was the subject of a key education decision to provide resources for specialist courses at secondary level in technology, business, languages, the performing arts and special educational needs within one convenient centre which could be accessed by children from Ferguslie Park and a wider area. A subsequent development in this secondary school is the School Based Access Initiative. This is funded jointly by Strathclyde Education Department and British Petroleum (BP), which allows pupils in fifth and sixth year to follow a scheme of work in science and technology and which will, if successfully completed, guarantee them a place in further or higher education. However parents of the secondary school were involved in fund-raising to subsidise "The Big Breakfast", a venture organised by the school in which parents cook and are helped by their children to provide a meal. This involvement according to parents

and school personnel has several values: it affords good nutrition, it provides cooking and catering experience like serving and washing up, it is a free meal for those involved in its preparation and serving. Fund-raising also covers some subsidy for pupils attending conferences abroad.

#### **7.5.6 ATTITUDES TO PARTNERSHIP**

It has been acknowledged on a few occasions that this dissertation centres on partnership and traces it through attitudes, activities and perceptions of those involved in the HSCL scheme. In 1.7 and in 5.3 we recorded the theory and practice of partnership respectively. We now examine the attitudes to and the practice of partnership in Scotland through the Likert scale results. Comparisons are drawn between Ireland and Scotland.

The Likert scale was distributed to thirty-four teachers in Scotland and all teachers completed the scale in full. A reliability analysis was run on the entire scale using Cronbach's Alpha Test and yielded a score of 0.8832. The Likert scale can be found in Appendix 2, Table 1. The Mean for the full scale was 3.78. The mean, standard deviation, and significance rating for each item can be found in Appendix 2, Table 4. A fourteen item subscale (Appendix 2, Table 5) yielded a score of 0.8678 on the Alpha Test.

We now compare attitudes of teachers in Ireland and Ferguslie Park in relation to "Perceptions of Partnership" and "Attitudes to Partnership". The mean, standard deviation and the t-test for the full scale and the subscale follows in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1 Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test on the Scale and Subscale for the Irish and Scottish Teachers**

Scale	Teachers	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-test for Equality of Means	
					Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences
"Perceptions of Partnership"	Irish teachers	112	3.31	0.3931	<.001	-.4777
	Scottish teachers	34	3.78	0.4247		
"Attitudes to Partnership"	Irish teachers	112	3.5	0.4099	.001	-.3458
	Scottish teachers	34	3.9	0.5334		

It can be noted from Table 7.1 that the mean is higher for the Scottish teachers in both the scale and the subscale. Only in five of the individual items is the mean higher for the teachers in Ireland than it is in Scotland. (Appendix 2, Table 4). From the t-test we observe that there is a significant difference between the Irish mean and the Scottish mean in both the scale and subscale. It can be said that the Scottish teachers are more positive towards partnership than their Irish counterparts. This could stem from the fact that:

- the ratio of Scottish to Irish teachers (34:112) was very different;
- a very progressive post-primary school was part of the Ferguslie Park population and accounted for 32.3 of the completed questionnaires;
- there was a system of re-specification of jobs in Strathclyde whereby every teacher had to sign a contract agreeing to implement partnership;
- the cultural thrust of the Strathclyde area was one of partnership;
- the implementation of the partnership process was more advanced in Strathclyde — policy, practice, resources, training and an expectation that teachers would live out of a partnership framework.

It was the observation of this author that during interviews (7.5.1-7.5.5) teachers did not seem quite as positive as was evidenced in the questionnaires (7.5.6).

Eleven items on the thirty-eight item scale from Ferguslie Park were not statistically significant (Appendix 2, Table 4) as opposed to five items in Ireland (Appendix 2, Table 2).

### **7.5.7 INTERPRETATION OF THE INTERVIEW PROCEDURE**

In surveying the activities of some areas of the Strathclyde model it would seem then that where people are valued and good communication is in place it is more likely that there will be structures to facilitate input from, and planning and evaluation by, individuals, groups and agencies. Where this type of structure is in place strengths can be highlighted, weaknesses overcome and feedback sought. This is conducive to an internal support system promoting self-help and an action-reflection-action type framework. There is then much more chance of a healthy balance between task performance and maintenance initiatives. When people feel good about themselves, when self-esteem is stable and structures for planning and evaluation are in place, the views of others present less threat and people are more open to negotiation and joint decision-making. Although the particular questions dealing with the involvement of teachers in negotiation and decision-making got high figures, this was not well substantiated in other related areas. There is much need to give scope to the role of parents in the field of decision-making.

Partnership calls for a shared sense of purpose worked out and implemented collaboratively. As already noted in Chapter One "education is now too important to be left merely to educationalists and to schools" (Wolfendale, 1983: 4). It would seem appropriate for parents and teachers to define their mutual roles, together with the inherent rights and responsibilities of those roles. It appears obvi-

ous that parents do want involvement in educational processes both as parents and citizens. The mystique cloaking some aspects of education needs to be exposed and relativised.

For schools, the child is and remains the centre of the picture and the task of schools is to enable the child to handle himself/herself successfully in life and to make the world a happier and safer place. Since it is largely from the parents or parent figures that children's receptivity, responsiveness and resilience to life-events are fashioned, the family needs to be in receipt of investment and support by schools and governments. "Governments should establish a policy environment which enables families and communities to fulfil their responsibilities of child rearing and protection" (Evans, 1998: 8).

The interviews delineate that some structures are in place to facilitate the change in attitude necessary, particularly on the part of schools, for the implementation of partnership.

## **7.6 SUMMARY**

There was an awareness in Scotland of the need for partnership. The term was used in a variety of ways and not always with the same meaning. If the work was to be judged along the definition of partnership enunciated by Pugh in Chapter One, then the type of involvement with parents and the activities delegated to them could not, on the whole, be called participative.

Efforts were made to develop collegiality at staff level by heads and teachers. An understanding of management procedures and time to implement change seemed to be missing. While there was a level of planning and evaluation around the Mission Statement, clear objectives and agreed goals, sound working and decision-making procedures and regular review were not widely in evidence. Support

and co-operation were sought. Some teachers believed that they could approach the head if there was conflict or a difference of opinion. Individual teacher development was encouraged and partially funded. Heads and teachers spoke of the need to develop sound inter-group relations. All of this augurs well for the future.

The schools also aimed at "breaking down barriers" between home, community and the school. Some schools chose to involve parents in the classroom or the school library. One must admit that this is a forward move; there is a negative feature in the fact that parents had no formal preparation for this work, nor indeed a monitoring service nor formal evaluation. Communication with parents zoned in very much on concerns about pupils and the encouragement of parents to support the work of the school. An important element in the partnership process did not surface, namely the complementarity of roles of parents and teachers. Delegation was evident. However, apart from the secondary school, it could be seen as a balancing of the workload rather than a creating of participation, trust and consequent growth between colleagues, parents and pupils.

While tasks were defined between the head and depute in this secondary school, this was not the case at primary level where parents were working in classrooms. Reasons were not given to parents regarding their involvement except in issues such as fund-raising; one could not escape the impression that perhaps parents were being used for this task rather than being valued for their contribution to the education process. Expectations were not named nor was a process outlined to monitor and evaluate progress.

## **7.7 COMPARISONS BETWEEN SCOTLAND AND IRELAND**

The value of the research pursued in Scotland is necessarily limited. It was not extensive enough to claim to be in any way a comprehensive, less still definitive

evaluation of a complex situation there. The research has the limited role of pointing up questions, which are addressed not to the Scottish, but to Irish educationalists. One might summarise through viewing similarities, differences, strengths and weaknesses of the schemes in Ireland and Scotland.

There is a key difference between the Strathclyde and the Irish scheme. The former brought in education within a very comprehensive study of various social and economic needs. The Irish scheme, whilst not divorced from a socio-economic situation, was planned by the Department of Education and lacks the depths of integration with other agencies that we find in Scotland. But whilst the Strathclyde initiatives have this valuable breadth of relationships, the purely educational elements do not seem to be so well developed. The main thing that the Irish scheme has to learn here would be a heightened awareness of a structure which the Irish scheme already has, but is not operating at anything like full potential viz. the Local Committee.

The Scottish scheme confirms the need of parent involvement; it faces much the same difficulties that are to be found in Ireland. It would seem that if the Irish picture is a little more developed, this is due to the strong emphasis on parent involvement in the various in-service opportunities for coordinators and others. At the same time the Scottish parallel would be still further encouragement to bring the message of parent partnership to teachers in Irish schools who, we have seen, noticeably lag behind coordinators and principals in this vision.

The experience in Scotland is also a warning against any complacency about overcoming diffidence on the part of parents to become actively involved in the work of the school. The same socio-economic features can militate against many parents making their proper contribution.



Every scheme and proposal can have a gap between planning and implementation. Scotland and Ireland have problems in this regard. We have seen the emphasis on continual evaluation in Ireland. An interesting notion from Scotland has been that of "pledges". They are simple ideas, easily recorded and easy to verify. The somewhat emotive word "pledge" might also have a sense of commitment and of partnership for those involved.

The experience in Scotland about partnership also indicates the danger of a key word like "partnership" being variously understood by different people. We have seen that this lack of common understanding is found also in Ireland: coordinators because of in-service tend to use the word in broadly the same way; principals and teachers do not at all have the same common understanding. This divergence is yet another indication of the essential role of coordinators being a link not only between parents and schools, but between the philosophy of the Department of Education and the schools.

The interview with the then Director of Education in Strathclyde would seem to support the view that an idea like HSCL which has a definite focus, also needs a special team equally focussed and that it is best not to have it as one among many concerns of a Director. On the other hand, the broad educational and social vision of the Director is a most valuable asset for the implementation of a vision. There is of course a difference between something that is organised at a national level and something that is more locally focused.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Since this research has been dealing with a recent development in Irish education, one which is on-going, a definitive judgement such as one might make about an educational phenomenon in another century is not possible. The HSCL scheme which is the broad topic of this dissertation, nonetheless, receives some serious evaluation. We can now indicate some of the strands that come together as we close this dissertation.

#### 8.1 THE LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature review we noted new visions in education which called for partnership especially between home and school and also community. The literature also showed something that is more subtle, which was authors grasping at less tangible but decisive issues like attitudes, prejudice and the need to break out of set patterns. The literature, therefore, showed not only some consensus on need but also an emerging consensus on the necessity of developing partnership through practical measures and through a re-education and re-orientation in attitudes.

Elements of literature relevant to specific aspects of Chapters Four and Five were studied and provided a context for the findings in these chapters. The questionnaires and their answers were shown to reflect much of the wisdom in current management thinking, mostly in the corporate and industrial world but also in education.

## **8.2 THE NEED**

Socio-economic and educational disadvantage including "uninvolved" parents have become issues in educational circles across the developed and developing world from the early sixties. We have seen that the theme of disadvantage is central to every chapter in this dissertation. It is central for two reasons. Firstly, as we have just noted, it is an issue emerging, studied and responded to world-wide. Most specifically, as we have seen, the HSCL scheme emerged from the Department of Education precisely in answer to deprivation and need.

### **8.2.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE AND THE MARGINALISED PUPIL**

The term disadvantage is an ambiguous one. Policymakers view the notion from the point of view of defining programmes to promote social inclusion, educators grapple with the concept as it applies to traditional learning styles while social scientists attend to its characteristics in order to identify populations for study (see Johnston and Borman, 1992: 3-28). The focus of all groups would be to ease the effects of disadvantage on individuals and groups and, if possible, to break the cycle of disadvantage particularly for children.

Traditional theories have held that a pupil is disadvantaged if belonging to a minority group, a low-income group or a group with low educational status. A more recent addition is the self-image, incorporating self-worth and self-confidence, which the individual has of himself/herself. In a recent article in the *Educational Researcher* five key indicators are associated with the educationally disadvantaged: "minority racial/ethnic group identity, living in a poverty household, living in a single-parent family, having a poorly educated mother, and having a non-English language background" (Pallas, Natriello and McDill, 1989: 17).

The authors hold that some children may be classified as educationally disadvantaged "on the basis of several of these indicators", which they believe puts the children "at greater risk of educational failure than if only one indicator applied to them" (Ibid. see also Cullen, 1997: 5 and OECD, 1995: 20-24, 48). In Ireland the indicators of disadvantage in designated areas are related to the type of housing pupils live in, the number of pupils whose families hold medical cards or/and are in receipt of unemployment benefit. In addition the level of education of the mother, followed by that of the father is taken into consideration (Kellaghan, Weir, Ó hUallacháin and Morgan, 1995).

In order to build "the learning society" the European White Paper on education and training postulates five general objectives, one of them being "to combat social exclusion". The White Paper highlights the facts that "Schools located in the 'problem' areas are increasingly reorganizing...by using the best teachers ...an appropriate teaching pace, in-company placements, multimedia equipment and smaller classes. They are also trying to make school a community environment ...when social and family links are breaking down in these sensitive districts" (European White Paper, 1995: 10, see also 62-66).

At the UN World Summit in Copenhagen in March 1995, the Irish Government endorsed a programme of action aimed at eliminating absolute poverty in the developing world and also reducing overall poverty and inequality everywhere. Arising from this commitment, the Irish Government approved the development of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) which would address poverty, exclusion and inequality, and ensure coordination across and between departments and involve people directly affected by poverty. The overall objective, in relation to educational disadvantage, of the NAPS is "to ensure that children, men and

women living in poverty are able to gain access participate in and benefit from education of sufficient quality to allow them to move out of poverty, and to prevent others from becoming poor" (NAPS, 1997: 9 see also 1997a and 1997b).

Strategies were identified to achieve the objective first outlined and they included:

- eliminating barriers to participation in education for welfare dependent families;
- providing pre-school education;
- preventing educational disadvantage through extending the HSCL scheme and reducing class size;
- ensuring a continuum of provision for special education;
- working to include travellers in primary and post-primary education;
- integrating the school and community dimension of provision in the tackling of early school learning;
- supporting lifelong learning and community-based education and training.

It is clear that underachievement in school, unsatisfactory retention rates and poor participation in higher education have focused the Irish Government and in particular the Department of Education on the need of marginalised pupils. Policy changes have been initiated. The alteration of school structures and practices, a more enlightened and positive way of viewing both marginalised pupils and their families and effective schooling are called for. We have postulated throughout the literature review the debate regarding language "deficit" and "difference". In addition the argument relating to "continuity" and "discontinuity" between the home and school experiences of marginalised children was considered. The influential role of the home and the community was central to the entire thesis.

Membership of the school, says Wehlage et al. is based on social bonding. The four elements of social bonding are attachment, commitment, involvement and belief (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez, 1989: 113-133; see

also Cusick and Wheeler, 1988: 273-276). A pupil is socially bonded to the extent that he/she is attached to adults and peers, committed to the ethos of the school and involved in school activities with a belief in the legitimacy of schooling. Obviously the more parents know about the school the more they can socialise their children to schooling. The committed pupil remains in school to graduation spurred on by internalised goals emanating from the home, the school and wider society. What about the pupil who comes from a home disrupted by poverty, unemployment, relationship difficulties and substance abuse where parents may be unable or unwilling to parent? This question leads us into the next section dealing with uninvolved parents.

### **8.2.2 UNINVOLVED PARENTS**

Despite educational theory emphasising the role of parents, educational practice has lingered behind. The formation and culture of teachers did not lead to their having a strong practical conviction about the role of parents in the school, parents as prime educators. It was taken for granted that the axiom "parents as prime educators" referred to what went on at home. From a teacher's point therefore, there was an absence of a positive appreciation of the possible role of parents. There was a negative apprehension in which parents were seen as threatening, intrusive, a nuisance, not really understanding the school and not professional (see Wilton, 1975: 3-15). It is important when seeking to change school culture to see the teacher as the medium through which the change must pass, otherwise the change may be resisted or shaped in an unintended way (Hatton, 1985: 228).

From the point of view of parents, especially in marginalised areas, but also among the socio-economic lower middle class parents, there was a consciousness of the teacher as being better educated and to that extent, at least, the expert.

Again, parents of the marginalised, working and lower middle class frequently had unhealed memories of their own unhappy school days, which were often, but not always, associated with their self-image and lack of achievement. Furthermore parents were not encouraged to take an active interest in what went on in the school. They were seen as supportive of the school in matters of discipline, homework and fundraising. From the 1960s people became aware of the gap between educational theory on the role of parents and the actual practice. Two things happened, firstly, educationalists began to notice that there was a gap, secondly, this gap gave rise to more theories but more significantly to specific action in various places. An example of such action is the HSCL scheme, the subject of this dissertation.

### **8.3 AN ANSWER TO THE NEED**

We now turn to the specifics of the HSCL scheme which have emerged during our study, as we consider the services to disadvantaged areas both in a general way and in the specific sense of the HSCL scheme.

#### **8.3.1 GENERAL SERVICES TO SCHOOLS SERVING DISADVANTAGED PUPILS**

Initiatives have been in place for decades to help disadvantaged pupils at primary level, for example the school meals service and the free-book/book-rental scheme. In 1984 a more focused approach became apparent with the introduction of a programme of special measures for schools in disadvantaged areas of Dublin, Cork and Limerick with a per capita grant to principals at primary level for books and materials. A further grant was sent to the chairperson to encourage home, school, community liaison. In evaluation carried out by the Department of Education in 1985/1986 and again in 1987/1988 schools reported an impact from a morale and financial point of view. However very little had happened regarding parent in-

volvement. During the period 1984-1990 concessionary posts were allocated to most schools in disadvantaged areas and these schools were also favoured in the granting of remedial teachers.

At post-primary level, curriculum adaptation to meet the needs of the less academic pupil was a commitment of the Irish Government in the White Paper on Educational Development (1980). This started with the reform of the Intermediate Certificate, re-named the Junior Certificate, with a further adaptation in 1996 to the Junior Certificate Schools' Programme, suited to the less academic pupil. The Leaving Certificate went through even more stages in its development to the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The LCA is currently in operation and apparently more suited to some children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Post-primary schools serving disadvantaged pupils, have at least one ex-quota post for remedial teaching. Primary and post-primary schools in designated areas of disadvantage receive a higher per capita grant than the non-designated schools.

The HSCL scheme, established in 1990 in disadvantaged areas (see Chapter Two) was a commitment by the Department of Education to develop the parent as prime educator and to promote change in school attitudes and behaviours so that parents and teachers could work in partnership to help realise the potential of at-risk pupils. It can be said that the HSCL scheme was, and is, about radical change, change in the way people think, learn and act particularly in the school context.

### **8.3.2 THE HSCL SCHEME AS AN "ANSWER" IN RELATION TO PARENT EMPOWERMENT**

Firstly the HSCL scheme is an answer in so far as parental development and involvement is taking place. The value of the home and its influence on the life of the young person is clearly outlined in Chapter One. The HSCL scheme is a tar-



geted and focused resource at the most marginalised within the designated schools. This is positive discrimination in favour of the most marginalised or "positive differential treatment in which some students are seen as different in some educationally relevant way, and are treated differently from others out of respect for fairness" (Corson, 1998: 85). The designated primary schools, on the whole, serve a 100 per cent marginalised catchment. However, this is not the case with the post-primary schools. In many instances, within the scheme, the post-primary school serves only a 20-25 per cent marginalised catchment and so choices have to be made by the coordinator, in consultation with the principal, regarding which families are to receive the HSCL service. Generally speaking the relevant families have passed through the "feeder" primary schools which are designated.

Not alone is the HSCL scheme a targeted and focused resource it is also a "preventative" and "integrated" service. "Prevention" has been highlighted by the HSCL scheme since its inception in 1990 (see 2.2.3). The concept of prevention has been further recommended by the National Economic and Social Forum (Report No. 4, 1994 and Report No. 11, 1997). The large volume of research available today points to the fact that prevention is less expensive and more productive than is the treatment and attempts at solution when the problems have emerged.

The concept of integration or networking is a difficult concept to implement (see 2.2.9). This difficulty arises out of different expectations, hopes and concerns that groups have of themselves and of one another. There may even be an absence of expectation and in addition a fear of "take-over" or "interference". The task of integration and networking has become easier in the HSCL scheme with the support of research and literature from the Combat Poverty Agency and the

Department of Education and with the advent of Area Based Partnerships (2.4.2.1). However, much more needs to be done in addressing problems inherent in the relationship between home, community and school in the area of educational disadvantage. This issue will be further dealt with in 8.4.

### **8.3.3 THE HSCL SCHEME AS AN "ANSWER" IN RELATION TO TEACHER AND WHOLE-SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT**

The first hypothesis of this dissertation proposes that there is no difference in the attitudes of principal, coordinators and teachers, these being three sub-groups of one of the partnership bodies, namely, the school, the others being the home and the community. This hypothesis cannot now stand because there are significant differences. The findings in Tables 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.14 and 5.15 show diverging perceptions among principals, coordinators and teachers and evidence of rather poor consultation. Teachers were more likely than principals or coordinators to have the perception that there is little or no consultation with parents. This finding could portray a lack of communication at staff level, a withholding of information, an unclear view of the situation as it is, or a desire for the system that could be or should be on the part of principals in particular.

In Table 5.31 we noted that 54.0 per cent of teachers had "no understanding" of partnership. Again in Tables 5.25 and 5.27 we observed the fact that teachers were the least positive about partnership.

There is a need for teacher development in order to promote in-school, inter-school and intra-school change and development. This concept has been covered in some detail in 5.2, 5.2.1, 5.3.3 and 5.3.4.1 above. Suffice it to say here that "the rules of the world are changing. It is time for the rules of teaching and teachers' work to change with them" (Hargreaves, 1994: 262).

The urgent need within the HSCL scheme is for systematic and regular teacher development to allow each teacher to become a "home-school teacher" in attitude. It is especially important to note that "parent involvement practices succeed with less-educated parents and disadvantaged students, where it is crucial that the school make a difference" (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991: 235). School is the centre of change and exists within the context of home, community, voluntary and statutory agencies, religious bodies and affiliations, educational organisations and institutions and the Government. Each group has an agenda, has self-interest to protect. Schools can, as many do, "isolate themselves to maintain control and avoid criticism. In so doing, they not only build barriers against potential partners; they contribute to the incoherence of pupils' lives" (Stoll and Fink, 1996: 133, see also Webb and Vulliamy, 142-164). In the next section we shall examine this intricate network and the role of the HSCL local coordinator within it.

#### **8.4 THE LOCAL COORDINATOR**

Given the analysis summarised above, which itself is amply documented in contemporary educational literature, it is clear that there are two foci in the learning ellipse, namely, school and the home, each needing the other. In the HSCL scheme which emerged from the Department of Education a third component was identified, namely, the community. It might be argued that in the future it is the development of the community dimension which will lead to the greatest challenge and fruits. The home and the school interaction is relatively well advanced where the HSCL scheme has been initiated.

However, even going back to the first two, home and school, we had two moral bodies separated by a chasm over which there was no obvious or reliable bridge. The second hypothesis of this dissertation proposes that the coordinator is

an important link agent in the partnership enterprise of the HSCL scheme. It focuses on the role of the coordinator as the key link agent between three existing bodies, namely, home, school and community. The contribution of the Irish scheme compared with those examined in other countries was the clear identification of the need of a bridge, who would be, the coordinator. Then it was clear that the coordinator needed a status and the freedom from actual teaching commitments to fulfil this bridge role. It is this centering of the role of the coordinator that makes the Irish scheme unique and one could argue an important development in educational theory and practice. The question of community brings in many more complex issues to the above role of the coordinator. It is relatively easy to establish parameters for the activity of the coordinator, for example welcoming parents to the school, home visitation and parent development. It is also relatively easy to identify the skills needed for coordinators and to provide training and support systems.

However, to use traditional terminology, found especially in Catholic social writings but with roots in Greek political thinking, both the school and the family are "imperfect societies" which means that they do not have within themselves all the resources needed to fulfil their aim, in this case, the education of the child. As "imperfect societies" they need the community. We have already referred to the complexity of the notion of community and the pluriform usage of the word. Hence, though most people would, we are sure, readily admit to a role for the community in education, the specification of this role and its actualisation is a difficult task, one moreover varying from place to place.

The questionnaires are interesting in the rather low estimation in theory and in practice of the community in the educational task. Here again there is need of a

mediator bringing together the community and the school, the community and the family. This mediator is of course the coordinator. There is a discernible change regarding community in recent times in the HSCL scheme brought about through the understanding of the coordinator, the understanding that the marginalised family/families need to access those meaning systems that complement and do not replace their own meaning systems. The Local Committee, (2.2.12, 2.3.7 and 5.4.2) when functioning well, is an example and we shall deal further with this in 8.4.1.

#### **8.4.1 OVERVIEW OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF COORDINATORS**

In the light of what we have already said about the coordinator, one could expect that a summary evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the coordinator would bring us close to a grasp of key strengths and weaknesses of the whole scheme. It might be helpful to get one matter out of the way, namely, the influence of the personality of the coordinator on the exercise of the role of coordinator in the scheme. The questionnaires, dealt with in Chapters Four and Five and addressed to principals, teachers, parents, Boards of Management as well as the interviews dealt with in Chapter Six, of the same persons, threw up only minuscule evidence of unsuitable persons having the role of coordinator. In addition there was no evidence of the coordinator's personality being a block to the operation of the scheme. Further evidence that the coordinators have, up to now, been very satisfactorily selected can be found in the very few voices which were open to, much less recommending, that the coordinator should not be a teacher (Chapter Six). We are, therefore, dealing with the strengths and weakness of talented and dedicated coordinators who are not, through their personalities or approach, a

cause of deficiency even though, as we shall see, there are some significant weaknesses across the board.

#### **8.4.2 STRENGTHS IN THE ROLE OF THE COORDINATOR**

As has already been stated, the HSCL scheme is centred on the adults within the school community whose attitudes and behaviour impinge on the life of the pupil (2.2.4 and 2.2.6). The five *Aims* of the HSCL scheme focus on:

- the at-risk pupil;
- promoting cooperation between home, school and community;
- empowering parents;
- retaining young people in the education system;
- disseminating positive outcomes (2.2).

Bearing in mind that the role of the coordinator is targeted and focused on the most marginalised families within the school community, it follows that these families would have young people who are potential and even likely drop-outs from the school system. We first look at the strengths in the role of the coordinator in relation to the young person in danger of dropping out from school. We have already named the value of prevention, that is, precluding the occurrence of problems and if not, then "intervention during the early development of difficulties" as a key feature of liaison. (Hayden 1997: 122).

Schools alone cannot solve the multifaceted problems of at-risk families so the coordinator initiates support services that are home-family based, school based and community based. Home based initiatives include the coordinator:

- visiting parents at home (2.2.8 and 2.4);
- training and providing parent-to-parent home visitation (2.3.6.3);
- providing for homework support within the home or local community;

- supporting teenage parents to stay on at school through the intervention of third level students as mentors.

Where these initiatives have taken place there is a level of satisfaction particularly on the part of parents (Chapter Six). All of the foregoing initiatives are backed up by research evidence worldwide and now by practice here in Ireland. This aspect of the HSCL scheme should be further developed and promoted as a way of enabling the home to acknowledge, work on and eventually solve many of its own needs and problems. Parents within the HSCL scheme often call for support and skills in managing their children's behaviour in the home. This request, together with the identification of similar needs by the school, has led coordinators to provide a school-based support service.

Among the school-based services provided by the coordinator for parents are:

- coordinator availability to parents;
- the parents' room and crèche facilities;
- courses, classes and activities;
- involvement in policy formation (2.4.1);
- opportunities for parents to act as a resource to the school and the school community (2.4).

The judgement of the writer, from the research findings (5.2.2, 5.2.3, 5.3.3, 5.4.1 and Chapter Six) and through interaction on the field, is that the coordinator has functioned well in the above named areas with parents.

On the other hand, school-based supports for teachers are not much in evidence, with calls from principals and from coordinators themselves throughout the findings and particularly in Chapter Six for renewed efforts to involve teachers. There is a danger that "each side of the school-family partnership can relieve its disappointment and sense of failure by judging the other to have been deficient in

the task" (Dowling and Pound, 1994: 69). However, one must remember that the primary task of teachers is to provide a rich learning environment for pupils and it may be more realistic to expect that the time already given to parents need not be increased, but should, in the words of Pantin, be a "respectful intervention" (1.8.9.1). For this to happen we would require a pooling of resources of home and school in order that the pupil may enjoy childhood and that academic progress be in harmony with ability. Educational partnership can be viewed as "the proper relationship between one child's parent(s) and that child's teachers(s) about that individual child's education acquired both at home and at school" (Macbeth, 1995: 51). It can be said that the coordinator is the bridge between parents and teachers that has allowed this to happen.

Pupils are not only members of families and schools, they are also part of community groups, churches, teams, clubs and gangs. An integrated approach means recognising all the influences at work, aiming to bring coherence to the multiple messages young people receive (see Stoll and Fink, 1996: 133-149). Acceptance of the value of the community dimension of the HSCL scheme has been growing from the mid 1990s. This growth has accelerated recently with the development of Local Committees and the general emphasis on the community in current literature.

An additional service and complementary to the HSCL scheme is the 8-15 Early School Leaver Initiative (ESLI) which was set up by the Department of Education in 1998, as a pilot project to combat early school leaving (see Imich, 1994: 3-11). While still in the embryonic stage the fourteen "consortia" (a committee composed of school personnel, members of voluntary and statutory bodies and in some cases parent representation) have made remarkable strides in struc-



turing the involvement of the community in the interest of at-risk pupils. These consortia are being nurtured and supported by the project's coordinator. They should be given longer than the proposed two year pilot stage in which they can develop a viable working model of integrated community services for at-risk pupils. They may also serve as complementary to or instead of Local Committees.

A particular strength of the coordinator, in relation to the community dimension of HSCL, is the ability to network with agencies and to direct parents towards existing services either within or outside their local community. A further strength in the role of the coordinator is his/her willingness to delegate to the local community personnel as is evidenced by the following practices:

- the process of parents and teachers "working together" in small groups which now calls for the inclusion of community agencies;
- the "recruiting of parents";
- the "training" of parents as facilitators;
- the "running of the crèche";
- "leadership training";
- the maintenance of the "parents' room";
- the training of parents "as home visitors";
- the "facilitation" of Local Committee meetings;
- the giving of "parent-to-parent input" at meetings;
- the management of HSCL "funds";
- the work of the "parent council".

By way of conclusion it can be said that the coordinator has facilitated the growth of the school towards being a part of the community. The coordinator has contributed to the fact that the community is supporting the school and working in its

interests. In short the role of the coordinator has been to intervene respectfully and to encourage this growth towards autonomy.

In this section we have named some of the strengths of the coordinator in supporting the family rather than the young person in isolation. Next, we considered the role of the coordinator in providing support services within schools. Finally, we viewed the interconnection of school and community and how the community can grow through processes generated from within and by the community. The role of the coordinator is a vital bridge linking any two of these interconnections and also linking all three.

#### **8.4.3 WEAKNESSES IN THE ROLE OF THE COORDINATOR**

The weaknesses in the work of the coordinator were noted by the writer following the coding of questionnaire responses throughout 1996 and 1997. This data bank supported the author's personal knowledge of the scheme gleaned from visiting schools and training coordinators (2.3.2-2.3.7, 5.1.5, and 5.2.4).

The areas that emerged which required attention were:

- home visiting by the coordinator;
- the training of parents as home visitors;
- policy formation including parental involvement;
- planning, monitoring and evaluating as part of the role of the coordinator;
- a continuing focus on the integrated delivery of services;
- the delegation process;
- the delivery of in-career development by the coordinators to staff and to themselves;
- the development of Local Committees.

Two of the above named areas, that of policy formation (2.4.1) and the delivery of in-career development by the coordinators (2.3.4.4 and 2.3.4.5), were facilitated

through the practice of action research, carried out "always and explicitly, to improve practice" (Griffiths, 1998: 21). The training of parents as home visitors is currently developing within the framework of action research. The other shortcomings were dealt with through the support structures of the scheme and particularly through in-career development. It can be stated, therefore, that this dissertation is both formative and summative.

An area of concern and one that emerged as a surprise is the almost irrelevance of home visitation throughout the research findings. This is indeed a weakness on the part of the coordinator and one that has been addressed many times at in-career development since this data was coded. It would be the view of the writer that coordinators need to be continually encouraged to spend the required 30-40 per cent of their time on home visitation. It would also be held by the writer that the physical and emotional drain on the physique of the coordinator can be very challenging and may often go neither noticed nor appreciated by school personnel. However, coordinators always speak of the power of home visits in bonding with the family and ultimately in improving educational opportunity for young people. This view point was indeed supported by parents (Chapter Six).

The training of parents as home visitors has taken almost three years to establish in some areas and is currently working well in parts of Dublin, in Limerick and in Dundalk. Many coordinators are not yet convinced of its value despite wide experience on the part of the Bernard van Leer Foundation across the world and that of other coordinators here in Ireland.

As was indicated in the research findings there was an absence of planning, monitoring and evaluating across the research population. This was noted in 5.1 where there was a scarcity of evaluation particularly on the part of primary and

post-primary principals. This was also the case in relation to coordinators although the lack was not so acute. While planning and evaluating were priority areas for coordinators from the inception of the HSCL scheme there has been a direct focus on this work from 1996 to date. Coordinators were led through theory and practical processes until a satisfactory schema was established.

The work to establish Local Committees across the scheme is now in train. Coordinators have adopted a team approach in their introduction (see 2.2.12, 2.3.7, 5.4.2).

From the foregoing the formative nature of the evaluation can be gleaned. The summative element is obvious.

## **8.5 TOWARDS THE FUTURE**

This dissertation can, at most, be an interim report of a scheme that is both rapidly developing in depth and rapidly expanding into more and more schools. Since the initiative taken by the Department of Education in 1990 was aimed at a serious need, namely children of disadvantaged families, the crucial test will not be obvious for about another five to eight years when it might be possible to conduct further research. Such research would be able to take account of completed post-primary and third level education by these children. It would also tap into employment figures, garda records, and information available to voluntary bodies, as well as to the Departments of Social Welfare, Justice and Employment. After all, we should remember that the definitive evaluation of the Rutland Street Project was only made available in 1993, twenty four years after its inception (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993a). Similar findings were made with the Highscope Perry Pre-school Study later in 1993 (Schweinhart, 1993).

Even at this stage, it can be argued, that an initiative has been taken in Irish education which, in many ways, amounts to a serious culture change for teachers in particular, namely a new way of relating between school and home. It is likewise a culture shock for parents. It is gratifying to be able to note the visionary analysis by the often maligned Department of Education in the continual inter-departmental infighting for funds, which is a mark of all democratic governments. The Department of Education managed not only to acquire funds but to allocate them seriously to this new scheme. It is also worth noting that enthusiasm and good will are found not only in the Department of Education but right throughout the areas in which the scheme has been operating.

It is, therefore, all the more urgent to look to some present weaknesses and some undeveloped areas so that the scheme may be more sharply focused. These critical areas we have seen include:

- *Home visitation* which is carried out by the coordinator. This is one of the major challenges in reaching families who are most in need of support and is emphasised for the purpose of "forming bonds of trust". Through home visitation, self-reliance rather than increased dependence can be fostered and family self-image can be enhanced rather than stigmatised for its inadequacies. It is vital for the life of the scheme, not to mention its on-going development, that coordinators become sharply focused on this aspect of their work.
- *The training of parents as home visitors* "transfers them...from being passive and dependent recipients of assistance...to becoming active members of the community able to give to others, and consequently, able to take pride in themselves" (Paz, 1990: 53). This type of intervention-service enables indi-

viduals and the community at large to respond more effectively to the problems and challenges facing it. Coordinators require further training and skills development in this area of their work in order that they can proceed with conviction and determination. Principals need to be more open to this process of growth within their school and the wider school community. Parents require further training in their role as change agents within the home-community.

- *Policy formation*, including parental involvement, was a highly successful practice in 94.0 per cent of the HSCL schools in 1997-1998. Very little has happened in this area in 1998-1999. It is important that this process of bringing parents and teachers together be continued and extended to include community members. Support from the Board of Management and from principals is required so that the coordinators can view policy formation as an on-going feature of their work and may have the freedom to organise it.
- *Planning, monitoring and evaluating* are part of the role of the coordinator. It is required of them that they carry out these functions at "family cluster" and "local cluster" levels (2.3.6 and 2.3.6.1) and that they work as teams across the designated schools in their areas. It is also anticipated that the skills coordinators have learned during in-career development sessions and through their practice will be transferred at staff level.
- *The delegation process* within the parameters of the HSCL scheme continues to be an area which requires monitoring. It is normal when one is successful at a given task, particularly a task with a community dimension, to want to maintain the lead role. The aim of the HSCL scheme is to allow the "para-professional" be the front-line worker while the coordinator takes an ancillary

role. It is incumbent on coordinators to keep the delegation focus clearly in mind from the very early stages of programme development so that the local community may take over the work and carry it on.

- *The delivery of in-career development by the coordinators* is a practice in delegation which is functioning well at both staff level and during their own in-career development sessions. This practice should continue to be enhanced particularly in relation to teacher development and growth.
- *Teacher development* is the hinge on which the foregoing recommendations revolve. To a degree, coordinators can redress most of the above challenges over time. However, quality renewal within schools will be determined by attitudinal change on the part of principals and teachers brought about through team development.
- The development of *Local Committees* was slow particularly in the early years of the scheme and indeed right through to the present day. The Local Committee can be viewed as a mechanism of community self-help and self-functioning through defining community needs, establishing priorities and developing local resources, particularly people resources. It can be said that Local Committees have focused their attention on the link between poverty in the community, school failure and the continuing cycle of disadvantage. Local Committees aim at the prevention of at-risk rather than at compensation for its damaging effects. Since the at-risk factor extends beyond the child, "when a society has a great number of children and families at risk, the society itself is at risk" (Arango, ca.1989), it is almost binding on the school community to facilitate the coordinators in having a dynamic "community committee" in the Local Committee.

The reader must bear in mind that the data for this dissertation was gathered from early 1995 to early 1997. There has been growth within schools since, which includes teacher involvement with parents, particularly in the areas of collaborative policy making, home visits, Local Committees, further development with regard to parents in the classroom and a more inclusive type of parent-teacher meeting.

If the evidence acquired for this dissertation and its analysis is valid then the role of the coordinator has not only been crucial for the scheme up to now but will be critical also in addressing these weaknesses. One last point is the need for coordinators to be affirmed by principals, teachers, management, parents and by each other so that they will be encouraged and, as appropriate, directed in the future evolution of the HSCL scheme.