

University of Strathclyde

Department of Educational and Professional Studies

**A Study of the Perceived Relevance and Effectiveness  
of  
Parents' Meetings in Primary Schools**

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## *ABSTRACT*

The body of research on parents' meetings characterises these events as stressful and unsatisfactory while projecting a superficial consensus between parents and teachers for the sake of the child. As the recent UK literature is based in a secondary education context, this study aims to examine whether these issues are relevant in primary education. Informed by grounded theory, the study analyses the opinions of a sample of parents, teachers and pupils from three primary schools in one local education authority in Scotland. The data was gathered by group interviews with pupils, parents' meeting observation and a diary-interview approach with parents and teachers. The key issues of the satisfaction, purpose and organisation of parents' meetings as well as the proposed participation by pupils was subjected to a larger sample of parents through an attitudinal questionnaire. The data analysis suggested that, overall, satisfaction for parents and teachers rested on the individual meeting encounter with the interpersonal qualities of the teacher being paramount. Professional autonomy persists as participants interpret the purpose and key teacher role as being to transmit information as the expert on the pupil. However, a traditional model of parents' meetings is being challenged as some parents seek proactive roles on behalf of their child that could be interpreted as advocacy. This process appears to have ignored the arguments for greater pupil self-advocacy prompted by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as no pupils were present at the parents' meetings in the study. Adults in the second phase of the study indicated their willingness to include pupil participation in meetings in some form, while the majority of the pupils interviewed were positive about this proposal.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **The purpose of the thesis**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the perceptions of parents, teachers and pupils of parents' meetings in the specific context of the primary school. It aims to gain insight into professional practice and illuminate how the research participants interpret and respond to this practice.

### **Selecting the key term of 'parents' meeting'**

In common parlance, the event explored through this study is called a parents' evening or parents' night. The participants in this study used a variety of terms and the researcher adapted her interactions with the participants to include their familiar terminology. The key term 'parents' meetings' was identified after a preliminary search of the relevant literature. This search indicated that there was a limited amount of literature which specifically referred to parents' meetings in general and almost none related to the primary school context.

Hornby (2000) referred to 'parent-teacher meetings' in his text on 'Improving Parental Involvement'; in her UK, secondary school research, Walker used either parents' evenings (Walker, 1998) or parent-teacher consultations (Maclure & Walker, 1999) to discuss this event; while American authors tended to use the term 'conferences' (Swap, 1993) and many US articles are located by using this search term. This study in three Scottish primary schools showed that these meetings take place in afternoons as well as evenings; therefore, suggesting that parents' evenings or nights are a misnomer. Within this confusing framework, the researcher decided to adopt one term for consistency. This was the key term that located relevant articles in this area of study during an early ERIC database search. The term was not chosen capriciously but as a conscious intention to locate the researcher's work within the larger, relevant discourse on meetings that take place in schools with the aim of discussing matters related to the parent's child as a learner.

## **Influences on the choice of topic**

The choice of topic for this study was influenced by the national educational context and the researcher's professional interests.

### *Professional relevance*

The researcher was previously a primary teacher and had over ten years of shaping her own practice for parents' evenings. This was primarily based on an experiential model of learning (Kolb, 1984) whereby she refined her practice by evaluating her experiences. Management responsibility gave her the opportunity to observe a greater range of professional practice and led her to reflect on the diversity of experiences that parents found between schools and individual teachers. Many aspects of education were reviewed over that time, principally the 5-14 Guidelines for the Curriculum; these became the focus of staff room discussions, staff training and school policy. However, what teachers actually did in the privacy of their classroom at a parents' meeting remained a private matter. Staff room discussions followed the pattern of focusing on 'difficult' interviews or those who never turn-up (Bastiani, 1986) but the 'nuts and bolts' remained a mystery. In all the researcher's schools, pupils remained excluded but there was awareness that parents' meetings could be a source of anxiety for the children and were sometimes used as emotional leverage by both parents and teachers.

A shift of career to teaching in an education faculty led the researcher to teach undergraduate and postgraduate students about working with parents. This included providing continuous professional development courses in local education authorities. Groups of students were often interested in innovative ways to form partnerships with parents such as parenting classes and home-school curriculum projects. While working with practising primary teachers, the researcher became aware of overt and covert professional practices to avoid meeting parents in person. Teachers appeared to be more comfortable communicating with parents in a written format. This led the researcher to think about the minimum provision for a parent to actually meet the teacher of their child in the year; for many parents, the main personal communication they have with a teacher is through the requirement of

parents' meetings (Johnson & Ransom, 1983). In an educational ethos of parental partnership, the researcher wondered what relevance a 5-10 minute interview had: what do the participants want and to what extent does this practice satisfy this?

This question prompted an initial search into the literature of this topic. The development of a larger study was attractive in satisfying professional curiosity and in contributing to the knowledge and skills base that the researcher would bring to her teaching. Parents' meetings provided a topic with the crucial quality of practical relevance as,-

“The more the research lacks connection with the normal range of professional work, the more difficult it will be to undertake, and the more likely it will be that its worthwhileness will be substantially reduced.”

(Lewis & Munn, 1997 p.15)

### *The national context*

The Scottish education context during the period of this study made parents' meetings a contemporary topic. The Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) set five national priorities that included Values and Citizenship whereby schools would work with parents to develop pupils' citizenship skills, thus supporting improved working practices with parents (Scottish Executive, 2000). Also, in 2002, a large national project was established to investigate the various contributing factors in assessment. The Assessment is for Learning Initiative set a specific project on “Reporting to Parents and Others” (Project 9) to involve schools in action research on partnership with parents. The researcher had various professional links with the Development Officer from Learning and Teaching Scotland and helped to collect data for their study. While Reporting 5-14 (SOED, 1992) had set expectations for parent and teacher partnership in reporting assessment, the actual practice in schools was now open for development. The Minister for Education and Young People, Peter Peacock, announced a SEED proposal to encourage partnership with parents including “more regular dialogue with parents about how their children are developing” as “where parents are involved

with their children's learning – particularly at home- it has a positive effect on attainment and achievement” (Peacock, 2004 p.10). This proposal has more recently led to a contract with the Quality in Education Unit at the University of Strathclyde to develop various partnership materials including advice for schools and parents on improving parents' meetings.

The national context had remained heavily influenced by the legislation of the 1980s that sought to increase parents' rights in education (Education (Scotland) Act 1980, 81, 86). These developments were based on a philosophy of increasing stakeholder participation in education. During this period, the key stakeholder was identified as the parent of the pupil (Macbeth, 1989). Increasing parents' rights would enable them to enter into a partnership model of home-school relations; partnership being facilitated by an equal power base for the participants and shared goals. This is the model that is outlined in Reporting 5-14. Research into the extent to which parents actually embraced these new rights suggests that there are variations by social class and ethnicity: middle class parents appeared to have the skills and motivation to act more readily on behalf of their child (Thomas, Vass & McLellan, 1997; Crozier, 1999a; 1999b; 2001).

As Scotland moved towards the new millennium, the national context on who were viewed as the stakeholders in education was changing. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child had become a strong international influence on Scottish education legislation. Both the Children (Scotland) Act (1995) and the Standard in Scotland's Schools, etc (2000) Act demonstrated a growing recognition of the UN Convention including, in particular, Article 12 whereby children should be able to give an opinion on decisions that affect them, where possible. Nationally, Education for Citizenship (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2001) charged schools with supporting children as developing citizens through a holistic approach that permeated all aspects of their school experience.

The perception of the stakeholders in education had now extended beyond teachers and parents to include parents. Where parents continued to act on behalf of the absent

pupil, it could be argued that they were fulfilling the role of advocate; that is, they acted on behalf of one who was perceived as less able (the pupil) to gain something from someone who was perceived as having more power (the teacher). If this was the case, the equal power base of partnership and the mutually complimentary roles would not be evident. Garner and Sandow (1995) are wary of advocacy as it can restrict the development of self-advocacy skills for the person being represented. The changing national context suggested new roles for parents, teachers and pupils with a common theme of participation. However, these changes also suggested tensions between parents' rights and emerging children's rights as the question was now raised of who best articulated the needs of the child. Against this context, the exclusion of pupils from aspects of their school life, such as parents' meetings, now clearly needed some form of justification.

### **The aims and proposed outcomes of the study**

Professional and national influences led the researcher to design a study with the following aims and intended outcomes.

#### *Aims of the study*

The purposes that the researcher had for undertaking this study were:

- To compare and contrast the expectations that parents, teachers and pupils have of parents' meetings
- To sample parents' meetings to examine the methodology employed and ascertain the extent to which expectations were fulfilled
- To review the relevance of parents' meetings in the current primary education context
- To ascertain which aspects of parents' meetings best serve the purposes of the study participants.

### *Proposed outcomes of the study*

Within the scope of this study, the researcher should have achieved:

- insight into parent, teacher and pupil expectations and levels of participation at parents' meetings
- knowledge of the methods employed by teachers at parents' meetings
- an indication of parent-teacher satisfaction with current models
- insight into practice that reconciles participant expectations
- an indication of the relevance of the established practice of parents' meetings in the current context of primary education
- an enhanced understanding of the factors influencing partnership with parents.

### **The terms of reference**

#### *The context of the study*

A study of parents' meetings was carried-out at three primary schools in one local education authority in central Scotland. These schools are identified by the pseudonyms Burgh, Gateway and Hill: this required permission from the local authority education department and this is discussed more fully in Chapter 3. The study was structured in two phases:

Phase 1: at each school - naturalistic observation of a general parents' meeting, a group interview with a quota sample of pupils and diaries of the meetings from teachers and parents followed by semi-structured interviews.

Phase 2: at each school, questionnaires derived from Phase 1 data to a larger sample of parents.

Informed consent was sought from the parents and teachers through a letter. The researcher satisfied local education authority guidance by establishing informed consent for the pupils from their parents; she also recorded the pupils' consent on video tape. Chapter 3 details the further ethical considerations that the researcher made at each stage of the research study.

### *Constraints on the study*

The researcher sought to provide a valid study to address the research questions. The scope of the study was constrained by the researcher being a part time student with limited time to access the participants of the study. This affected the scale of the sample and its geographical location. The researcher also had to select methods that addressed the research questions while working within her time constraints during the day. Understanding had also to be shown regarding the limits on the time that the participants could give to the study; the researcher was attentive to this by piloting her research tools to ensure that she could maximise the data collection within the time that the participants had available. Following a review of teachers' pay and conditions under the McCrone agreement (SEED, 2001), sensitivity was required when approaching teachers to participate in additional work during the period of the study.

### **The research method**

Chapter 3 will detail the research method employed during this study. The lack of relevant literature in the primary context presented in Chapter 2 led to an approach informed by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, the design of research tools for Phase 1 of the study was informed but not led by the available literature. At each school, three teachers volunteered to participate in the study; a random sample of two parents in each teacher's class was then selected. These related triads kept a diary that was structured to record before, during and after the parents' meeting. The researcher then used this data to inform follow-up semi-structured interviews with these participants. The outcomes of this data were used to design a questionnaire that was issued to 60 parents at each of the schools in Phase 2. In addition, data was collected through group interviews with pupils at each school that contained representatives of each stage of the school. A general observation using descriptive recording was made at each school of one parents' meeting.

The data from the study provided a rich picture of parents' meetings at it could be analysed and interpreted by the participant group, research site and the stage of the

pupils. It required an iterative process of interpretation whereby Phase 1 identified key themes and Phase 2 checked the validity of these themes but one had to return to Phase 1 to illuminate and understand the process underpinning parents' meetings. The themes emerging from the study included issues regarding the purposes for the participants, the participant roles, content and organisation of the actual meetings and the aspects that led to participant satisfaction. The study established quickly that pupils did not participate in these meetings and this led to an investigation of the responses of teachers, parents and pupils of the potential participation of children at parents' meetings.

The study encountered some difficulties that are discussed in Chapter 3. A main issue in Phase 1 was that only three of the parents at Burgh returned their diaries and participated in the interviews. The context of this school had raised specific issues such as access to pupils' work and confidentiality in an open setting for the meeting. The implication of this was that proceeding to Phase 2 was imperative to check the validity and reliability of the findings in Phase 1.

The main issue for Phase 2 was securing a reasonable return rate of questionnaires. This difficulty is identified in many key texts on research methods (Munn & Drever, 1999; Burns, 2000). Chapter 3 outlines the steps that the researcher took to prompt returns. The total return rate from the three sites was 92 questionnaires. Gorard (2001) states that samples over 60 reduce the potential standard error and can be considered large scale research. Thus, analysis in this study across the three sites is credible in its generalisability. Whereas, the analysis at individual site level, should be considered small-scale research and caution is required in making general statements from these findings. However, analysis at this level is still worthwhile as Perakyla (1997) proposes that findings are generalisable in that professionals can read these and identify what they can do from their context.

## **Outlining the structure of the thesis**

In this thesis, Chapter 2 will provide an outline of the relevant literature that informed the study and identify the research questions that led the investigation. As stated, the amount of literature available was limited in the specific field of parents' meetings in primary schools. However, this was supplemented by drawing from the abundant general literature on partnership with parents and from the relevant evidence available from the secondary school sector. Chapter 3 outlines the research method adopted to address the three research questions and it is supported by examples of letters and research tools in the appendices. The findings are presented in Chapters 4 to 7. Chapters 4 to 6 each address one of the research questions from the study. Chapter 7 looks across the questions at the issue of pupil participation at parents' meetings; it is hoped that it is more meaningful for the reader to take a holistic view of this issue rather than fragmenting it across several chapters. Chapter 8 seeks to move beyond the traditional final discussion of the findings to reconstruct the information in the preceding chapters around the core concept of parents' meetings and advocacy. It will suggest that teachers demonstrate methods of protecting their professionalism but the consumerist ethos of the 1980s and 1990s has encouraged some parents to seek proactive advocacy roles on behalf of their children. The Chapter will question the exclusion of pupils from parents' meetings and discuss the potential for self-advocacy at future forms of these meetings. The implications emerging from this discussion will be drawn together in Chapter 9 which discusses the relevance of the findings for particular stakeholders. The Chapter will suggest the study has relevance for policy makers, teachers, parents, pupils, Initial Teacher Education and the researcher herself.

### **Introduction**

The roots of parents' meetings lie in the developments of partnership with parents through educational legislation, policy and practice since the late 1960s. This chapter will seek to demonstrate that the literature on working with parents has grown rapidly through the 1980s and 1990s, to include recent research on participant views of parents' meetings. However, the current research perspective of dissatisfaction with these meetings is founded on the secondary education field and has yet to explore this issue in the primary education context. The discussion will not assume the validity of parental involvement and the arguments regarding partnership with professionals will be succinctly presented. Current concerns of teachers, parents and pupils will be established by reviewing the limited specific literature on parents' meetings that is available. As pupil participation in the primary sector is not a widespread practice in the UK, the review of this aspect will be embedded in the wider debate on children's rights, participation and citizenship.

### **Defining a parent**

While the pupil and teacher continue to be clearly defined roles in primary schools, the role of parent is more nebulous and requires definition prior to its extensive use in this study. By 'parent', it is necessary to assume a broader view as the nuclear family has changed significantly to respond to increased divorce and working parents (Smith, Cowie & Blades, 1998; Schaffer, 1999; Utting & Pugh, 2004). In Scottish education law, the parent includes a "guardian and anyone who has parental responsibilities for, or has the care of, a child or young person." (McGuire & Nisbet, 2001 p.9). Swap (1993) suggests that one should consider in this reference frame "not just biological parents, but step-parents, grandparents, primary caretakers, older siblings, aunts, and uncles." (p.61) And, in welcoming family to school, professionals should consider those who "have special responsibility for or a special meaning to the child" (Swap, 1993 p.61).

## **Parental involvement**

### *A rationale for parental involvement in education*

Parental involvement was given impetus with the minimum requirement introduced in the Plowden Report (1967). It was set against a climate when parents could be met in the playground by a sign instructing 'No Parents Beyond This Point' (Green, 1968). Working with parents remained an 'understanding' until the 1980s when a series of Education Acts (Education (Scotland) Act 1980, 81, 86) set legislation on parental rights and subsequent professional accountability. Parental involvement was "located within the discourse of participatory democracy, the stakeholder society and citizenship." (Crozier, 1999a p.316).

The growing body of research into school effectiveness and standards of attainment cited partnership with parents as a contributory factor (Tomlinson, 1984; Johnson, 1990; MacBeath & McCall, 2001). Elsewhere, it was found that parental attendance at parents' meetings was linked to pupil attainment and attendance at school (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986). However, Hornby (2000) argues that this is based upon 1969 research when the model of partnership was less developed and it could be said that the parents of these pupils are more likely to attend parents' meeting due to the increased chance that they will hear a positive report. Recent work on working with parents (Hornby, 2000) continues to cite a link between partnership and pupil attainment and attendance.

Tomlinson (1991) also links parent-teacher partnerships to increased pupil attainment. She suggests further roots for partnership based on,-

- legislative requirements that place the parent in the role of the client to the teacher;
- the democratic requirement of parents to act on behalf of their child's rights, including, as a taxpayer holding teachers accountable;
- teachers' professionalism requiring them to recognise parents as co-educators;
- enhancing the equality of opportunity by parents entering into partnership.

These require further consideration.

Comparative studies of EEC countries indicate that a favourable context to partnership exists where there is legislation at different levels of power (Ross & Tomlinson, 1991). This includes proposals for individual level home-school contracts with rights and requirements for both parties (Macbeth, 1989; Bastiani, 1996). However, to win the hearts and minds of parents and professionals, partnership needs to appeal beyond the factual, legislative level to the affective and attitudinal. Participants need to identify a personally relevant reason for partnership practice. Therefore, a rationale for parental involvement needs to transcend the legislative level to relate to the common participant interest of the pupil – participation requires justification on educational grounds (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986; Bogdanowicz, 1994). The school effectiveness movement has consistently made this connection. Klein & Schleiffer (1980) looked at partnership where pupils have special educational needs; they concluded that the challenge for the future was to take the body of legislation on working with parents and turn it into real collaboration between the participants that would not be achieved by legislation alone. Instead,-

“We must learn to appreciate the perspective of others, learn to share with one another, and, learn how to learn from one another.”

(Klein & Schleiffer, 1980 p.3)

The body of 1980s and 1990s legislation on partnership placed the parent in the role of client to the role of the teacher as professional. This consumer model of education charged parents with the responsibility in exercising the rights of the child and holding education, as a public service, accountable. Simpson (1978) identifies that the growth of large bureaucracies has necessitated advocacy. Similarly, Garner and Sandow (1995) found that the emphasis placed upon rights and consumerism has created the need for self-advocacy. They argue that, through the consumerist

philosophy of education, the pupil is denied the right to self-advocacy and it is assumed that the parents will act in the interest of the child.

The weaknesses of the consumer model of education have been extensively discussed elsewhere (Sallis, 1988; MacLeod, 1989; Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995). Here, it is pertinent to raise the validity of its belief that parents are a homogeneous group endowed with the ability and willingness to consistently advocate in the best interests of the child. Crozier (1999a; 1999b; 2001) has queried the true equality of provision for parents when parental needs differ by social class and ethnicity. A major strength in the shift towards parental involvement in education has been the recognition of the unique parental knowledge of the individual child and the complimentary skills that parents bring to the child's education (Hannon, 1995; Pugh, 2001). This knowledge and these skills cannot be divorced from the strongly affective experience of parenthood. Advocacy requires the advocate to act free from self-interest (Dunning, 1995; Bateman, 2000; Liebmann, 2000). It has been argued that, while parents may act vociferously as advocates for their child, they may not always do so objectively and in the best interests of the child's needs (Hegarty, 1987; Landsdown & Lancaster, 2001). Legislation and cultural factors in Western societies have increasingly supported the family as a private domain and its practices and decisions tend to be questioned only when they have clearly put the child in jeopardy (Roche, 1999).

On the other hand, the extent to which parents have been able to exercise their perceived power in the market place of education requires qualification. At the end of the 1980s proliferation of legislation aimed at enshrining parents' power, Ted Wragg differentiated between parental rights and real parental power:

“the right to be given a prospectus is not the power to say what should be in it, and the right of parents as a group to provide two to five parent governors is not the same as power to all parents to determine the conduct and curriculum of the school. “ (Wragg in MacLeod, 1989 p.125)

As stated before, legislation may outline a minimum requirement of parental involvement but this will be limited without real attitudinal change by professionals. Within the parent body, the extent to which individual parents were able to exercise these new rights depended on knowledge of how to navigate the education system, a cultural willingness to question professional judgement and, to some extent, economic advantage. Thomas, Vass & McLellan (1997) interviewed 659 parents to assess parental responses to increased power. Parents had made little response to the Parent's Charter and were moving against rights for schools to opt-out of the public sector but they valued opportunities they had gained to receive hard information on their child. Class differences were evident, including, the greater willingness of non-manual workers to become involved in school governance. Crozier (1999a; 1999b) has contested working class parents' ability and willingness to engage with parent power. Her studies suggest that it is more probable that these parents perceive education as a 'division of labour' between themselves and the professional and they are more likely to be differential to professional judgement. Both Crozier (1999a) and Bogdanowicz (1994) have found that middle class parents have benefited most from parental rights. The consumer model of education in the UK has not been beneficial in furthering parental participation in education, thus, weakening the likelihood of achieving the benefits of partnership outlined by Tomlinson (1991). It is difficult to argue for partnership where one partner has been perceived as having the legal right to hold the other accountable. Instead, Bogdanowicz (1994) suggests that the discussion needs to be relocated within the dialogue on 'active citizenship'.

A concern that has received less consideration is that the consumer model of education placed the parent in the role of client as advocate for the child. Garner and Sandow (1995) state that the dominant belief in the UK is that the child's rights are best served by the parent but that parental and educational establishment rights frequently take precedence to those of the child. The consumer model of education consolidated the silence of the child's voice in education by locating the discussion exclusively with the adult participants.

### *Models of parental involvement*

One model of working with parents saw interventions made on a deficit model, that is, that the school could ameliorate the negative effects of the home. The Plowden Report (1967) was influenced by the research of Douglas (1964) who defined parental interest in education by the number of visits to the school and comments made by the teacher about the family. Atkin and Bastiani (1985) identified that the Plowden concept of the 'good home' persisted; further, Bastiani (1986) found that teachers still measured parental interest by attendance at school events. The 1960s and '70s saw an acceleration of intervention projects in the home to benefit children's education; for example, Project Headstart in the US (1965) and Halsey's work on Educational Priority Areas in UK (1972). However, Bronfenbrenner's (1974) review of such projects highlighted that the ones that had a long term effect were those that worked with families rather than excluding them.

Hornby (2000) expands 6 models of parental involvement.

1. Protective model: The functions of parents and teachers are clearly defined and separated to avoid conflict; the teacher's being to teach while the parent send them fully equipped
2. Expert model: Developed by Cunningham & Davis (1985), the teacher is the expert disseminating information to the parent.
3. Transmission model: described in Swap (1993), the teacher sees benefits to involving parents as a resource as seen in intervention projects.
4. Curriculum enrichment model: Swap (1993) identifies a model where teachers want parents involved to extend the school curriculum.
5. Consumer model: Cunningham & Davis (1985) link this to the growth in legislation that put parents in the role of consumer.

6. Partnership model: Hornby (2000) identifies 4 essential elements:

- (i) 2-way communication
  - (ii) mutual support
  - (iii) joint decision-making
  - (iv) enhancement of learning
- (Hornby, 2000 p.18-21)

How do these models translate into practice through parents' meetings?

## **Current Practice in Parents' Meetings**

Johnson and Ransom's (1983) study of secondary schools highlights the importance of the parents' meeting as it can be the only point of interpersonal contact between the parent and the teacher. In Scotland, a pattern of reporting to parents is outlined in 'Reporting 5-14: Promoting Partnership' (1992). It suggests that the school report should be issued with a section for the parent to comment, followed by a parents' meeting. Pupils should be encouraged to contribute to the writing of the report and should have an opportunity to informally discuss the report with the teacher. In 'Scottish Education 5-14: A Parents' Guide' (McClelland, 1993), parents are advised that the aims of parent-teacher meetings are, -

- to give parents a clear view of pupil progress
- to enable teachers to understand parents' views of pupil progress
- to allow parents and teachers to agree support that will give the next steps to learning.

These aims infer that communication will be two-way with joint decision-making based upon mutual respect of parent and teacher contributions to pupil education.

Reporting 5-14 states:

“By the end of the meeting, parents and teachers should feel satisfied that they have had the opportunity to listen carefully to one another, to contribute meaningfully to the discussion, and to establish a clear idea of the action to be taken.” (SOED, 1992 p.26)

Yet, in the UK context, Stacey (1991) finds teachers still setting the boundaries for parents' perceived needs. Significant national research found parental dissatisfaction with parents' meetings in the secondary context, complaining of lack of privacy, pressures of time and long queues (Reid, 1984; Walker, 1998).

Hornby (2000) suggests a range of purposes for parents' meetings. For teachers, this includes “informing parents of their children's progress”, “learning more about children, from parents' perspectives” and “jointly making decisions about children's education”. While the goals of parents included “finding out about their children's

progress”, “questioning teachers about any concerns they may have” and “passing on important information about their children”. (Hornby, 2000 p.42). Whereas Spooner (1991) suggests that these meetings should be used to correct any misconceptions arising from the school report. It could be argued that parents’ meetings are victims of the many purposes that they are perceived as meeting. Swap (1993) acknowledges that it is difficult to really reconcile different opinions where these meetings have a short timescale; however, Simpson (1996) argues that the goal must be preserved that the teacher ,-

“regardless of time constraints and the amount of information to be dispensed, he or she *discuss* information with parents and family members rather than lecture.” (Simpson, 1996 p.266)

Teachers complain that they do not see the parents that they want to see (Bastiani, 1986). At the beginning of the 1980s, Gregory (1981) advocated ‘selling’ parents’ meetings; this client-based model has resulted in private partnerships in the US to advertise parent-teacher meetings in Houston, Texas and encourage employers to release parents for meetings in Indianapolis (Swap, 1993). Where parents are attending parents’ meetings, there remains “a veneer of consensus” (Walker, 1998 p.172), an uneasy relationship resulting from differing expectations, unequal power bases but a desire to avoid conflict for the sake of the child. Walker interviewed pupils, teachers and parents but found that they were unclear on the expectation of parents’ meetings.

## **What do parents expect from parents' meetings?**

### *General parental expectation from recent research*

Ammer & Littleton (1983) used questionnaires to ascertain current parental involvement and desired participation in the educational process for 217 parents of pupils with special educational needs. Parent-teacher meetings held a significant place as 51% preferred these with only regular letters home (69%) exceeding this choice of communication. Recent work in the secondary sector (Crozier, 1999a) supports the value that parents place on parents' meetings, particularly working class parents. In the US, Swap (1993) established that working parents prefer individual meetings with teachers to other home- school contacts. Whereas, Walker (1998) clearly depicts secondary school parents' meetings as a source of stress where parents felt distressed and powerless; some parents had decided to stop attending.

Schools make personal contacts with parents through different meeting formats. This can include class meetings to discuss the curriculum. Munn (1998) found that parents were less interested in these meetings as they considered this to be the teacher's responsibility; they were more likely to attend personal meetings that concerned their individual child. Thomas, Vass and McLellan's (1997) study confirmed that parents are positive about school reports and found meetings useful. On the other hand, less than half of the parents in this English study found the National Curriculum information clear on reports. During the 1980s, positive reporting suffered a backlash as parents found it difficult to discern the areas that required support in their child's education; in England and Wales OfSTED subsequently promoted 'constructive reporting;' that gives a more balanced overview (Clark, 1998). When surveyed on the skills that parents value in professionals, parents of SEN pupils listed truthfulness, treating parents with respect and listening sensitively to parents. (Silverman & Stacey, 1989). A consistent message emerges of parents looking for truth but in communication often couched in professional jargon this would appear difficult. Clark and Power's (1998) secondary sector parental participants were critical of parents' meetings where they did little more than reiterate the report and did not provide opportunities for dialogue. Despite the practice of issuing reports

before meetings, parents reported surprise at meetings as they were unable to read the reports at an inferential level. In a later article, Power and Clark (2000) discussed parents' queries about the relevance of receiving reports at the end of the school year. These parents found these reports to be "vague and formulaic" (p36).

Hornby (2000) suggests that parents have a hidden agenda at meetings to see if the teacher knows their child; an anecdote from the teacher regarding the child conveys specific knowledge that give credibility to the teacher's comments on the pupil's educational progress (Swap, 1993). Walker's (1998) secondary study found parents' feeling undervalued as teachers did not treat the parental information on the individual child credibly.

It has been suggested that parents want more than information on their child; there is a need to make a social link, to build some kind of relationship and match a face to the person who spends a significant proportion of time with their child (Newsom & Ransom, 1983; Clark, 1998).

#### *Parents are not a homogeneous group*

The needs of parents, however, are not homogeneous. It is important that schools generate a spectrum of activities to encourage partnership. Within the parent-teacher meeting, parents bring different expectations and needs. Crozier (1999a) argues that the consumer model of education suits middle class parents who have confidence in approaching the school. She argued that working class parents employ a model akin to Hornby's protective model whereby parents and teachers have distinct roles and find that teachers tend to phrase their expectations of parents in terms of their own needs. Working class parents relied heavily on teachers to tell them when there are problems and how these can be remediated; they are aware that teachers are not always successful but felt that they could not do better where the school had failed. Difficulties also arise in the needs of other groups: for example, parents' meetings are more tightly structured to reporting 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines and use school reports as a basis for discussion. Parents with language difficulties, such as those who do not have English as a first language, have difficulty in grasping the nuances

in teachers' reporting language (Clark, 1998). Crozier (1999a; 2001) concludes that treating parents as the same results in discrimination against certain groups. Bogdanowicz's (1994) comparison of EEC countries parental partnership identified an international pattern of exclusion of certain groups of parents including those of the working classes.

### **What do teachers expect from parents' meetings?**

#### *Professional Requirements*

The McCrone Report 'A Teaching Profession for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' (2001) reviewed the career structure, conditions of service, pay and continuing professional development of Scotland's teachers. Within the contractual time out with class contact and preparation allowance, teachers would agree school level activities to include parents' meetings (SEED, 2001). Many primary schools had settled into a biannual pattern of one afternoon (after school) and one evening meeting. The previous Scheme of Salary and Conditions required teachers to attend up to 6 parents events in a year out with pupil contact hours. Currently, the Standard for Initial Teacher Education in Scotland (2000) and the Standard for Full Registration (2001) outline the professional expectation that teachers will "have positive relationships and partnerships" with parents (GTC, 2001 p.31); more specifically, they will demonstrate that they ,-

"understand the importance of reporting to parents or guardians on children's progress and discussing matters related to their children's personal, social and emotional development in a sensitive and productive way." (GTC, 2001 p.27)

#### *Teacher expectations from recent research*

In the US, Turnbull and Turnbull (1986) found that teachers rate communication with parents as a key source of job stress. This was particularly evident in inexperienced teachers. Teachers have generally complained of a lack of training to work with parents (Reid, 1984; Walker, 1998). This appears to be a larger issue as the conclusions of Bogdanowicz's (1994) EEC comparative study included the need for professional training in this area. Both teachers and parents were aware that they

were being judged at these meetings (Walker, 1998). Walker's study of 4 Norfolk secondary schools included canvassing teachers on the purpose of parents' meetings. The majority of professionals responded that this was to answer parents' questions. However, Walker employed observation of these events and found that teachers did most of the talking. Thus, teachers adopted an expert model of partnership. Munro (2003) reported the example of one Scottish secondary school that had chosen to abandon traditional parents' meetings for drop-in approach aimed at addressing parents' concerns as they arise.

### *Interpersonal skills*

Parents have suggested organisational factors that led to dissatisfaction including queues and lack of confidentiality (Reid, 1984; Walker, 1998). Research in the SEN sector indicates that parents value good interpersonal skills in the teacher during a meeting (Silverman & Stacey, 1989). Competence in these skills with parents cannot be automatically assumed where teachers have received a training and work in a context that focuses on children. Further, a normally confident teacher may feel stressed by having to communicate in a situation where the traditional power base has to shift to one of equality with another adult. (To extend the argument, this potentially poses problems where teachers have had to review their traditional power base to accommodate the growing impetus for children's rights and participation.) Stacey (1991) suggests that teachers are uncomfortable in communicating openly where they do not have all the answers. As previously discussed, parents can be emotional about their child and may bring this to the meeting: Stacey believes that teachers have the intellectual capacity to conduct such meetings but they can undervalue dealing with people expressing emotions, including their own. Where teachers perceive a situation as stressful, she states that they may tend to give a monologue and adopt the comfortable role as expert. This contributes towards parents' meeting potentially becoming "a kind of ritual" (Stacey, 1991 p.92). Kroth and Simpson (1977) argue that interpersonal skills cannot be taught. However, Hornby (2000) believes it is possible to work with teachers on this skill. He suggests that these include learning active and passive listening skills; being assertive including handling criticism, requests and giving positive feedback; encouraging

problem-solving approaches in working with parents; and counselling skills. These bear a strong resemblance to the principles of mediation outlined by Liebmann (2000) that included listening to others, valuing their contributions, taking a problem-solving approach and seeking a 'win-win' situation.

### *Teacher attitudes to parents*

Teachers' expectations at these meetings are shaped by their attitudes to parents: this influences the role that the teacher adopts and the role that is ascribed to the parent. Hornby (2000) identified several common teacher attitudes towards parents:

1. Parents as problems: parents who ask questions or remain concerned about their child, in spite of professional assurances, are given labels such as 'over-anxious' or 'aggressive'.
2. Parents as adversaries: conflict exists where parents have different viewpoint or other goals to the teacher.
3. Parents as vulnerable: where teachers perceive parents as being too vulnerable to be treated equally, they are less likely to be honest in order to protect the parents and they may assume superiority. Turnbull and Turnbull (1986) argue that this attitude towards parents can be self-fulfilling.
4. Parents are less able: parents are assumed to be less intelligent or observant than the teacher. Thus, the teacher adopts the expert role and may dismiss parental information on the child. Simpson (1996) argues that teachers need to listen because they value parental information rather than because they have to.
5. Parents as needing treatment: teachers may assume that a parent of a child who is having problems is not realistic about the situation and requires counselling.

6. Parents as causal: teachers may believe that parents have caused their child's problems. Professionals may criticise the parenting skills. Turnbull and Turnbull (1986) believe that parents can also hold this attitude. However, it is important that professionals do not reinforce this belief.
7. Parents need to be kept at a professional distance: teachers interpret professionalism as keeping parents at an emotional distance but parents can perceive this as a lack of empathy.  
(Hornby, 2000 p. 5-8)

Sonnenschien (1984) suggests that teacher's attitudes about parents can contribute towards their stress. In a profession that lacks a formal training on working with parents, teachers will rely on beliefs of their professional group. Therefore, one has to question to what degree these attitudes are generated from direct experience or whether they are embedded in the professional belief system and communicated to new teachers.

Working in the US, Kroth (1975) has extensively used a Q-sort technique with parents and teachers to explore their complementary perceptions. When the groups have been asked to examine expectations placed upon them by others, they have been surprised by the range of expectations, indicating that these are implicitly held rather than explicitly stated.

#### *Professionalism and public relations*

Teachers' expectations and resulting actions at parents' meetings will be influenced by their beliefs on the attributes of a member of the teaching profession. Professions have been described by functionalists as having a specific body of knowledge and being endowed with a good degree of autonomy including being self-regulating. Weber and Marx adopt a critical stance on the professions as self-protecting and a means of social control (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000). Recent observers of the status of the teaching profession suggest that their perceived autonomy has been eroded through greater central control and unification of the job of the teacher

(Patrick, Ford & McPhee, 2003). However, it could be argued that a technical-rational model has been imposed on public practice but parents' meetings remain part of the private professional practice. The author identified a similar pattern in the early 1990s when her research into teacher behaviour management practices indicated that experiential-based learning in the absence of formal training was dearly held by professionals and transmitted to new entrants to the teaching profession (Hannay, 1993).

The consumer model applied to education through the 1980s and early 1990s clearly segregated the roles of the parent as client to the teacher as professional. The parent was placed in the role of advocate: advocacy involves "helping another person obtain something from someone with power" (Bateman, 2000 p.6). Although legislation sought to increase parent power, teachers could still protect their status by assuming the role of expert. Functionalist perspectives on professions describe a specific knowledge-base, while critical theorists believe professions protect the perceived exclusivity of that specialist knowledge. It could be argued that teachers may feel that parents' meetings present a challenge to their professionalism as the teacher does not hold exclusive knowledge of the child. Stacey (1991) believes that teachers do not deal well with situations that place them outside their expert role. Moore (1994) compared the perspectives of parents, head teachers and pupils on parents approaching the school. The parents felt that they needed to voice queries or concerns but this type of activity was interpreted elsewhere as complaining. Indeed, pupils asked parents not to voice their concerns for fear of reprisals in school. Some parents in the study had found the process of talking with staff discouraging and perceived teachers as insensitive. Bateman (2000) states that there will be opposition to advocate's claims where these affect the interests of the institution, where negative views are held by the profession of the client's lifestyle or as part of the defensive culture of the bureaucracy.

In the current educational context where it has been argued that teacher autonomy is being eroded elsewhere, how do teachers protect their power through parents' meetings? Walker (1998) found that teachers hold the props of power during these

meetings such as prepared notes. Elsewhere, Kroth (1985) advises that schools should help parents by suggesting topics that they might want to review before the meeting. The setting of these meetings takes place on the teacher's territory with the professional having a clearly defined role; thus, further reinforcing the power difference. Tomlinson (1991) argued that parents are further disadvantaged as they lack a coherent power base.

Communication at parents' meetings has been beset by the dual influences of professionalism and consumerism. Teachers can protect their profession by using professional jargon (Tomlinson, 1991). As discussed previously, in the English context, parents find the language of the National Curriculum confusing in school reports (Power & Clark, 2000) and ESL parents are further hampered by accessing professional language and nuances (Clark & Power, 1998). Consumerism served to place the parent in the role of client rather than expert on their own child (Walker, 1998); thus, teachers manage parents' meetings as a 'public relations exercise', engaging in "impression management" (Clark & Power, 1998 p.48). Maclure and Walker's (1999) analysis of parents' meetings found parallels to information management strategies in other professions. The teacher engages in "institutional talk" (Maclure & Walker, 1999 p.54), taking control through holding official paperwork and by adopting the right to decide whether an issue raised by a parent is really a problem. In an attempt to appear business-like, the teacher assumes a distant manner. Simpson (1996) provides advice on holding a parents' meeting that includes maintaining "a natural demeanour" (p.123). It is difficult for parents to feel they can communicate equally where the other person appears less approachable and infallible.

Thus, through the mixed expectations of parents and teachers, Walker (1998) concluded that parents' meetings were,-

“an ambiguous mix of social event and business meeting.”

(Walker, 1998 p.174)

## **What do pupils expect from parents' meetings?**

### *Pupils' expectations from research*

Both Walker (1998) and Reid (1984) found little evidence of pupil participation: even when school stated that pupils could attend, a significant amount of the children stated that they were not encouraged. Studies that included pupils have spotlighted the secondary sector with little consideration of primary schools. Pupils reported anxiety while waiting for the results of parents' meetings and some were relieved not to be present (Walker, 1998). Maclure and Walker (1999) suggest that the low level of pupil attendance was confounded by interviews with pupils turning into little more than "a show trial". The secondary pupils in the study wanted to have the right to attend although many may still not attend as they would be outnumbered by adults (Walker, 1996). Class teachers reported that they would find the presence of pupils to be "inhibiting" and Walker concludes that parent, teacher and pupil meetings would probably be longer and more complicated. If pupils were to attend meetings, both parents and pupils wanted a projection on their educational career but teachers were happier reporting on past achievement. (Johnson & Ransom, 1983; Walker, 1998)

### *The right of the child to participate and express a view*

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12 supports the participation of children in the decision-making process where children are able to express an opinion. Walker (1998) and Walker and MacLure (1999) suggest that the legislation appears to be having little impact upon the practice of parents' meetings. Discussions of children's rights tend to fall into two broad categories. One argument is that children require rights to protect them from society and their own irrationality. These are protectionist or paternalistic in perspective. On the other hand, other rights are aimed at empowering children, giving them increasing autonomy to support them towards participation in society and self-realisation (Franklin, 1986; 1995).

Discussions that strengthen protective rights can limit the autonomy of children as this supports the empowerment of adults to act in the 'best interests' of the child. Bateman (2000) states that advocates are needed where people are perceived as

vulnerable. Where parents act as advocates for pupils, this reinforces the protectionist view of rights over those of empowerment. Franklin (1986; 1995) argues that these rights are exercised by adults in the belief that they have greater rationality and that children will grow to retrospectively appreciate the decisions that were made on their behalf. This advocacy on behalf of the child is often pursued without accountability mechanisms. Prout (2000) identified that there is a widespread pattern of parents representing children's rights in industrialised countries. Freeman (1983) agrees that these are "no-rights" as they exist to protect against perceived threats rather than existing as 'rights to'; the Children's Rights Office (1995) argue that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK government in 1991, has extended children's rights into the latter area. More recently, Roche (1999) has argued that children are still being denied rights to express their views and participate more fully as professionals find it difficult to deal with them in a more powerful role, patterns of respecting family privacy mediate against a meaningful change and there is a continuing ethos of 'adultism' that discriminates on the grounds of age.

The empowerment of children has suffered from a lack of consistency in the definition of the child. Franklin (1986) proposes that childhood is not a common experience or duration. The laws of the UK provide a mix of definitions of legal responsibility for different aspects of life and, culturally, it has been easier to see children as non-adults rather than as beings of growing competence. As with parents, children do not represent a homogeneous group and, therefore, their discrimination is compounded by other factors such as race and gender (Franklin, 1986). Liberationist rights for empowerment are often viewed as dichotomous to protectionist rights. However, adults benefit from both without these being conflicting; for example, rights that safeguard employment and to express one's opinion (e.g. through unions) and Health and Safety legislation that protects one during employment (Franklin, 1986). Freeman (1983) suggests that protection and self-determination rights should be viewed as a continuum rather than as dichotomous. Roche (1999) represents writers who believe that children's rights to participation should increase with age. On the other hand, there are examples of practical projects that have garnered the views of young children (Stirling Council, 2000): the key may lie in how one

supports participation, commensurate with the age and understanding of the child. Indeed, Franklin (1986) states that democratic countries should include people automatically unless a good case can be made to exclude them. The great difficulty is that those who already possess power rarely share it voluntarily. This is where the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should be lending strength to pupil participation by enshrining it in UK, and more locally, Scottish legislation.

*The impact of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in the UK*

The Children's Rights Office (1995) reported on the auditing of the UK's progress in putting the UN Convention into practice. The UK was criticised on several counts including the powerlessness of children to participate meaningfully in educational settings in line with Article 12. In Scotland, the Convention has been enshrined in educational legislation that impacts on primary schools including the Children (Scotland) Act (1995) and the Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc (2000) Act. McGuire and Nisbet (2001) outline legislation that has given children greater participation at whole school level, for example, in consultation regarding School Development Plans. As legislation has moved to enshrine children's rights in schools through mechanisms such as pupil councils, the degree to which individual pupils' views are actually treated with due regard may still prove difficult to hold accountable.

Jeffs in Franklin (1995) argues that the centralisation of education through the 1980s and 90s has eroded the rights of the child. The philosophy of consumerism in education with choice and competition has dehumanised pupils by reducing them to statistics in the competition between schools and the accountability mechanisms to parents, LEAs and national government. Donnellan (1994) states that children's rights are treated less seriously as they lack political rights that would require politicians to treat their views more sincerely. Indeed, legislation has tended to set parental rights against the discussion of children's rights (Prout, 2000), while pupil self-advocacy can be perceived as threatening to the teaching profession (Garner & Sandow, 1995). In this context, it would appear difficult to convince parents and

professionals that pupils should have the right to participate in meetings about their education.

### *Pupil participation and the citizenship discourse*

The discussion of children's rights and participation has increasingly been linked with education for citizenship as Scottish education moves in to the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a national agenda of social inclusion and social justice. Whereas traditional views of the child have depicted them as irrational non-adults, advocates of education for citizenship clearly state that children are born citizens with rights (Learning & Teaching Scotland, 2001; McGettrick, 2001). Prior discussions of children's rights of participation have tended to focus on their future potential to society (Roche, 1999); in consumerist language, society invests in children as "futures" (Prout, 2000).

In the context of parents' meetings, where education aims to develop children's citizenship skills, one is prompted to question when and where pupils will acquire these skills if they are excluded from real, meaningful events in their lives. Education for Citizenship (Learning & Teaching Scotland, 2001) in contrast to citizenship education is not proposed as a separate part of the curriculum but as one that is embedded across the curriculum and school experience to address a holistic perspective of the child. It is proposed that it should be represented in the ethos of a school and how all its partners address one another rather than located in an isolated unit (Learning & Teaching Scotland, 2001). This raises a question over the messages on mutual respect that pupils receive by observing parent-professional relationships and school management- teacher relationships in their daily lives.

Rudduck (2002) states that children receive less autonomy and challenge in the school context than they do elsewhere. Prout (2000) suggests that the growing support that many children receive towards self- realisation and individualisation in family contexts creates a tension to the control and lack of autonomy in school settings. Katz & Chard (1989) describe a model of social skills development whereby some children are viewed as competent, and hence receive more opportunities to exercise responsibility, which further reinforces their autonomous social skills. Other

children are viewed as incompetent and unreliable; therefore, they are less likely to be chosen for activities that require social dependability. In this way, a cycle of deprivation of social skills that enable one to participate confidently in social situations is compounded for some children. Garner and Sandow (1995) warn that reliance upon an advocate, such as the parent, can make people dependent and restrict the development of their own skills. By assuming that children have the capacity to participate, this encourages adults to engage them in conversations with children that will encourage this capacity further (Franklin, 1986; Roche, 1999). In pursuing an agenda of citizenship for all, schools could have the potential to break this cycle. However, legislation and government policy can make education for citizenship take place but the longevity of pupil participation will be affected by the authenticity with which it is engaged. Listening on the part of adult must be genuine and situations for pupil participation must be meaningful to the children (Boyd, 2001; L'Anson et al, 2002). McGettrick (2001) believes that citizenship education must focus on the genuine relationships needed for participation rather than the outcomes; that is, the process rather than the product. As a society, we should be wary of any measure that abandons children to their rights. Bateman (2000) suggests that there needs to be greater change to support self-advocacy; this involves more than merely giving pupils the permission to speak. Where children elect not to pursue self-advocacy, their choice must be respected as self-advocacy should not become a new form of child cruelty (Garner & Sandow, 1995).

Teachers can profit from a new perspective from pupils that can inform and benefit their practice (Rudduck, 2002). Pupil self-advocacy, though, requires a change in the traditional teacher-pupil roles where,-

“the teacher becomes a facilitator, rather than an instructor, the child becomes a self-directed learner, and therefore a participant rather than a recipient.”  
(Garner & Sandow, 1995 p.19).

Underpinning any progress in children's rights, participation and citizenship is more than legislation: legislation is important to shift the traditional power base but it will

not be fully realised without attitudinal change for it could be argued that prejudice exists based on ageist views of children's competence to form a credible viewpoint and,-

“Prejudice is more resilient to change, and legislation can prove itself a blunt tool with which to attack it.” (Franklin, 1986 p.19).

## **Deriving the research questions**

This literature review suggests that a rationale for parents' meetings could be founded on improved school effectiveness including pupil attainment (Tomlinson, 1984; Johnson, 1990; MacBeath & McCall, 2001). Education legislation from the 1980s onwards could be perceived as reinforcing the legitimate right of the parent to exercise power on behalf of the child. On the other hand, research suggests that parents have demonstrated varying skill and inclination in holding schools accountable and in exercising choice. The consumer model of education placed the parent in the roles of advocate and client, serving to create parents' meetings akin to business conferences. This philosophy ignored the rights of the child to participate as it set the discourse of pupil rights against the rights of the parent.

A review of the specific literature on parents' meetings identified key issues from the secondary and SEN contexts:

### *Secondary school parents' meetings*

- The purpose of parents' meetings was unclear (Walker, 1998)
- Teachers retain a dominant role in these meetings including using information they have collected on the child, retaining the right to dismiss parental information and not encouraging a dialogue with the parent (Walker, 1998; Clark & Power, 1998)
- Teachers lack training to prepare them to conduct parents' meetings (Walker, 1998)
- Organisational factors were contributing to parental dissatisfaction with parents' meetings, including queues, lack of time and privacy (Walker, 1998)
- Parents avoid raising issues that may result in conflict for the sake of the child (Walker, 1998)
- Parents value parents' meetings as a means to make a social link to the teacher (Newsom & Ransom, 1983; Clark, 1998)
- Parents have difficulty understanding the professional language that teachers use (Power & Clark, 2000)

- Parents' meetings are a source of stress for teachers and parents (Walker, 1998)
- Pupils are not encouraged to attend these meetings (Walker, 1998)
- Parents value parents' meetings, particularly working class parents (Crozier, 1999a)

#### *SEN sector parents' meetings*

- Parents value parents' meetings (Ammer & Littleton, 1983)
- The interpersonal skills of the teacher will impact on parent satisfaction (Silverman & Stacey, 1989)
- Parents have a hidden agenda at these meetings to find-out how well the teacher knows the child (Swap, 1993)
- Teacher domination of the meeting can lead to a lack of dialogue (Simpson, 1996)
- Parents' meetings are a source of stress for parents and teachers (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986)

These findings indicated some overlap and differences between the sectors. Reid's (1984) NFER study was the only one to include UK secondary and SEN parents. It indicated that organisational factors and a lack of teacher training for working with parents were contributing to parental dissatisfaction with these meetings. Certainly, where the teachers from two education sectors were reporting no specific training, it was relevant to pursue whether this extended to the primary sector as well.

The primary sector had a relationship to the SEN sector in that the pupil tends to spend large amounts of time with one teacher. This could be expected to lead to a higher degree of teacher knowledge of the individual child and an increased likelihood that the teacher and parents would form a positive relationship. Parents of SEN children are likely to meet periodically with teachers to discuss pupil progress; therefore, providing more opportunities for teachers to practice and refine their interpersonal skills. Thus, the findings from this sector were potentially relevant to the primary context. On the other hand, several studies were US based and non-

specific on the age range of the pupils whereas the most recent research on parents' meeting investigated the UK secondary school sector.

The movement of secondary pupils between more teachers might be expected to result in a different relationship between the teacher, parent and pupil. Further, the sense of the secondary teacher as a subject specialist may reinforce parents' apprehension in questioning the input from the teacher. Secondary school research focussed a lot on the organisational factors that impacted on parental dissatisfaction. Amongst these issues, the lack of time appeared immediately relevant to the primary sector. Less obvious, perhaps, was the lack of privacy as many primary schools conducted meetings in classrooms using an appointment system. It had increasingly come to the researcher's attention during her visits to student teachers, though, that a number of primary schools were moving to a secondary model of organisation with all the staff and parents in the school hall. Thus, this was emerging as an issue to explore in the primary context. The research of Crozier had differentiated between the participation and responses of parents by social class. It was not within the scope of this study to pursue this theme but the researcher used these findings to inform her selection of research sites to attempt to get a range of participant perspectives. Key to the work of Walker was the confusion over the purpose of these meetings; this issue could not be taken for granted in the primary sector. She also highlighted a lack of pupil participation at these meetings. Professional experience had informed the researcher that pupils tended not to participate in the primary sector. However, given the changing national context described in Chapter 1, it was relevant to assess the impact that children's rights was having on primary practice.

To explore the purposes, organisational factors, actual content and resulting satisfaction for parents, teachers and pupils from parents' meetings in primary education, three research questions have been devised to guide the study.

1. What expectations do parents, teachers and pupils have of parents' meetings in primary schools?
2. What is the current structure and content of these parents' meetings?

3. Which aspects of current models of parents' meetings satisfy the needs of the participants?

### **Choosing a method to investigate the research questions**

#### *Interrogating the questions*

The literature review resulted in the author forming 3 research questions; these questions became the driver in selecting a research method (Lewis & Munn, 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These questions formed a structure of before (expectations prior to the meeting), during (structure and content of the actual meeting) and after (satisfaction as the participants reflected on the event) the parents' meeting. This suggested a need to investigate the dynamic of different individuals' perceptions of the meeting, the bank of experience that they have from a range of meetings and an insight into the actual process as well as the outcome of participant satisfaction. Accessing individual constructs of the reality of the event required depth and suggested the use of a more flexible approach such as interview while the view of process initially appeared to indicate the use of a direct method on the event such as observation.

#### *Aiming for reliability and validity*

Central to a research study are concerns that the data collection and analysis is reliable, that is, whether another researcher would reach the same findings from the data; this has been a criticism of qualitative approaches (Silverman, 2000). In this chapter, the discussion of the various methods used will include consideration of establishing reliability and validity. More broadly, the researcher has endeavoured to achieve reliability in the findings by describing the research method in detail in this chapter so that another researcher would be able to replicate the approach; further, a second stage of the research, tested the initial findings of some of the qualitative data through a questionnaire to a larger parental sample. The research had to ensure that the findings had internal validity (they were an accurate summary of what they aimed to describe) and external validity (the findings could be generalised to elsewhere). Internal validity was attended to in various ways including feeding back to the participating sites and taking a multi method perspective from various

interested groups to pursue consistency in the findings. During the study, the research questions were kept at the core of the work to ensure that the work was addressing the relevant issues and producing valid information. The generalisability of the findings was more complex than finding a model of practice that would match with practice elsewhere; instead, themes emerged from the work that readers may see as applicable to their situation. Silverman (2000) discusses Perakyla (1997) who believes that generalisability lies, not in terms of describing what other professionals do, but in what they can do.

### *Initial model of methodology*

It had originally been intended that a traditional ethnographic approach would be used. Burns (2000) outlines this as having three phases:

I initial phase – broad research interests guide this

II second phase – significant people and events emerge that reformulate and focus the research

III – third phase – collection of data takes place, based on this reformulation.

For this study, this was to take the form of a questionnaire to parents and teachers in the selected population with group interviews to a sample of pupils.

Munn and Drever (1999) promote this as an efficient use of time that can generate a lot of standardised data. The questionnaires, coupled with observations of a random sample of parents' meetings, would allow the researcher to reformulate the research and focus upon key themes through semi-structured interviews with this sample. The semi-structured interview approach would allow the researcher to unpack the person's interpretations and feelings of the meeting process, thus, adopting a qualitative approach that, -

“places stress on the validity of multiple meaning structures and holistic analysis, as opposed to the criteria of reliability and statistical compartmentalisation of quantitative research.”

(Burns, 2000, p.11)

### *Initial research design reviewed*

As the planning stage for the research progressed, the difficulties and weaknesses of this approach of the broad overview to the particular focus became apparent. Beginning with a questionnaire assumed that the researcher felt confident about the main themes that could be explored through this method. However, an initial literature review indicated limited data specific to the primary sector; using what had been gleaned from secondary school work carried potential flaws in ignoring the dynamics of the context and could begin with assumptions that would lead the study rather than reveal valid data. In seeking to establish validity, the researcher would have to demonstrate that “the propositions generated, refined or tested, match the causal conditions that exist in human life” (Burns, 2000, p.418).

Proposing observations of a sample of parents’ meetings to collect data through descriptive recording was initially attractive, as it seemed to strike at the core of the research study. On further reflection, questions arose about the reliability of such data due to the presence of the researcher in such an intimate setting; the small number of people would make it difficult to ignore the researcher, while the timescale of parents’ meetings would not allow participants a period to relax and get used to the researcher’s presence. Technical solutions to the observation problem also presented difficulties in getting people to behave normally for a video camera, while audio taping would exclude important non-verbal data. There were pragmatic difficulties arising from the rare occurrence of parents’ meetings in the academic year; this research model would require the researcher to be available at specific times or this window of opportunity would be lost.

The use of semi-structured interviews to explore participants’ responses to parents’ meetings also carried pragmatic problems. Capturing this data would require a highly concentrated period of research as increased time from the actual event could change people’s responses and memories. This could

strengthen the criticism of such approaches as “anecdotalism” (Silverman, 2000, p.11) thus calling the validity of the data into question.

The steps each appeared to logically address the research questions in a before ->during ->after structure.

Table 3.1: Initial research question – method match

research question	research method
<p>1 What expectations do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- parents</li> <li>- teachers</li> <li>- pupils</li> </ul> <p>have of parents’ meetings?</p>	<p><i>Phase 1:</i> Questionnaire to all parents &amp; teachers in research sites Group interview with quota sample of pupils</p>
<p>2 What is the current structure and content of parents’ meetings?</p>	<p><i>Phase 1:</i> Observation of random sample of parents’ meetings using descriptive recording (narrative system)</p>
<p>3 Aspects of current models that satisfy needs of the participants?</p>	<p><i>Phase 2:</i> Follow-up semi-structured interviews with parents &amp; teachers in random sample</p>

Giving equal weighting to each approach would require the researcher to be adept at differing methods of data collection and analysis. This would generate a significant amount of data to be collated, transcribed and analysed. Silverman (2000) is cautious regarding employing multiple approaches: these may provide triangulation through different methods, but he questions whether it makes analytical sense where “social reality is constructed in different ways in different contexts, then you cannot appeal to a single ‘phenomenon’ which all your data apparently represent” (p.99). On the other hand, Lewis and Lindsay (2000) propose that mixing methods that are traditionally viewed as qualitative and quantitative can achieve innovative and useful research. Silverman (2000) describes these divisions as artificial and to only be used as starting points in

understanding these disciplines. Hammersley (1992) also highlights the dangers of compartmentalising these approaches:

“We are not faced, then, with a stark choice between words and numbers, or even between precise and imprecise data; but rather with a range from more or less precise and imprecise data. Furthermore, our decisions about what level of precision is appropriate in relation to any particular claim should depend on the nature of what we are trying to describe, on the likely accuracy of our descriptions, on our purposes, and on the resources available to us; not ideological commitment to one methodological paradigm or another.”

(Hammersley cited in Silverman, 2000, p.12)

#### *Adopting a grounded approach*

The direction of the research appeared to lie in changing the entire structure of the research design: starting with a more open approach with a sample of the population that acknowledged some of the topics that emerged from the literature but allowed for emergent themes based on contextual differences. This first stage was informed by grounded theory as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998), in that:

“One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge.”

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.23)

These themes would then be tested on a larger sample of the parental population through the use of a questionnaire. Given the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12 on consulting children, it was imperative that the research design maintained a means to gather the perceptions and views of the pupils.

Table 3.2: Final research question-method match

research question	research method
<p>1 What expectations do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- parents</li> <li>- teachers</li> <li>- pupils</li> </ul> <p>have of parents' meetings?</p>	<p><i>Phase 1:</i> Group interview with quota sample of pupils at each site Semi-structured interviews with a random sample of teachers &amp; parents at each site based on their diary content</p> <p><i>Phase 2:</i> Phase 1 outcomes used to create a questionnaire to a systematic sample of parents at each site</p>
<p>2 What is the current structure and content of parents' meetings?</p>	<p><i>Phase 1:</i> Descriptive observation of 1 parents' meeting at each site Diaries of parents &amp; teachers at each site (followed-up by interview)</p>
<p>3 Aspects of current models that satisfy the needs of the participants?</p>	<p><i>Phase 1:</i> Pupil group interviews Semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents</p> <p><i>Phase 2:</i> Questionnaire to parents at each site</p>

(A timeline of the revised research study is located in Appendix 1).

### **Sampling the general population**

*Initial ethical considerations: making contact with the local education authority*

The population for the study could be considered as all pupils, parents and teachers in the primary education sector in the UK. As it was clearly not feasible to work with the complete population, the researcher had to select a sample. One local education authority in Scotland was selected and then three primary school within that local authority. The selection was based on a geographical area where the researcher had a well developed network of contacts through her work as a school experience tutor for students preparing to be primary teachers. Using an existing network allowed the researcher to apply

a bank of knowledge she had developed through visiting schools and had the potential to utilise the personal contacts she had built to motivate schools to participate. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe theoretical sensitivity that the researcher can bring to a study through professional and personal experience as well as knowledge of the literature. The nature of these contacts was on a professional basis, reducing the potential bias in the researcher having existing personal relationships in the schools.

The researcher embarked on the initial stage of receiving ethical consent by contacting the local education authority in October 2001; she was required to complete their standard form and submit a synopsis of her research proposal before consent was given. (Appendix 2 details the communication with the local authority.) Permission to continue with the research was granted with the condition that individual schools retained the right to decline to participate. The local authority also provided the researcher with their standard informed consent form for working with pupils; the researcher decided to change the wording of the form to increase the parents' and pupils' rights to informed consent. (This is discussed more fully in the section on pupil interviews.) The Appendix information showed that the researcher verified to the local authority that she was a member of the General Teaching Council for Scotland and, as such, would have given full disclosure of any criminal convictions that she had that may have reduced the appropriateness of her working with children.

#### *Making contacts with schools*

Consent from the local education authority allowed the researcher to progress onto directly contacting the named schools. Two of the schools were selected through the researcher's prior professional contacts with the schools as a school experience tutor. The third school was selected as the researcher had previously worked and researched in a neighbouring school. This meant that she was familiar with the area and had some professional knowledge of the staff from her experience as a teacher in that area. An initial literature review had suggested that social class may be a factor in parental satisfaction with

parents' meetings (Crozier, 1999a) and previous work in this area had revealed a cross-section of social class.

*Burgh School*: situated in a burgh town, the Office of Public Health in Scotland constituency report for 2001 described the area as having,-

“a lower than average proportion of older people in the population. Household income in this constituency is close to the Scottish average and there is a higher unemployment rate. All the health indicators are either better than or very close to the Scottish average.”

(Office for Public Health in Scotland, 2001)

Burgh was a long established school in a Victorian building. The town supported three primary schools with one being denominational. Burgh school was a non-denominational primary school situated in a part of the town with a high amount of local authority owned housing. Since the researcher had last worked in this area, the social composition of the school population had shifted with the school having one of the highest free meals records in the local authority. The houses that the researcher visited were in need of refurbishment internally or externally with all the interviewed parents living in small council flats. The management team of this school had been in place for a long time (over twenty years) with the head teacher having progressed to that role from being a class teacher.

*Gateway school*: situated in a larger town, the constituency health report described the area as having,-

“a slightly lower than average proportion of older people in the population. Educational attainment among school leavers is lower than the Scottish average, as is household income, while unemployment and the proportion of Income Support claimants are both higher. Most of the health indicators are either close to or better than the Scottish average. However, the level of maternal smoking is higher than average.” (Office for Public Health in Scotland, 2001)

The area supported a higher number of both denominational and non-denominational primary schools. Gateway was a non-denominational school that was located in a long-established but modern building. The researcher had visited the school annually with students who had been placed in the school and had established a good working relationship with the management team and many of the teaching staff. Within the catchment area of the school, there was a mixture of council and private housing. The researcher visited homes that were generally well maintained and furnished. The school had the largest roll of the three sites and the management team of the school had changed within approximately the last five years, with the head teacher bringing experience of having been in a similar post in a smaller school.

*Hill school:* again, situated in a large town that was geographically close to the town in which Gateway was located, the local area supported a good number of denominational and non-denominational schools. The constituency health report summarised it as having,-

“a slightly lower than average proportion of older people in the population. The educational attainment among school leavers is lower than the Scottish average, as is household income, and there is a higher than average unemployment rate. Whilst the mortality rates for various conditions are either close to or better than the Scottish average, rates for maternal smoking and low birth weight babies are higher.”

Hill was a non-denominational school that was sited in a Victorian building. The researcher had a long-standing professional relationship with the school through visiting teaching students and had developed good links with the head teacher and the staff. The school was situated in an area that was surrounded by council housing including high rise flats where the researcher visited some participants; families involved in the study extended further afield from this direct area into privately owned housing. The school roll was not large, generally supporting a class at each stage with two Primary 1s. This meant that the primary management of the school was carried-out by the head teacher who had come to the school, again, in approximately the previous 5 years, bringing management experience from her previous post.

The health and social information from the Office of Public Health in Scotland that was available at the time of the research was formed retrospectively. The 2004 constituency health and well-being profiles of 2004 provide an update over the period of the data collection.

Table 3.3: Constituency health & well-being profiles 2004-indicator highlights

topic	indicator	value Burgh	value Gateway	value Hill	Value Scotland
Population	Male life expectancy <i>years</i>	74.3	71.1	71.6	73.4
Behaviour	Smoking prevalence %	34.2	38.6	38.2	34.7
Children & adolescents	Teenage alcohol attrib hospitalisation <i>Crude rate per 100 population</i>	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7
Ill-health	Unable to work through disability/illness %	10.8	15.2	14.3	10.2
Social environment	Voter turnout %	50.1	44.3	46.3	49.4
Education	School leavers into HE %	34.4	21.2	29.5	32.1
Deaths	Cancer mortality <i>Age-standardised rate per 100,000 population</i>	161.5	189.2	183.1	165.7
Crime & safety	Road accident casualties <i>Crude rate per 10,000</i>	24.9	40.2	39.2	38.0
Prosperity & poverty	Average household income £	27,580	24,162	23,442	25,873
Business & employment	Unemployment claimants %	2.8	3.9	3.4	3.2

The majority of the indicators for the constituencies of Gateway and Hill were worse than the national average, whereas, the majority of the indicators for Burgh were near or better than the Scottish average.

Initial contact with the school was established through a telephone call. (See Appendix 3 for initial letter, synoptic paper and follow-up letter.) The researcher asked to visit the school to discuss the project with the head teacher. A schedule was designed by the researcher to gather initial information and

head teachers were given a paper on the research proposal. While the head teachers were satisfied that the research should proceed, there was a lapse in time while they identified volunteers from the staff; this phase of the research coincided with the McCrone agreement on pay and conditions for teachers and sensitivity had to be displayed in asking teachers to undertake further duties.

In the initial meeting and letter, the researcher indicated a willingness to meet with the Pupil Council or School Board. This would allow the researcher to extend her network of contacts beyond staff and provide an informal introduction to the research for the school community. Burgh school asked the researcher to attend a School Board meeting in February 2002 while Gateway school asked the researcher to speak to a mixed group of the School Board, the pupils invited to participate in the study and their parents in January 2002. These were beneficial experiences in building trust within the school community and in building the researcher's knowledge of the individual school context.

Throughout the study, the researcher aimed to maintain contact with the schools to update them on the progress. The researcher made a conscious decision to decline an invitation from the Times Educational Supplement Scotland to write about Phase 1 of her research in case it would jeopardise her working relationship with the schools. Further, she provided them with a copy of a conference paper that she presented to the Education Research Network about Parents in Education, Gdansk 2003, to allow them to comment on the progressing study.

## **Group interviews with pupils**

### *Benefits of group interviews with pupils*

In 'Towards a Children's Agenda' (1996), Save the Children found several difficulties in planning provision for children; these included a failure to collect specific information from children or to recognise the valuable contribution that they can make. (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Reflecting upon the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12, it would have been incongruous to research meetings about pupils, in particular whether they should participate, without consulting the people who are the focus of parents' meetings. Elsewhere in Europe, strong models of consultation towards policy and planning exist; for example, the national consultation exercises with children in Denmark (Poulsgard, 2001).

Consulting pupils through an interview allowed for a depth in the data that increased the researcher's potential to explore individual perceptions of these events. Face-to-face contact facilitated the researcher's potential to clarify any misunderstandings for the child and the researcher; this was crucial, not only to the gathering of valid data, but to ensure an ethical approach as the level of understanding of the child is often more important than the age of the participant (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). The semi-structured interview method provided a framework for the discussion but allowed the researcher to use prompts and probes to achieve depth to the data. Gathering data with the participant present provided an occasion for the researcher to gather a range of data including verbal and non-verbal; it presented an opportunity to consider the age, understanding and other personal characteristics of the participant (Greig & Taylor, 1999). This would have been difficult to achieve through a questionnaire and it avoided the additional problem of overcoming children's literacy difficulties in tackling a written research tool.

The decision to organise group as opposed to individual interviews was based on concern about the power relation that may apply between an adult and a

child in a school setting. A group would have the potential to spark ideas from each other as the group provided a more natural form of interaction, although the interviewer had to remain vigilant to peer and group dynamics that may lead a child merely to follow the views of others (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000).

*Potential difficulties in using group interviews with pupils*

This approach was not without potential problems that had to be fully considered beforehand. The group organisation may have reduced the power imbalance between the researcher and the participants, however, the setting remained that of a school, bringing all the social and rule-bearing conventions of that location. In addition, as the researcher was previously a primary teacher, she would have to be self-aware regarding her use of behaviours that reinforced the power imbalance found in many classrooms (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). For example, how she responded to pupils' input could be problematic in that she may not validate responses as expected in the traditional method of communication in a classroom – teacher asks, pupil answers, teacher validates answer or otherwise. The setting of the group interviews was often out with the control of the researcher. Therefore, she would organise carefully the aspects that she could control such as the seating arrangement.

A major consideration lay in establishing rapport with a group of children that the researcher had not met before (Cohen et al, 2000; Keats, 2000). Lewis and Lindsay (2000) recommend putting children at ease through a play approach. With that, the researcher devised a 'Taboo' type game that was played before the interview commenced. This allowed the participants to relax but it also contributed to establishing a more informal atmosphere where pupils were not required to put their hand up to speak and they could refer to the researcher by her forename.

The game approach contributed to getting the pupils talking and overcame the concern of reticence from the children. This issue was also tackled by a set of probes and prompts. Robson (2001) defines a probe as:

“a device to get the interviewee to expand on a response when you intuit that she or he has more to give.” (Robson, 2000, p.234)

While a prompt requires one to:

“suggest to the interviewee the range or set of possible answers that the interviewer expects.” (Robson, 2001, p.234)

A combination of specific probes and a list of general probes suggested by Robson (2001) were listed on the interview schedule to maximise the informal flow of the discussion rather than meeting the children with more questions; again, avoiding an interrogation style of communication that is akin to the classroom. However, in approaching reticent pupils, the researcher had to bear in mind that it was their right not to contribute and that children can often feel that they must answer for the interviewer; this is ethically undesirable and threatens the validity of the child's answer (Greig & Taylor, 1999). Limerick et al (1996) suggests that an interview should be regarded as ‘a gift’ with the interviewee having the right to withhold information..

Underlying the whole interview was the consideration that the researcher had to give to the degree of structure. Previous discussion had indicated that steps were taken to establish as informal a setting as possible. Kitwood (1977) discusses that, in seeking to achieve reliability, the researcher may have taken a more structured approach. However, there is a tension between achieving reliability while compromising validity as the child may feel under pressure with a more ‘clinical’ approach. Contextualising work with children and an informal approach to research have previously allowed children to show greater ability than in formal settings, for example, Margaret Donaldson's work (1978) on conservation of number found that children could achieve more out with a clinical setting. Greig and Taylor (1999) conclude ‘Doing Research with Children’ by stressing this important point.

*Ethical considerations of working with children*

Lewis and Lindsay (2000) and Watt (1995) clearly state that no unnecessary research should be carried out with children. Therefore, the researcher's first ethical consideration had to be – is it necessary that this research must be done? The literature review indicated a lack of relevant research to the primary context and, thus, to primary pupils. Save the Children has identified flaws in planning for children where they are not consulted. Further, as already stated, children are the focus of these meetings and, as such, have a right to be consulted.

The involvement of any participant in a research project should be based on receiving informed consent from that individual; that is, not only should a participant give their permission to participate, they should do so based on information that they can understand as to the nature and use of the research. The contentious issue in involving pupils was who should give consent for their participation. The local education authority had provided a standard consent form however it was an opt-out form aimed at parents. This appeared to have several flaws including the potential that a form may not reach a parent and, as it was opt out only, a child could be participating in an interview without a parent's knowledge. The form was changed to require parents to sign for children to participate and they were asked to discuss this with their child before making any decision. (A copy of the informed consent letter is in Appendix 4).

Informed consent by a child's parent/guardian met the requirements of the local education authority and those of the Scottish Educational Research Association but assumed that the child did not have rights in whether he or she should participate. This subscribed the view of the child as a possession of the parent without rights, also viewing childhood as one where children as subjects that require adult protection (Jenkins, 1993). However, participation in a well structured research project that was open to external scrutiny held the potential

to develop children's ability to participate and develop citizenship skills (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). It was desirable that permission should be sought from both the parent and the child (Cohen et al, 2000; Alderson, 1995). There remained a query over the extent to which children could understand why they were giving their consent and the short and long-term ramifications of this decision. It fell to the researcher to provide the information for consent in terms that the children could understand. Every interview was prefixed by a videotaped preamble that requested the children's consent after an explanation that included:

- The identity of the researcher
- The purpose of the research
- The structure of the interview
- A reassurance that they did not need to provide answers
- How the researcher would safeguard confidentiality in the reporting process ( Children's understanding of confidentiality was also checked)
- The method of recording the interview and the future use of the videotape
- An opportunity for the children to asks questions

Although consent was given on tape by all the participants, this did not release the researcher from the ethical requirements that children should not be exploited or abused by the research process; therefore, the interviewer remained vigilant to any discomfort or signs that the pupils were becoming restless during the interview.

Following the adult interviews, the researcher provided a copy of the transcript to each participant to allow them to comment on whether it was a fair representation of the interview. This posed literacy and, therefore, confidentiality problems for the children who may have required an adult to read and explain the format of a transcript. Keats (2000) recommends that, at the end of the interview, the children are given the opportunity to view the

tape. In this study, all the groups asked to see the tape although they usually stated that they did not want to see the entire tape.

*Selecting a sample*

In the literature on the ethics of working with children, age and understanding are seen as variables that should be taken into account in terms of their involvement (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Therefore, the researcher decided to select a sample of pupils from each school that represented a variety of age groups. At each research site one group of six pupils was selected: this was a quota sample as the group represented that site but part of the selection procedure included selecting two pupils from the infant, junior and senior stages of the school. The only class that was omitted was primary 1 as, at the time of the group interviews, they would only have had one parents' meeting that may not have been typical of the experience at that school. Each school provided a copy of its roll and the researcher randomly selected two pupils from each stage of the school. The random selection ensured that each pupil at that stage had an equal chance of being chosen, therefore, increasing the reliability of any data (Munn & Drever, 1999). The sample of pupils at each school represented the following classes:

Table 3.4: Sample of pupils by class at each research site

site	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Burgh	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hill	0	2	2	0	0	2
Gateway	0	2	1	1	0	2

At each site, the head teacher was informed of the selection to organise for the release of the pupils from class and to allow for initial feedback on any pupil that the school felt may be distressed by the interview process or had special circumstances that the researcher would have to take into consideration. This approach acknowledged the role of the head teacher as “gatekeeper” at the school who safeguards the child’s welfare but remained alert to the need to

question decisions that may be used to censor certain pupils (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000, p.36). Where parents or pupils were unwilling to participate or there was a non-response, another name was chosen randomly for that stage.

In addition, at two of the sites the researcher drew another sample based on the above procedures to use for a pilot study of the group interview design.

Table 3.5: Pilot sample of pupils by class at each research site

site	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Burgh	1	1	0	2	1	1
Gateway	2	0	0	1	1	1

*(Gateway total is less due to confusion between school and home regarding whether an individual could participate, therefore, researcher decided not to involve pupil where informed consent was not clarified.)*

#### *Piloting the research approach*

Silverman (1993) considers the potential weaknesses in the interview approach and suggests that one can enhance reliability through careful piloting. The group interview was piloted at Burgh and Gateway schools; prior visits had made the researcher aware that Hill school was severely limited for private space and that an additional visit to the actual group interview would create constraints on the regular work of the school. Prior to using any of the interviews at piloting stage, the schedules went through a 'shredding' stage (Drever, 1997) of close scrutiny by the researcher and her supervisor.

The pilot phase of the pupil interview included an evaluation section at the end to allow the pupils to give feedback on how accessible they had found the process. The preamble to seek ethical consent and the game to establish a rapport with the group worked well. At both sites, the pupils reported that they had understood the process and the questions; there was a flow to the communication and the answers related to the areas that the researcher had set in her overall research questions. The process was highly useful as it allowed

the interviewer to refine some prompts and present the interview in a more natural format as she became experienced with its content and structure. Each interview was videotaped on the consent of the pupils; no amount of practice elsewhere could match the experience of doing this in a school context with actual pupils. This experience led the interviewer to reconsider positioning of participants, using a back-up audio recording to identify contributions that were too quiet for the video microphone and generally increased the interviewer's expertise in using this recording format.

#### *Group interviews with pupils*

The group interviews with pupils in February 2002 were the first part of the research process although the data was coded at a later point. (A copy of the interview schedule is provided in Appendix 5.) Cohen et al (2000) discuss the importance of using language that relates to the participants' frame of reference. Therefore, the opening on the interview sought to establish the terminology that the pupils used for parents' meetings, embedding this term in the remainder of the interview. Again, later, in question 4, the probe for 'Would you like to go to your parents' meeting and take part' was changed at the planning stage from 'What do you think you would be able to contribute?' to 'What do you think you would be able to add to the meeting?' to ensure that accessible language was used for the interviewees particularly where they are children (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000).

In structuring the questions and the follow-through probes, Cohen et al's (2000) advice to ask about the 'what' before the 'why' questions was followed. For example, 'Question 1 – what do you think happens at a meeting?' was followed by the question 'how do you know?' The overall structure of the interview provided a broad start, a more specific development and a sweeper question at the end. The framing of the sweeper question provided a cue to the transition of the end of the interview (Keats, 2000; Robson, 2001). This had the benefit of avoiding a rushed conclusion with the participants potentially feeling used or denied the full opportunity to participate. The conclusion also

contained a question on the research process to identify where this may have shaped participants' opinions; Keats (2000) discusses that interviews should not seek to change participants' opinions but this can be a component of the process. Closure was established and the participants were thanked as maintaining politeness norms are essential in the process (Robson, 2001: Keats, 2000).

### *Analysing the data*

The object of phase 1 of the study was to identify relevant themes on parents' meetings in the primary education context. Therefore, the coding of qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews was subjected to content analysis; the codes emerged from the data rather than being imported from the literature at the outset. By a code, one refers to "a symbol applied to a group of words to classify or categorize them" (Robson, 2001, p.385). Coding began with the parents' interview transcripts as this represented the largest coherent group to begin to identify patterns. The coding process is more fully described under the section on the diary-interview method used with teachers and parents. By the time the pupils transcripts were coded, a large set of codes had been identified and grouped from the parental data; this set of codes was reviewed and 'cleaned' (Gorard, 2001) after the parent interview coding and was then applied to the teacher coding with further codes generated.

Each pupil group interview videotape was reviewed following the interview and then a full transcript was produced from each videotape. The researcher then applied the following steps:

1. the transcript was read and a holistic summary of the interview was written
2. the transcript was coded using the bank of generated codes; any new codes were added to the bank
3. the transcript was revisited and the codes colour-coded to represent the stage of the child
4. a summary sheet was produced for each site to identify site patterns

5. single pupil clusters of codes were produced to maintain the unique perception of each child
6. grids of codes were produced by pupil stage to identify age related patterns
7. the site summary sheets and the stage-related code sheets were drawn together into an overview for all the pupil participants

These steps were informed by the procedure described in Strauss (1987).

The researcher recorded on-going analysis discussion in the form of memos; these also were reviewed across the pupil participants for patterns. These memos and the metamatrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) allowed the researcher to look for patterns across all three groupings of the parents, teachers and pupils.

#### *Reflecting on the methodological approach*

The group interviews with pupils provided a positive contribution to the study, particularly, as it accessed the views of a group that are frequently omitted from discussion related to their progress. Lewis and Lindsay (2000) represent a viewpoint that any researcher must review whether they have the relevant skills to undertake interviews successfully with children. This methodology allowed the researcher to pull on a range of skills that she had developed over her teaching career while remaining reflective and wary of any related bias entering her work. Nonetheless, reviewing the actual process led the researcher to certain observations:-

- In examining the video tapes and transcripts, the material may have been richer if it had been conducted by school stage. The younger children had limited concentration and were not always able to reason their decisions whereas the older pupils could have participated for longer and could develop their ideas; in the analysis, their individual clusters indicated more complexity in the older pupils' contributions. On the other hand, the organisation of the groups provided a cross-

section of views and did not assume that the younger children could not contribute. This decision was also shaped by the limited time available to the researcher during the school day to conduct the interviews.

- While the use of the game in the preamble prompted the children to talk, the conversation still did not flow as naturally as the researcher would have hoped. The pilot study pupils appeared to be less reticent. An interview is an artificial situation but it is probably easier to facilitate a discussion where one has an existing relationship with the children. Both these points reflect the difficulty in entering a school context as an outsider.
- The interviews sometimes appeared short or lacking in as much information as the parent and class teacher interviews. Again, the use of stage interviews may have helped here. Looking more closely at the patterns of information from the interviews, the pupils gave richer information in their views about their participation at parents' meetings. The sporadic information elsewhere can be explained, in part, by the differences among the formats and content of the pupil interviews versus the parent and teacher interviews. It may also reflect that the children had limited information to contribute on certain themes as their answers show that they had no direct experience of parents' meetings and had information on these meetings mediated to them through their parents.

Robson (2001) states that one is unlikely to gather valuable information in an interview that is less than a half hour; discounting the preamble and game, many of the group interviews were approximately twenty minutes. However, the researcher had to be aware of discomfort that pupils showed through their restlessness after this period of time; again, stage specific groups would have allowed the researcher to vary the length of time appropriately to the age of the children.

During the research process, the researcher applied Kvale's (1996) criteria to judge a successful interview: one of the key criteria was that there should be short questions and long answers. Reviewing the videotapes made the researcher concerned about the amount that she had to prompt and probe the pupils' responses. During the study, she maintained a reflective diary where she recorded how she thought through this issue:

"Took Kvale criteria from Cohen et al and thought about pilots. Kvale refers to balance of talk- I wondered if I talk too much. Was teaching SLT Year 1 on Thursday which made me look at Gordon Wells, Labov and Tizard and Hughes. None of these children are expansive and it appears as if young children need a lot of prompts and seem to give brief answers." Research Diary 2002

(SLT refer to Speech and Language Therapy students. Full references for cited authors appear in the reference section.)

## Observation of parents' meetings

### *Rationale for observing at parents' meetings*

The potential difficulties that made direct observation of individual parents' meeting undesirable have already been outlined. Nevertheless, the researcher wanted to achieve some direct information on the structure of these meetings; this would allow her to triangulate this information to subsequent descriptions of the event by parents and teachers. Further, it would help the researcher to understand the specific organisation of each site, potentially beginning to collect information on how the participants responded to the event.

### *Observing*

During the 2001-2002 session, parents' meetings took place at differing points at each site with each school hosting an afternoon and evening meeting.

Table 3.6: Parents' meeting dates at each site

site	1 <sup>st</sup> meeting	2nd meeting
Burgh	November 2001	29 May 5 June 2002
Gateway	2 & 3 October 2001	13 & 14 March 2002
Hill	7 & 8 November 2001	23 & 24 April 2002

*(Exact dates for meeting 1 at Burgh not provided by school).*

This phase of the study concentrated on the second parents' meeting in the school session. The researcher sought the permission of the head teacher to be present at one parents' meeting at each school. As the intention was not to directly observe individual meetings, ethical consent did not have to be established for parents, pupils or teachers present.

The researcher consulted the overall research questions to identify the type of information that needed to be collected; a flexible observation schedule of headings was created. A broader observation approach to parents' meetings was already suggested in the work of Walker (1998). Simpson and Tuson

(1997) describes this as a descriptive system whereby it “may have some pre-set categories, but they are much broader and more flexible than those of category systems.” (p.46). This allowed the researcher to respond to the individual context while collecting common data. (Observation headings are listed in Appendix 6.)

#### *Handling the data*

The intention was not to subject this data to in-depth analysis but to allow the data to inform the researcher before the parent and teacher interviews and to provide general data that would add to the validity of the study. The face validity of the observation data would be apparent when it was triangulated to other data sources and examined for consistency (Simpson & Tuson, 1997). There were occasions where this approach gave the researcher an opportunity to conclude that the nature of parents’ meeting described by a head teacher did not fully match the actual event. (These differences were communicated to the head teacher by the researcher sending a conference paper on her Phase 1 results to the school for comment.) The observations provided data on aspects such as individual teacher’s organisation, pupil participation, the role of management, timings of a sample of meetings and contextual information including a crèche at Burgh school and student teachers’ participation at Hill school.

#### *Reflecting on the methodological approach*

This section of the study was not methodologically rigorous as in systematic sampling; this reduces its validity as a source of data in itself but it can add to the reliability and validity of the overall study where it can be compared with data collected by other techniques and full field notes have been recorded that would allow for replication (Simpson & Tuson, 1997). The experience helped to embed the researcher into each research site and contributed to her understanding of these events; in turn, this helped the flow of her interviews with parents and teachers as she could build-in what she had observed to her prompts and probes to create a more site specific tool.

## **Stage 1: Adopting a diary – interview approach with parents and teachers**

### *Benefits of diary and semi-structured interview approach*

The research questions aimed to examine the process of the parents' interview; previous discussion outlined the weaknesses in using direct observation but there remained a need to get to the heart of the private practice. Sa (2001) and Nunan (1992) suggest that keeping a diary can capture the dynamic of a process that is not easily observed; it was decided that a brief diary would capture the data of the parents' meeting as close to the event as possible to maintain internal consistency in what the teachers and parents were describing. This was linked to a semi-structured interview, following the return of the diary, as the combination provided "an approximation to participant observation" (Burns, 2000, p.439). The time lapse between the actual parents' meeting and an interview with the researcher could potentially have cast doubt on the validity of the interview data. However, the diary reduced this in several ways: a copy of the diary was given to the interviewee to act as a prompt of the events and affective responses (Tomkins & Tuncliffe, 2000; Nunan, 1992); it was a source of evidence in itself that could be used in the analysis to check the validity of the interview data; and the diary was used by the interviewer to plan prompts and probes that contextualised each interview (Burns, 2000; Peck, 1996) rather than applying a standard set for each participants (Drever, 1997).

While the aim of the research was not to change people's views, the reflective process of keeping the diary had the potential to develop participants' conceptualisation of the parents' meeting process (Tomkins & Tuncliffe, 2000; Jorge, 1994; Bailey & Nunan, 1996). Sa (2001) has used diaries to aid metacognition; in this study, some participants overtly commented that the research process had focussed their thinking. It provided a way into accessing people's constructs of reality (Estola & Syrjala, 2000): this was probed more deeply through the interview. An example of this lay in asking participants to rate their satisfaction with the meeting; the ratings alerted the researcher to

parent and teacher concurrence and this was then pursued through the interview.

#### *The researcher uses a reflective diary*

During the study, the researcher also maintained a diary. It enabled her to record her on-going thinking and to write through her developing ideas. Over the extended period of the research, it provided a means of support in allowing the researcher to reflect on her thinking and emotions. As recommended by Sa (2001), it was open in structure, allowing for entries in prose, lists and what have you. An example from the diary that records the researcher's thinking on the construction of the parental questionnaire is shown in Appendix 7. The recording in the reflective diary was approached as an iterative process, allowing the researcher to return to and develop earlier entries (Holly, 1989). During the content analysis, the researcher used the diary less as she incorporated memo writing into her practice; she returned to using the diary more extensively to support the thesis writing process.

#### *Potential difficulties in using diary-interview methodology*

The diary approach increased validity in accessing the actual process as a "Proxy for observation" (Robson, 2001, p.254); nonetheless, there remained concerns over the validity if this remained the only perspective of the meeting – concerns over bias in what the participants wrote and bias in how the researcher interpreted what was written. Two issues had to be addressed in the design:

1. combining research approaches to increase the validity of the diary data
2. achieving a level of structure that would increase the reliability of the approach while remaining flexible to allow participants to structure their perceptions of the experience.

Nunan's (1992) experiences in using a diary method with learners led him to conclude that there remained issues related to external validity that made this approach suitable only to raise issues. Jorge (1994) asked students to complete diaries as a focus of later group discussions; while Goetz and LeCompte

(1984), Hilleson (1996) and Shaw (1996) used dairies as one of several methods to collect evidence. In this study, the diary was accompanied by a semi-structured interview in Phase 1 and the perspectives of the pupil group interviews, parents and teachers were compared; the resulting themes were further compared to the results of a questionnaire on a larger sample of the parent population in Phase 2 of the study.

The literature on diaries suggests a variety of levels of structure: Sa (2001) preferred a completely open diary, Tomkins and Tunnicliffe (2000) used a broad structure, while Robson (2001) and Lewis and Lindsay (2000) suggest a higher degree of structure that is akin to a self-administered questionnaire to minimise respondent interpretation. There exists a continuum of opinion on diary structure; the decision in this study was based on the limited support and direction that the researcher would be able to give to the writers and ensuring that the methods collected data that addressed the research questions. A diary was designed that had a clear before, during and after structure that paralleled the research questions; some specific questions were asked, such as rating satisfaction, while other parts remained open sections for the writer to record what happened. The construction of the sections was informed by literature on questionnaire items (Cohen et al, 2000). (A copy of the teacher diary is located in Appendix 8: the parent diary is in Appendix 9). Burns (2000) writes that this approach needs clear instructions; the structure helped to lead the writer through what information was required. On the other hand, the researcher remained vigilant that she did not create biased responses from the participants by piloting the diary. Further, she was careful not exclude them from the opportunity to express ideas that were beyond the existing literature on parents' meetings by providing open sections for extended responses.

### *Selecting a sample*

At each site, three class teachers volunteered to participate in the study; the researcher did not specify who could participate but she cannot ensure that the selection was entirely random as the head teachers initially collected the names

of the volunteers. The class teachers who participated represented the following stages at each site:

Table 3.7: Stage of teacher participants at each site

site	Infants (P1-3)	Juniors (P4&5)	Seniors (P6&7)
Burgh	2	0	1
Gateway	1	1	1
Hill	1	1	1

*(At Hill, one of the teachers held a promoted post.)*

Two parents were randomly selected from the class list of each volunteer teacher and they were contacted by letter to ask them to participate. A letter was sent to the head teacher to advise him or her of the selection; this allowed the school to alert the researcher of any potential difficulties such as literacy problems (the letter is in Appendix 10). Refusals or non-responses were substituted by another name randomly drawn from the class list: there were four substitutions across Burgh and Gateway schools. Three parents at Burgh did not return their forms but, as the meeting was imminent, the school made arrangements with them to participate; however, none of these parents returned the diary or participated in the research interviews. The final pattern of participants at each site was:

Table 3.8: Teacher & parent participants at each site

site	teachers	parents
Burgh	3	3
Gateway	3	6
Hill	3	6
Total	9	15

The reduced number of parent participants at Burgh made the triangulation of the data to the Phase 2 questionnaire data essential.

The proposed selection of parents from each participating teachers' class allowed for a comparison of perspectives on the same event. Despite the attraction of also trying to create a connection to the pupil participants, the complexity of achieving such a task may have reduced the amount of people willing to participate.

The parents drawn in this random sample elected to attend their parents' meetings. The study did not measure the effect that selection had upon the willingness of the parents to attend. Thus, there is potential to develop this research further by seeking out a sample of parents who do not attend these meetings to gather their views and expand the scope of the study.

#### *Ethical considerations in working with parents and teachers*

The parent and teacher participants were asked to give informed consent through a letter that outlined the nature and use of research and an accompanying form. Consent was given to complete the diary and to participate in the follow-up interview. (See Appendix 11 for informed consent letter.) While it was possible to offer anonymity in the reporting process of the research, the teachers had to know which parents had been selected so they recorded the correct interviews in their diary; similarly the parents needed to know which interview they had to focus on where they may have more than one child. The correspondence clearly identified the pupil that the meeting would be about; this avoided confusions, particularly where two of the participating parents at Burgh had sets of twins. The participants were not made aware of the diary content that they had each recorded for a meeting as the literature on parents' meetings suggests that participants are not always frank with one another as they do not want to jeopardise the security of the child (Walker, 1998).

The researcher met with each teacher prior to the research progressing to ensure that they understood their rights in the research and to answer any questions that they may have. It would have been difficult to organise the same

pre-meetings for parents so they were contacted individually by telephone, allowing the researcher to introduce herself and answer questions.

Table 3.9: Enquiries made by parents during telephone contact

site	enquiry
Burgh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ all parents satisfied with communication</li> </ul>
Gateway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ one parent nervous about being interviewed but satisfied after talking with researcher</li> </ul>
Hill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ purpose of research</li> <li>▪ researcher presence during the actual meeting</li> <li>▪ log initially not received – later located with child</li> </ul>

The parents and teachers were contacted after the diary return to arrange an interview.

*Piloting the parent and teacher diaries*

The draft formats of the parent and teacher diaries and interview schedules were shredded by the researcher and her supervisor. Drever (1997) describes this as getting another person to examine the research tool closely for faults before the piloting stage. Next, the diaries were piloted on a non-probability sample of contacts of the researcher: three parents and two teachers completed the diaries and participated in a de-briefing session with the researcher to identify any necessary changes. The parents reflected that the study may have collected different data dependent on which child or which of their interviews was the focus. Therefore, the final diary asked the parent to identify how ‘typical’ had been this experience. Burns (2000) recommends that diarists clarify whether they are recording a typical experience. It became confusing to try to incorporate this item into the teacher’s diary but the researcher included this in the interview schedule.

At the design stage, the researcher had decided to call the diary a log as this appeared less daunting as the word 'diary' carried varying connotations. The pilot led the researcher to change some of the language of the instructions so that it appeared less like a test, for example, 'please tick answer' replaced 'please tick response'. An extra note was added to remind the participants what was meant by 'parents' meetings' so there was a shared language.

The structure of the pilot teacher diary asked for the information related to the two different interviews after each question. This was found to be confusing. Therefore, the final draft split the diary into two different sections so that a teacher only had to focus and write about one interview in each section.

#### *Analysing the data: using the diaries to inform the interview*

The researcher issued the diaries to the teachers at the pre-meetings while the parent diaries were sent by pupil-post at each site. As diaries were returned, participants were contacted to arrange an interview. Analysis of the diaries indicated that people had been able to follow the format. The diary would be used to enter specific information into the semi-structured interview schedule. Copies were made of the original diary to allow the interviewer and interviewee to use these during their conversation. Content analysis led to information being represented in grids that supported comparison to interview data. The process of content analysis is described in more detail in reference to the teacher and parent interviews. However, the value of the diary data in the study lay as much in its holistic contribution to the study, in particular, as an effective prompt for the interview stage.

#### *Semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers*

The benefits and potential difficulties in using interviews have been considered in the section on pupil group interviews. In this section of the research, the interview was chosen to provide the depth and clarity that may be missing from the diaries. Rather than perceiving the study as only a series of steps that built on one another, there was a more subtle interplay between the ranges of data in

the analysis. Phase 1 created themes for the construction of a parental questionnaire in Phase 2 but the analysis called for a return to the questionnaire to illuminate findings from Phase 2. For example, the questionnaire could identify qualities in the teacher that were important but it could not illustrate how teachers communicate these qualities during the meeting. The constructs for the interview schedule were informed by the key issues from the literature review (see the conclusion of Chapter 2). Each interview schedule was tailored to the teacher or parent by using the data from their diaries of the parents' meetings.

*Ethical considerations in using semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers*

Teachers and parents had already given informed consent at the diary stage, however, the researcher had to remain aware that participants retained the right to withdraw from participation; no one chose to do so. However, participants may display their reluctance in other ways and the interviewer had to respect this. The interview allowed the researcher to take other characteristics into account (Keats, 2000); where participants had consented to be taped but were reluctant during the interview, the interviewer would be careful not to over prompt and probe, putting the person through an interrogation. Often, reticent participants (and some enthusiastic ones) spoke after the taping (Keats, 2000); the researcher noted any pertinent points on the interview schedule. These were then recorded on the transcript and a copy of the full transcript was sent to each participant with a time scale in which they could respond if they felt parts did not reflect their recollection of the interview or if they could identify any parts where the transcript recorded that the content had been unclear. (A copy of the transcript letter is located in Appendix 12). No participant contacted the researcher to ask for changes to the transcript.

Although these participants were adults, the researcher took the power relation between the interviewer and interviewee into consideration. The teachers were interviewed in their own school during the school day; while this was their

place of work, it is an environment in which they were more authoritative than the researcher. The parents were interviewed in their homes rather than the context of the school to encourage them to relax. This approach necessitated the organisation of security procedures for the researcher in the field.

### *Piloting the approach*

The interview followed the structure of the pupil interview schedule. There was a preamble that covered issues of ethical consent that led to a broad start to allow the participant to relax and prompt their memory of the event. The development of the interview included general probes and specific prompts and probes from the diary data. The conclusion provided a sweeper question to ensure that no pertinent information had been omitted. (A copy of the parent interview schedule is in Appendix 13; a copy of the teacher schedule is in Appendix 14). The researcher piloted the interview with participants from the diary pilot. The debriefing did not suggest that any major revisions were required. The actual interviews with teachers and parents were completed between April and June 2002, depending on when the second annual parents' meeting took place in each school.

### *Analysing the data from the semi-structured interviews*

The transcripts of the interviews were subjected to content analysis with coding identifying each change of theme rather than using a specific unit of analysis such as the sentence. A potential tension existed between preserving the holism of the interview and identifying themes and trends through coding (Cohen et al, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (as discussed in Cohen et al, 2000) suggest that the interview structure depends on the researcher's certainty on the key issues on entering the interview – semi-structured interviews offered a better fit where the literature on parents' meetings in the primary context was not well developed. The flexibility allowed exploration while the structure provided a means to provide a common analysis approach to identify themes for the next phase. In seeking to analyse in a structured way that would increase reliability

and validity and, therefore, generalisability, was important that the dynamic of the social interaction was not sacrificed as:

“It is neither the questions alone nor the responses alone but the dynamic interplay between them which creates the structure.”  
(Keats, 2000, p.51)

Therefore, while one can describe a set of coding procedures, Burns (2000) describes content analysis as “more an art than a science” (Burns, 2000, p.434).

A consistent pattern of coding was applied as described for the pupil interviews. An overview was written to preserve the holistic nature of the interview (Drever, 1997). The bank of codes was created by cutting and sorting the first few interview schedules to get an initial pattern for the data. Then the coding was completed on copies of the transcripts with the bank of codes expanding as the coding took place. The list of codes was then ‘cleaned’ after the parental coding, before continuing to the teacher transcript coding. Initial coding defined ideas from words, phrases or sentences but this developed towards pattern coding that structured hierarchies of ideas at an analytical level (Miles and Huberman, 1994); coding required continuous movement between inductive and deductive thought, stepping back from the data regularly to minimise bias (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As suggested in Strauss and Corbin (1998), one was able to fine tune some categories by introducing dimensions and properties; for example, differentiating between codes being mentioned positively or negatively and, again, whether events were present or past experiences. A flow chart was used to reconstruct each interview after coding; grids were created under key themes for set of participants at each site (parents and teachers separately) and these were drawn together to create overall grids for each set of participants in the manner of metamatrices described by Miles and Huberman (1994). (Appendix 15 contains an example of an overview, a page of coding on a transcript and the resulting flow charts). Following the

entire interview transcript coding, there were overview grids by groups (parents, pupils and teacher) that could also be read by category and site.

During the coding process, reliability was considered in several ways. Following the coding of the set of parental interviews, the researcher submitted the set of codes to rigorous analysis to validate the existence of each code. This resulted in some cleaning of the codes and fuller memo writing to clarify the definitions of the codes. The researcher selected the first interview transcript from each site and recoded these independently from the first coding and compared the results. Miles and Huberman (1994) propose that a double-coding by the same researcher should aim for 80% consistency or better. Here, the recoding focus was on ensuring the same codes were identified overall for the transcript making specific calculation of accuracy more difficult. There was a match between the first and second coding at Hill and Gateway; potentially a contributing factor had been that their first coding took place after Burgh and the researcher was more experienced in content analysis by that point. One code was omitted and one code added in the second coding at Burgh; this could be understood on an additional reading as they represented peripheral ideas to the main focus of the parent's responses during the interview. A selection of coded transcripts across all the interviews was sent to the researcher's supervisor with updated lists of the codes; Burns (2000) recommends that one should get another to act as 'devil's advocate' to control bias. Her supervisor cross-checked and tested the robustness of the categories, leading him to discuss any potential amendments with the researcher. Due to the protracted nature of the study, the researcher regularly revisited and considered prior coding as a means to reengage with the research process.

One way to approach describing and analysing such data is purely through words. However, even through words, one can begin to quantify data; for example, describing that a category was expressed frequently or less so than another category. Gorard (2001) discusses Popkewitz's belief that a false division between quantitative and qualitative analysis as:

“Words can be counted, and numbers can be descriptive. Patterns are, by definition, numbers, and the things that are numbered are qualities.” (Popkewitz, 1984, in Gorard, p.6)

It would have been flawed to try to reduce the interview coding to numbers as the research tool was not designed with this purpose and the resulting data would not bear the scrutiny of statistical analysis. Nevertheless, where there was a lot of individual data to bring together to tell a coherent story and progress to the next phase of the research, some counting of how many participants mentioned codes helped to identify more prominent ideas that needed to be explored further. Initial counting of codes led the researcher to particularly focus on codes that were only mentioned by one participant as she cleaned the data set; this did not always lead to exclusion of this code but it did signal cases that did not fit the overall pattern and had the potential to provide depth to the study as,-

“The discovery and specification of differences among and within categories, as well as similarities, is crucially important and at the heart of grounded theory.” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.111)

In reviewing the analysis process and cleaning the on-going coding list, a fine balance had to be sought between giving the coding room to expand to be flexible to a range of ideas while containing the process to allow the researcher to reconstruct the coded data in a coherent manner.

#### *Reflecting on the methodological approach*

The use of this method presented issues that are well documented in the research literature (Burns, 2000; Drever, 1997). In particular, it was time consuming as three teacher interviews would be secured in one day but parent interviews progressed at a slower rate. The process of transcription and analysis were also demanding on the researcher’s time.

The benefits of this approach lay principally in the depth of insight that was gained through the interviews, transcriptions and analysis. Movement onto checking the findings through a questionnaire to a larger parental sample, provided a check on the validity but attempting to reach an understanding of how some aspects were achieved required a return to the interview data. The combination of the diary-interview across different groups, informed by a grounded approach, allowed one to begin to understand the process the parents' meeting and how perceptions of satisfaction were formed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### *Using the data to inform the questionnaire stage*

The study was designed with the intention that Phase 1 would raise themes relevant to parents' meetings, while Phase 2 would check the validity of these themes with a larger sample of parents through a questionnaire. While the coding process contained rather than constrained the range of ideas from the Phase 1 participants, the resulting data covered a wide range of areas: to try to check every category and code through the questionnaire would have resulted in an unwieldy research tool. Therefore, one had to be selective. The design of the questionnaire focussed on the categories of satisfaction, purposes of parents' meetings, participants' roles, organisation of the meetings and potential pupil participation. (The reflective diary entry in Appendix 7 provides further detail on the design of the questionnaire items.) The Phase 1 data was utilised in several ways: some questions listed codes from that category and did a straight check to their importance to Phase 2 parents ( for example, checking the importance of interpersonal qualities of teachers); some questions were open but used the Phase 1 codes to code responses ( for example, parents were asked about how they prepared for meetings and their responses were coded using the list from Phase 1); and, actual raw data was used to encourage parents to engage with the views of others (for example, direct quotations from Phase 1 parental interviews were provided for Phase 2 parents to rate to extent to which they agreed with the views). The use of counting during the data

analysis allowed the researcher to select more commonly mentioned codes from larger categories to apply at the questionnaire stage.

## **Stage 2: Researching using questionnaires with parents**

### *Benefits of a questionnaire approach with parents*

The benefits of a questionnaire in answering the research questions of this study lay principally in accessing a larger sample of the parental population in a way that was less time-consuming than interviews (Cohen et al, 2000). An increased uniformity of approach could be taken that reduced the bias introduced through interviewer influence (Cohen et al, 2000; Burns, 2000). This approach increased anonymity with the potential for more honest participant responses. The Phase 2 questionnaire brought aspects that one could argue increased the reliability and validity of the study, making the findings more generalisable.

### *Potential difficulties in using questionnaires with parents*

On the other hand, the rise in uniformity and anonymity of the research approach brought potential problems. For some participants, the interpersonal aspects of other research approaches, such as interviews, may increase the willingness of their participation and the extent of their response. The questionnaire provided more uniformed data but it did not provide opportunities to follow-through to clarify answers or probe ideas further (Burns, 2000; Drever, 1997). The distance from the researcher may reinforce anonymity but it excluded participant support where there were problems with literacy (Cohen et al, 2000) or a respondent misinterpreted or misunderstood a question (Burns, 2000; Munn & Drever, 1999). Therefore, it was important that the questionnaire was piloted beforehand and that the questionnaire items had an appropriate balance in the construction of open to closed or more structured items to allow for efficient analysis while giving flexibility to gather a range of responses that may extend beyond data gathered in Phase 1.

### *Ethical considerations in using a questionnaire*

The participants in pilot and actual questionnaire were given a covering letter that provided information to allow them to make an informed choice in

deciding to complete to survey. The nature of the pilot group allowed me to speak generally to the potential participants beforehand and answer any questions that arose. Participants were promised anonymity in their response although the researcher coded the questionnaires beforehand to allow her to track participants who had responded. (A copy of the covering letter is provided in Appendix 16).

*Selecting a sample*

A sample of sixty parents was selected at each research site; a systematic sample (Burns, 2000) of parents was selected by selecting every nth name from the school register (the total roll for the school was divided by 60 to find which ordinal value was to be selected). Initial copies of the questionnaire and covering letter were issued by post; however, a low initial return rate led the researcher to issue a reminder through the pupil and a final reminder by post. The researcher was hoping for a return rate of about 30 questionnaires per school to provide for reliable statistical analysis and generalisability overall and from each site (Munn & Drever, 1999). The final return rate was as follows:

Table 3.10: Return rate of questionnaires at each site

site	No. of questionnaires issued	No. of returns	% of returns at site	% of total returns
Burgh	60	32	53	35
Gateway	60	33	55	36
Hill	60	27	45	30
Total	180	92	51	100

Gorard (2001) warns that samples less than twenty make the standard error very large, whereas samples of about sixty reduce the potential error and the additional numbers after eighty add little to increase the accuracy of the findings. Analysis at site level would be equivalent to small-scale research;

however, analysis across the sites was equivalent to large scale research with a total of over sixty respondents giving greater accuracy to reported findings.

#### *Piloting the research approach*

The draft questionnaire was shredded by the researcher and her supervisor. Due to time constraints in accessing a sample of parents from the research schools to pilot the questionnaire, the researcher invited undergraduate students who had primary school aged children to participate in the pilot. The majority of this convenience sample comprised Year 1 teaching students as they were less likely to approach the questionnaire from a teacher's perspective as this was early in their course (December 2002). Eleven students responded by completing the draft questionnaire and a brief evaluation sheet. All the students found the lay-out and questions clear with two students offering a response on wording. The completed questionnaires indicated that the pilot participants had been able to follow the instructions correctly. Ideally, the researcher could have drawn a stronger sample by asking parents from the actual research schools to participate in the pilot.

#### *Using a questionnaire with parents*

The final questionnaire was issued to parents in December 2002 when all the parents would have had an opportunity to attend the first annual parents' meeting. (A copy of the questionnaire is in Appendix 17). The process of collecting returns by post and prompting participants meant that this phase of the data collection was completed before the end of February 2003. As in other parts of the research, the head teacher was given a copy of the research tool and informed that this stage of the study was now underway.

The questionnaire followed the diary content in asking participants to rate their satisfaction. This approach has weaknesses in that the intervals between each stage of the rating cannot be assumed to be the same and participants may bring their own values to completing rating scales. For this reason, this data was not submitted to parametric testing; however, it provided an opportunity

for the parents to tune-in to the topic and participants at the diary-interview stage had commented that this had made them think about a personal response to meetings rather than accepting official provision. Again, the diary structure was mirrored in that parents were asked about before, during and after the meeting; this targeted the research question related to the process of the meeting. Parents were given attitude scales to rate their response to views from Phase 1. These scales included aspects of satisfaction, purpose of meetings and organisation. While Phase 1 indicated that pupils did not participate in meetings at any site, this issue was followed-through in the questionnaire. The Phase 1 data could be complex on this issue as participants presented variables related to when pupils might attend and reasons for their decisions; to avoid the survey becoming off-putting, this had to be reduced to a set of views from which the parents could make a choice. An open 'sweeper' question was included to maintain flexibility that Phase 2 participants may have different views to add from the Phase 1 participants. The initial literature review had suggested that one of the variables that impacts on the satisfaction and behaviours of parents is social class (Crozier, 1999a). Therefore, the questionnaire concluded by asking for occupation information; this was not extensive to avoid repelling parents from completing and returning the questionnaire. The classification used the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification. Further, this information would also allow the researcher to judge whether the respondent was atypical of the social profile given for that area.

### *Analysing the data*

Copies of the returned questionnaires were coded using a coding schedule and codes from Phase 1 to code open sections of the survey. The semantic responses were translated into numbers to allow the data to be collated and analysed. The results were collated using the SPSS programme. This allowed a foundation for descriptive statistics to allow the researcher to tell the story of the data at overall and site level; some data was also cross tabulated and subjected to appropriate non-parametric testing to check the probability that

variables, such as the site, had a significant effect on the data outcome. (As the sites represented more than 2 variables, ordinal data was tested for probability using the Kruskal-Wallis test, Gorard, 2001.)

### *Reflecting on the methodological approach*

While the questionnaire approach was efficient on time, it was expensive in using postal issue and responses. Questionnaire instructions and wording that had not been identified as problematic in the pilot phase arose here, in particular, the instruction to double-tick the most important interpersonal quality in the teacher in question 1.3. However, the questionnaire did achieve the main aim of this phase – to check the emergent themes of Phase 1 over a larger sample. It also provided assurance in making statements about parents' views at the Burgh site where parental response in Phase 1 had been lower.

### **Bringing it all together: triangulation**

Burns (2000) proposes that one can increase the reliability and validity in qualitative research through triangulating the results. Robson (2001) identifies potential to achieve triangulation through a multi method approach that collects information from a variety of informants. This study allowed for triangulation in several ways:

- comparisons between parent, teacher and pupil perspectives on the theme of parents' meetings
- comparison between sites overall and between groups in each site, for example, parental views at each site
- comparison between information collected in Phase 1 by different methods – diaries, semi-structured interviews and descriptive observation
- comparison between Phase 1 and 2 information through the additional method of a parental questionnaire used with a larger research sample- as the study employed qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, statistical methods of triangulation over the study would not have been appropriate. However, the questionnaire did provide a

comparison to qualitative findings and a statistical comparison between sites to establish significant findings.

Overall, the chosen methods addressed the research questions to produce valid and reliable information on (1) parents', teachers' and pupils' expectations of parents' meetings, (2) the current structure and content of parents' meetings across these three sites, and (3) the aspects of these meetings that satisfied the expectations of all these groups.

## CHAPTER 4 WHAT EXPECTATIONS DO PARENTS, TEACHERS AND PUPILS HAVE OF PARENTS' MEETINGS?

### **Presenting the research findings: introduction**

The literature review in Chapter 2 concluded that there was a dearth of evidence on parents' meetings in the context of primary education in the United Kingdom. This resulted in an inductive research design in Chapter 3. The application of this research design led to various categories of codes being identified that illuminated relevant themes on parents' meeting for parents, teachers and pupils at three primary schools. To allow the findings to be presented to the reader in a coherent way, the findings will be presented in four chapters; Chapters 4 to 6 will each address one of the research questions that emerged from Chapter 2. The data collected from the participants described current interaction with children before, during and after these meetings; rather than fragment this to fit the structure of chapters 4 to 6, this is considered separately in Chapter 7. The present chapter focuses on question 1 – 'what expectations do parents, teachers and pupils have of parents' meetings?' The term 'expectations' suggests ideas and goals that participants bring to the meetings; therefore, in the overall structure of the meetings, it is considered as part of the 'before' stage. In the analysis of the data, this was identified as a category called 'purposes'; these purposes ranged from providing information to making social contacts.

In reporting Phase 1 data, parents and teachers will be identified by a code as follows:

Table 4.1: Phase 1 parent & teacher participants

site	teacher	parents
Burgh	BT1	BP1A & BP1B
	BT2	BP2A
	BT3	No parents
Gateway	GT1	GP1A & GP1B
	GT2	GP2A & GP2B
	GT3	GP3A & GP3B
Hill	HT1	HP1A & HP1B
	HT2	HP2A & HP2B
	HT3	HP3A & HP3B

Table 4.2 displays the range of purposes for parents' meetings suggested by parents and teachers at each site. Individual participants may have cited more than one expectation for the meetings.

Table 4.2: Purposes identified by Phase 1 parents and teachers at each site (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	T info	P info	con	social	social context	incentive	view c work	purp (-)
Burgh teachers	3	1 links to misleading report formats	0	0	1	0	0	0
Burgh parents	3	3	2	1 easier to communicate concerns in person	0	1	0	0
Gateway teachers	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
Gateway parents	4	4	0	0	1 school evaluates home	0	2	0
Hill teachers	2	0	1	1	1	0	1 limitations in access due to saving evidence for HMI	1 teachers as self-protecting profession
Hill parents	4	3	3	2 gain more information	0	2	1	0

*Codes: T info- expectation that teacher transmits information: P info – parent wants to gain specific information: con – parent & teacher seek consensus on child's progress/future action: social – meeting provides a social link between parent and teacher: social context- provide information on the child's social context: incentive –meeting provides an incentive for the child: view c work – viewing child's work as an end in itself: (-) – meeting has no purpose*

## **Information for whom?**

### *Teachers transmit information versus parents seeking information*

The literature suggested a model of meetings where teachers often talk at parents; the expectation that teachers will transmit information to the parents at the parents' meeting was reinforced in this study. However, this was not the only purpose for the participants. Table 4.2 shows that there was almost a balance between parents who saw the purpose of meetings being for teachers to transmit information (cited in 11 out of 15 interviews) to parents who have a goal of particular information that they seek (cited in 10 interviews). This suggests that parents want information from the teacher but they do not want to be in a receptive role only. An exception was Hill parent 2A who cited getting a report from the teacher as the only purpose for attending parents' meetings. The main response from teachers was that they should be giving information to the parent; however, there is a marked difference in the balance of parental responses on teacher given information to their own goals to find-out certain information as 8 out of the 9 teachers cited that they provide information to 4 discussing parents having an expectation that they will achieve specific information. The class teachers are not ignoring that parents may want specific information but there is an indication that these teachers saw parents' meetings as a focus on their role as information-giver on the child.

The pupils who were interviewed were vague on their expectations of parents' meetings as no site included pupils at the meetings. The pupils tended to describe what they perceived in terms of parent and teacher roles (these are discussed in Chapter 5). The children described narrower roles for the adults than the parents and teachers identified; 17 out of 18 pupils discussed that the teacher's role was to transmit information. Pupils, generally, had traditional expectations of parents' meetings that they had formed from feedback they had picked-up while remaining in absentia from the actual meetings.

While the number of parents citing that the purpose of parents' meetings is that they expect the teacher to transmit information was higher at Hill and Gateway (4 parents at each site), it is noteworthy that all the parents consulted at Burgh identified this as

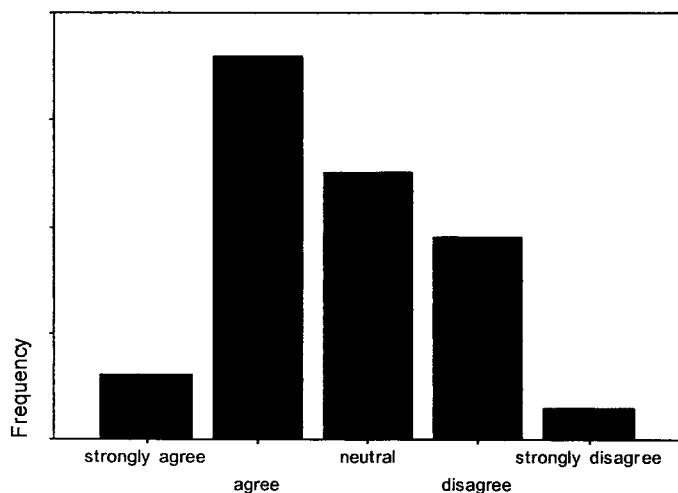
an expectation. Only at Gateway did all the teachers interviewed mention that a purpose of the meetings is that parents will have specific information that they want to gain; no teacher at Hill discussed this issue.

### *Phase 2 comparison*

These key purposes of teachers transmitting information and parents seeking specific information were followed-through in Phase 2 of the data collection. Parents were provided with statements from Phase 1 parent transcripts and they were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 5 point semantic scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This ordinal data lent itself towards analysis of variance by ranks and the Kruskal Wallis test was applied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Gorard, 2001).

Parents were asked to rate Q1.7.9 ‘It should be the teacher leading the conversation’ (source transcript of HP1B). Figure 4.1 shows the responses were as follows:

Figure 4.1: Frequency of parents’ responses indicating agreement with: “It should be the teacher leading the conversation.” ( Q1.7.9)



opinion:it should be the teacher leading the conversation

Most parents (40%) agreed that the teacher should lead the conversation although about one fifth of parents disagreed while just below a third were neutral on this issue. Table 4.3 shows that parents mainly agreed across all the sites with some

disagreement at each site and a few parents who strongly disagreed at Gateway and Hill: these were the sites where Chapter 5 indicates parents cited a greater range of their behaviours at meetings.

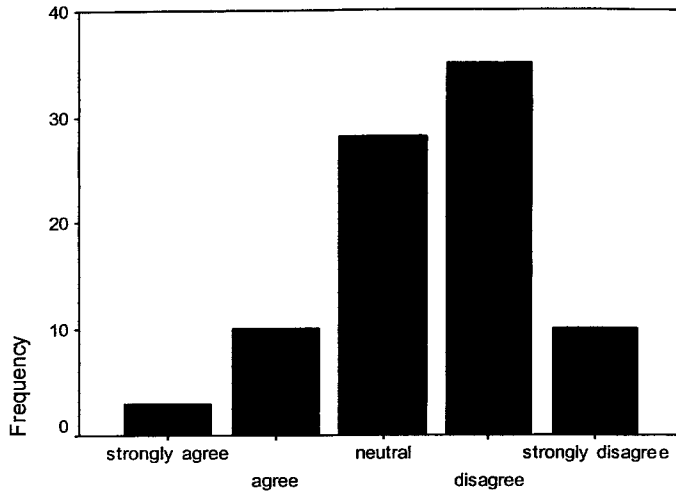
Table 4.3: Parents' views by site on 'It should be the teacher leading the conversation'

rating	value	Burgh	Gateway	Hill	total
Strongly agree	% opinion	17	50	33	100
	% site	3	10	8	7
Agree	% opinion	39	36	25	100
	% site	44	41	36	40
Neutral	% opinion	44	28	28	100
	% site	34	22	28	28
Disagree	% opinion	32	42	26	100
	% site	19	25	20	21
Strongly disagree	% opinion	0	33	67	100
	% site	0	3	8	3

In Tables 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5, the % of opinion displays the percentage of people choosing this response from the total amount of participants who chose that value; while % of site displays the percentage of participants at a particular site that chose that response.

When asked to rate 'I generally have my own agenda' (source HP3A), Figure 4.2 shows that parents responded:

Figure 4.2: Frequency of parents' responses indicating agreement with: "I generally have my own agenda." ( Q1.7.7)



opinion: I generally have my own agenda

Most parents (41%) disagreed with this statement with the next most popular response being neutral (33%). Parents appeared to be responsive at the meetings rather than proactive. However, grouping the agreed and strongly agreed responses together from Table 4.4, parents were more likely to bring their own agenda to the meeting in Burgh followed by Gateway and then Hill schools.

Table 4.4: Parents' views by site for 'I generally have my own agenda'.

rating	value	Burgh	Gateway	Hill	total
Strongly agree	% opinion	67	33	0	100
	% site	6	3	0	3.5
Agree	% opinion	60	20	20	100
	% site	19	6	9	12
Neutral	% opinion	43	36	21	100
	% site	39	31	26	12
Disagree	% opinion	26	40	34	100
	% site	29	44	52	33
Strongly disagree	% opinion	20	50	30	100
	% site	6	16	13	12

Statistical analysis indicated a significant difference among sites on this issue ( $\chi^2(2)=6.23, p=0.04$ ).

### *Seeking a consensus*

While seeking and getting information were frequently cited, some participants discussed a stage beyond this where the teacher and parent would be looking for consensus on their views. This was stressed by Parent BP1B who was experiencing problems with her child's behaviour but believed that the teacher, BT1, knew him well:

“ her describing what I see, holding his face up to the mirror and what she can see there too and I think that's quite important.” (BP1B)

For this parent, the consensual view of the child which linked to her perception that the teacher had a good knowledge of her child as an individual, counteracted negative comment in the meeting regarding her child's progress in school.

In seeking consensus, the parent is putting themselves in an active role where their views have equal value to those of the professional. The majority of parents interviewed related their satisfaction after the meeting to agreement between the parent and teacher on the child's progress or action that should be taken. One might expect a correlation, therefore, between parents expecting consensus (cited by 5 parents) and those expressing satisfaction related to having achieved agreement (cited by 12 parents). However, the lack of match here may be due to parents lacking explicit awareness that agreement is a purpose of meetings but being aware that they are dissatisfied when a consensual view of the child has not been achieved. A similar pattern can be found in the Phase 1 teacher data where only 1 teacher wanted to achieve agreement in saying:

“a chance to sort of interact with parents... get feedback from them about whether they're happy, whether they're confident in homework, whether they're happy about... the pace...their child's reading at, these things.”  
(HT1)

Nevertheless, 7 teachers found that level of concurrence shaped their satisfaction with the event. Parents' meetings emerged from Phase 1 as a form of mediation process where parents were expecting more active roles than are traditionally ascribed to facilitate them in seeking agreement with the teacher over the view of the pupil's achievements and future progress; this active mediation was necessitated, in part, by the absence of the pupil from the meeting.

### **A social event**

#### *Building a social link between parent and teacher*

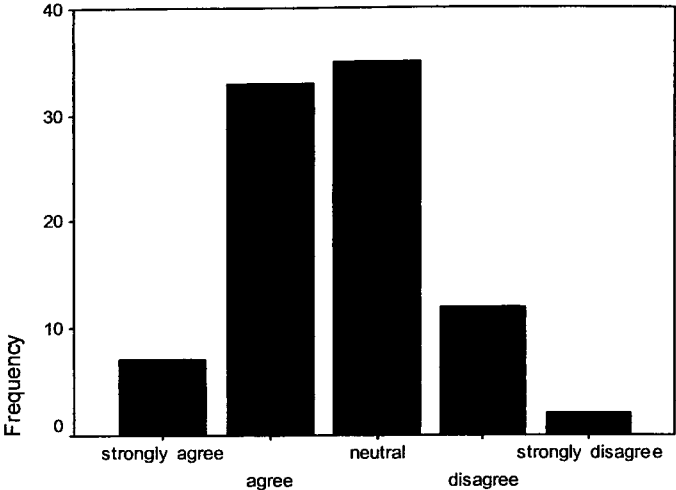
Clark (1998) suggested that parents value parents' meeting as a social experience. A few parents in Phase 1 found that these meetings served a social purpose. For example, HP1A had to raise an issue related to school disciplinary procedure and felt that,-

“that allowed me to bring it out on a more sort of friendly and open rather than make an issue.” (HP1A)

She preferred this approach as she felt that official contact with the school over this issue may have branded her “one of those mothers that is up at the school constantly.” Several parents agreed that they found it easier to communicate and gain more information in the interpersonal context of a meeting; while Teacher HT1 valued an opportunity for social interaction.

Phase 2 parents tended to be neutral when asked to rate Q1.7.10 ‘It’s a good way to get a personal attachment to the teacher’ (source HP3B) as illustrated in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Frequency of parents’ responses indicating agreement with “It’s a good way to get a personal attachment to the teacher.” (Q1.7.10)



opinion:... good way to get a personal attachment to the teacher

Table 4.5 indicates that Burgh parents were more likely to seek a social attachment; this is where parents and teachers raised prior experience of each other in Phase 1 and many teachers have links to or live in Burgh’s town. The issue was less important to Gateway parents. Phase 1 work and posting questionnaires indicated a geographical spread of parents at this site.

Table 4.5: Parents’ views by site on ‘It’s a good way to get a personal attachment to the teacher.’

rating	value	Burgh	Gateway	Hill	total
Strongly agree	% opinion	57	43	0	100
	% site	12	10	0	8
Agree	% opinion	42	27	30	100
	% site	44	28	40	37
Neutral	% opinion	29	43	29	100
	% site	31	47	40	39
Disagree	% opinion	33	25	42	100
	% site	12	9	20	14
Strongly disagree	% opinion	0	100	0	100
	% site	0	6	0	2

### *The social context of the child*

During Phase 1 interviews, it became apparent that there can be a social aspect to meetings that was not about adults making a social link; meetings were used overtly and covertly to gather social information on a child. Teacher HT2 described the child of HP2B as having had behaviour changes that could be explained by father attending parents' night, therefore, reinforcing information that the teacher had heard that the father had returned to the home after a period of separation from the mother. Further, she made judgements about the kind of father he was:

“He'd appeared back. And dad did appear... shall I put it this way, rather a rough, tough, scruff from the street but, when you actually spoke to him, he was giving you the most sensible feedback”. (HT2)

BT3 also described making assessments about the home background from these meetings:

“it allows you to meet the parents and to see where – the child is coming from. It also gives you some background to the child. It lets you – sometimes there are some things with a child, maybe happening in the classroom, where you don't understand what's been going-on with them and the parents they can say, ‘Well that was because such and such happened.’ It allows you the chance to let the parent know what their child is doing in the classroom and it allows the parents to obviously let you know what's going-on maybe out with school – sometimes, sometimes they don't want you to know.” (BT3)

The teacher proceeds to say that she believes there is more happening in the background of the first child she reported in the diary than the mother has revealed.

Parent BP1B was aware of a covert purpose to the meeting:

“I-I sometimes think it’s an opportunity for the – the teacher to see the parents as much as the parents to see the teacher, you know, and- and get the measure of the parents and what they can say and do to the child...” (GP1B)

This parent identified various ways in which he felt the meetings included manipulation of the parent, however, he gave the highest rating for satisfaction in his diary. GP1B identified other examples where it could be said that the school manipulates the event to meet its own end, including, conducting meetings with a lack of confidentiality to encourage a flow of parents through meetings due to time constraints and to allow parents to hear the content of other meetings so they will feel more prepared for their own meeting. It is interesting, therefore, that a parent who has identified strategies to manipulate parents should be positive about these meetings and, elsewhere, expresses support for the school. (While the parent was supportive of the school, the class teacher did not perceive this from her interview with the parent and her satisfaction rating was comparatively lower.) There are various aspects that may explain why this parent remains satisfied: he has limited experience of parents’ meetings that would allow him to make a comparison; he expresses that the professional should take the lead, therefore, accepting school control of the event; he is a member of the School Board and may perceive his role as being to support the school; as a couple, these parents took an active interest in researching schools and chose a school outwith their catchment area; and, he perceives the meeting as a frank exchange of views, regarding the individual teacher as honest. Therefore, the parent does not feel threatened by the strategies he has identified. While he supports the school, he is proactive in ensuring that his child receives a ‘good’ education. The interviewee was also politically minded and had developed clear views on education as he engaged the interviewer in a conversation about these after the interview.

Using these meetings for the purpose of making judgements about a child’s social context must be placed in perspective as meetings tended to last 5 to 10 minutes and one must question the reliability of complex judgements about pupils’ social context

made in that period of time and within the setting of a meeting with a limited agenda and differing levels of parental involvement.

### **Getting the children to work**

#### *Providing an incentive*

Some parents expected that the parents' meeting would encourage their child to work well at school. Three parent interviewees across Burgh and Hill believed that the meeting would have a positive effect:

“I know my kids, they've got parents' nights coming up, they tend to buckle-down and get the work done.” (BP2A)

For this reason, she would have liked an increase in meetings from two to three in the session. HP1B could see little purpose beyond seeing his children's work but he did sense that it gave him the opportunity to “give them a bit of a motivational talk” when he gave feedback to his children after the event.

In comparison, no teachers identified that the meetings were expected to motivate the pupils and the pupil groups did not recognise these meetings as an incentive for them. The only related discussion outwith the parental group came from the children when they were asked about what happened after the meeting and some Gateway and Hill children discussed the use of rewards and punishments by parents, with one Hill pupil anxious that the prospect of participating in an actual parents' meeting would increase the immediacy of the punishment.

#### *Viewing the child's work*

Parent HP1B stressed that he saw little purpose to these meetings beyond having an occasion to view his children's work:

“see I don't really agree with them as such apart from it is an opportunity for me to view the work.” (HP1B)

On the other hand, he did identify additional purposes he felt that the meeting served but stressed the key expectation of viewing work. Two further parents agreed on the key expectation of viewing work with GP3B identifying this as her only purpose. Viewing pupils' work served a variety of needs; it was a means to prepare parents for the interview and it was discussed as a feature of the organisation of the meetings, however, with these parents, viewing the work was a goal in attending the meeting.

Where the pupils discussed parents viewing their work, it was in the context of the organisation of the current meetings or as a potential pupil role in future meetings. Only one teacher (HT1) thought that viewing the child's work was a purpose of the meetings and she related its relative importance to limitations placed on parents regularly viewing children's work:

“they get a real chance to look through their work, especially now that we're gathering evidence and we can't send things home the way we used to, everything has to be kept in the school in case HMI come out, so parents don't get to see what they're doing except for the homework each week.”  
(HT1)

The low amount of formal homework that this teacher's pupils were likely to undertake reflected their early stage in primary school. Applying a transactional model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to this situation, policy from a macrosystem context is impacting on the links between the home and the school as the meeting becomes a substitute for timely communication on pupil progress through school work regularly going home; it impacts, not only on the nature of the meeting, but potentially on parents' perceived preparation for the content of the meeting. Some parents in Phase 1 prepared themselves for the meeting through observations they made by viewing how their child was coping with work that was brought home.

### **Meetings without purpose**

While some parents felt that parents' meetings had limited scope in their purpose, it was a teacher (HT3) who expressed that they served no purpose at all. This did not

impact negatively on her satisfaction with the two meetings recorded for the study; she rated both meetings at the highest level and this perception corresponded to the ratings of the parents.

“I think parents are quite intimidated by them. I think they...they are very much operated by the establishment “ (HT3)

As an experienced teacher, she believed that teachers retain control in this situation:

“I think we as teachers are probably quite – what’s the word?-(pause) I don’t know... what I’m trying to say is we’re quite protective of ourselves.” (HT3)

She reflected that teachers protect themselves through a model of parents’ meetings that provides limited time and, therefore, limited access to the child’s work; this relationship between time and access to pupil work can be exacerbated by the volume of work that the parent has to digest. The outcome can be that the parent is not fully prepared, leaving the professional in a superior position during the meeting. HT3 is proposing that teachers maintain a model of organisation that gives the meetings little purpose to parents but serves the purpose of maintaining professional power. This has led her to the view:

“to be totally honest, I’m not convinced that they fulfil a great deal of purpose.” (HT3)

Her proposal to overcome this situation is a model where the school would hold open days where parents could observe pupil work over a period of time in context. This would empower parents to ask more questions and form a point of view; teachers would have to be prepared to answer questions, moving the agenda towards the parent. Ideally, she would like to see “a kind of surgery” on a monthly basis that parents could access.

This teacher voiced a more radical view that was critical of her own profession; her criticisms of her profession emerged in some parental interviews but were not evident in other teacher interviews.

### **Getting ready**

Parents, teachers and pupils were asked to outline how they prepared for the meeting. Through the diary and interview, teachers listed approaches that included reviewing pupils' written reports and assessment records, making written notes and attending to presenting pupils' work. Several teachers identified times when a lack of preparation had led to dissatisfaction with a meeting. As this often arose under professional duties towards the meeting, this is discussed further under teacher roles in Chapter 5.

Parents prepared in various ways that they identified in the diary - interview and the questionnaire. They also used the school report although these were not always available prior to the meetings. This led parents to use other strategies including observing the child at home, using informal feedback from the school over the year, looking at work available at the parents' meeting and talking to the child beforehand. The expectation of parental preparation was not formalised at any site. There was a related aspect here of how prepared had the parent felt for the content after the meeting, that is, a parent may prepare to a certain degree but this may not prepare them for what actually happens during the meeting. Therefore, this aspect is elaborated upon under satisfaction in Chapter 6 as the degree of preparedness has links to how contented a parent may be after the meeting.

The study revealed that the pupils did not have a role during the current model of parents' meetings at these sites. During the interviews, no pupil perceived that they had the opportunity to discuss the meeting beforehand. Teachers (HT3 and GT2) said they had spoken to pupils beforehand and 11 parents across all the sites logged that they had spoken to their children. They talked about:

- Informing the child that the adult would be attending the meeting
- Asking the child to predict the meeting content

- Asking the child to identify issues or concerns that they would like the adult to raise at the meeting

There was no direct relationship between all the pupils and the teachers and parents interviewed in this study although some pupils came from classes of the teacher participants. However, generally, it is worth noting that there is a mismatch between the answers of the participant groups both within and between sites. This may reveal differing perceptions on pupil preparation rather than dishonesty. Parents' responses indicated that their interaction with the children, at this point, was primarily to prepare the parent rather than the pupil; teachers have little interaction to prepare pupils for the meetings. Communication with the children mainly happened after the meeting when parents provided feedback from the meeting; in a few cases some children did not receive any communication regarding the parents' meeting.

## CHAPTER 5 WHAT IS THE CURRENT STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF PARENTS' MEETINGS?

### **The structure and content of parents' meeting: introduction**

Addressing the second research question suggests examining evidence related to what happens during the parents' meeting. The lack of published evidence and policy in Chapter 2 proposed that this is a 'private practice'; as a result, Chapter 3 described a design method of using diaries coupled with interviews that would allow external observation of the event. The analysis of the Phase 1 data proposed categories connected to the roles of the parents and teachers during the event, the actual content of the meeting and aspects of its organisation.

### **The role of the teacher**

The category of purposes described the goals that participants brought to these meetings. Parents and teachers also described what they actually did at the meeting; that is, what action parents and teachers took to accomplish their goals. The pupils described parents' meetings in terms of what they perceived people did rather than as a range of their purposes or goals. In Chapter 4 it was shown that the expectation that the teacher would lead the meeting remained dominant but not the only purpose for participants. With competing expectations, which roles did teachers actually fulfil during parents' meetings? The Phase 1 data analysis illuminated traditionally defined roles such as transmitting information and providing advice but extended towards asking and answering questions and listening to parents. The teachers and parents expected the teacher to be prepared and this role of preparation extended into the researcher probing the teachers to establish the extent of their formal training to undertake parents' meetings. Table 5.1 summarises the teacher roles identified by the parents and teachers at each site in Phase 1.

At each site, the pupils perceived only one teacher's role of transmitting information on their progress and behaviour.

Table 5.1: Perceived teachers' roles by site and participant groups (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	prep	T transmit info	advise	ask q	answ q	listen to P
Burgh teachers	See note 2	3	1	1 particularly in meeting 1	1	1
Burgh parents	1	2	2	0	0	1
Gateway teachers	-	3	1	0	1	1
Gateway parents	0	6	3	0	1	1
Hill teachers	-	3	0	1 related to teacher's model of practice	1	1 gives a (+) & (-) example
Hill parents	1	6	1	0	3	1

*NOTE 1. Codes: prep- teacher prepares for the meeting; T transmit info- teacher transmits information on the child; advise- teacher advises parent how to support the child; ask q – teacher asks parent questions; answ q- teacher addresses parent's questions; listen to P – teacher actively listens to parent.*

*NOTE 2. The participant teachers were all asked during the interviews about their preparation, therefore, all answered but these did not arise spontaneously. Data on methods of preparation is presented separately in table 5.2.*

*The teacher prepares*

Table 5.1 shows that a few parents expected the teacher to prepare while all the teachers outlined methods of preparation and expanded upon these during the interview. Table 5.2 outlines the strategies that each Phase 1 teacher identified in her diary-interview to get ready for parents' meetings:

Table 5.2: Phase 1 teacher strategies of preparation (*\* indicates teacher used this strategy*)

	report	assess records	notes	C work	present C work	prep (-)
BT1	* review & use tear-off slip					
BT2	*	*teacher uses own records + National tests				
BT3	*		*			
GT1			*	*		
GT2			*linked to Org:time (-)	*	*filed work with children	
GT3			*		*checked work displays	
HT1		*	*	*	*	*(-) unexpected meeting
HT2	* tear-off slip-meeting I		*	*		
HT3		*reviewed National test results		*		*(-) info not passed to teacher

*NOTE 1: Codes: report –teacher reviews written report; assess records- teacher reviews child's assessment records; notes-teacher makes notes for the meeting ; C work-teacher reviews child's work ; present C work-teacher spends time on presenting child's work ; prep(-)-teacher does not feel prepared for the meeting .*

*NOTE 2: Italics = a previous meeting: (-) = this was cited as a negative experience.*

### *Making contact*

At the diary stage, the teachers were asked how they established contact.

Respondents at all three sites stated that this was done by a letter home. Teachers were also asked if they made any changes to the environment. The Burgh teachers did not have to attend to the immediate environment as all meetings took place in the school hall. At Gateway and Hill, teachers provided seating and thought about seating plans that would ensure privacy or an informal setting; children's work was displayed and some teachers used signs to encourage parents to look at the children's work.

### *The bureaucracy of parents' meetings*

All the teachers could identify methods that they preferred to use in preparation for the meetings. The access to reports and assessment records coupled with making notes could be interpreted as indicating that teachers maintain the image of professionalism and bureaucracy that can tip the power balance in the meeting towards them. Teachers' comments did not suggest an expectation of preparation on the part of the parents; however, the teachers cited cases where they felt uncomfortable when they had to undertake meetings without their tools of professional preparation. HT1 previously had a parents' meeting "sprung" on her unexpectedly:

"she just came in and I didn't feel as well prepared, I mean, I could talk to her about her child but I felt that, at least, having looked at all her work and looked through all the assessments, I could explain exactly, a lot more precisely. I didn't really enjoy the experience of not being prepared." (HT1)

Elsewhere, she described her notes as "a script".

At the same site, HT3 linked her dissatisfaction with a previous parents' meeting to information not having been passed on within the school about a child's learning difficulties, therefore, making the teacher appear less knowledgeable when a parent raised unknown information.

Elsewhere, GT2 linked the need for preparatory notes to the limitations of time:

“I generally make notes beforehand on what I want to discuss with the parents and, obviously, prioritising in what you have time for and what, as I say, is a priority.” (GT2)

Not only does this indicate that pragmatic aspects steer the model of parent’ meetings, but there is a suggestion here that the professional is the one to set the agenda for the meeting. The timings of the parents’ meetings meant that not all the teachers were able to employ the 5-14 Reporting model of written report distribution, followed by the return of the parent feedback slip and then the parents’ meeting.

#### *Arriving at a model of practice*

During the interview, the teachers were asked about training they had received for parents’ meetings. Regardless of the wide spectrum of professional experience amongst the participants, only GT1 could think of any related training in that she had watched a video as staff development on how to deal with aggressive parents. In the absence of formal training across the teacher participants, they were asked to reflect on how they had arrived at their model of practice. The majority of the staff had evolved a method from experience while a recently qualified teacher relied on her peers for guidance. BT1 and HT1 had disparate levels of experience but they both discussed the anxiety of initial experiences in participating in a parents’ meeting. A long-serving infant teacher at Burgh remembered her early concerns:

“I remember the first one, I remember the primary 4, (*name of pupil*)’s mum came in. She said, ‘I had diarrhoea thinking about coming to meet you.’ And I didn’t tell her, ‘So had I.’ (laughs) ‘cause that was my first one. Oh, it was nerve-wracking.” (BT1)

This teacher identified a positive model in a previous teacher education student being encouraged to attend parents’ meetings.

### *Teacher as information-giver*

As shown in Table 5.1, 23 out of 24 of the adult participants identified a role of the teacher being to give information on the child; the pupil groups saw this as the only role of the teacher. This was followed in frequency by the teacher providing advice to the parent. Both of these roles put the teacher in to an active role as an expert. Parents at each site discussed seeking guidance from the teacher; however, direct links could not always be established to teachers who said they gave advice during a meeting. The Primary 7 teachers in Phase 1 pre-empted the type of advice that would be requested by including information on transition to secondary school as experience had shown that this was a key parental concern. BT1 was wary of offering advice as she believed that the parent and teacher relationships to the child are different, thus, making school guidance not always applicable to the home setting. Parent HP3B repeated her dissatisfaction with teachers using a 'script' and making a one-way presentation that did not allow for her views to be discussed:

“It’s all black and white because the day’s black and white, it’s all kind of regimented – this is what we do- and it’s as quickly as they can tell you exactly what’s happening and out the door.” (HP3B)

### *Teacher as questioner*

Two teachers described asking questions to gather information. BT1 believed that the balance in the first parents' meeting of the session should be towards the teacher gathering information and background from the parent that would enable her to teach; this was probably due to BT1 being the Primary 1 teacher and the pupils being new to the school. HT1 was also a Primary 1 teacher but she used asking questions to check whether parents would be happy for her to proceed with her model of presentation to avoid her dominating the meeting.

Other teachers discussed asking parents questions but these have not been included on Table 5.1. The critical difference was the purpose of the questions: in 'T role' teachers asked genuine questions of parents; however, what emerged elsewhere was a model of practice that teachers employed with the sole purpose of encouraging

parents to participate. The analysis of the Phase 1 parents' data generated a sub-category of satisfaction regarding teacher's interpersonal qualities including the teacher encouraging parents' input: these responses were coded as part of the teacher's interpersonal approach to the meetings.

#### *Listening to parents and answering their questions*

Table 5.1 shows that participants at each site believed that teachers should be answering parents' questions and one person in each site participant group discussed teachers listening to parents. The total of six Phase 1 parent and teacher participants that wanted the teacher to listen to the parent compares to 23 who described a teacher's role as transmitting information to parents.

In the analysis of the Phase 1 Burgh parental interviews, some parents described their role as asking questions but a mirror image did not emerge in their expectation that a teacher had to answer question. Instead, often, they were asking for advice. In the other sites, the expectation from some parents was stronger that the teacher should be answerable to the parent. HP1A stressed the purpose of the parent seeking information through the meeting and, while satisfied with the meeting, she recalled that she had to follow-through and question the teacher's input to get the information that she expected from the meeting. One example from the interview showed the parent questioning input from the teacher:

“But, obviously, the information was, not limited, but it was just like the report card, you know, good, average or whatever. Whereas, anything that I wanted to know more of, I had to then say ‘Well yeah, you’re saying...’ She said, for instance, well she said she was in the top group for reading. So I says, ‘And how many are in the top group for reading?’ and she said, ‘Two thirds of the class’. So, if you were told, for instance, that your daughter was in the top group in the class for reading, you could take it that she was one of the best readers whereas she’s not. It’s just that two thirds are in the top group and a third in the bottom group.’ (HP1A)

The parent expected the teacher to be accountable to her through the meeting. This particular parent's circumstances indicated a degree of affluence which may have had some bearing on her attitude. HP1A rated her satisfaction with the meeting as a 5 whereas the teacher rated it lower at 4. The questioning with an expectation that the teacher should be accountable had satisfied the parent but the teacher felt less at ease when the parent had asked her to comment on a prior incident when her child had been disciplined by HT1A's team teaching partner. The teacher identified that this had influenced her satisfaction grading of the meeting.

At the Gateway site, one parent interviewed had the dual role of parent and teacher at another school. Her professional background had led her to form judgements about her child's progress and she expected the class teacher to listen to her views and answer her questions. She qualified her level of satisfaction with the responses that she received:

“She didn't answer anything that I specifically asked – she did answer. She was listening because sometimes you feel you go to parents' nights and they give you this spiel. They just want to get what they have to say out and they don't, you know, to what you've got to say, kind of thing” (GP2A)

This parent was not fully satisfied with the teacher's judgement on her child's progress as she brought her own professional knowledge to bear; however, she separates her role as teacher and parent when she does not pursue her reservations further. Three parent participants were in role conflict and this is discussed further under parents' roles. Following this meeting, the parent rated her satisfaction as 4 while the teacher rated the satisfaction level at 5 and perceived the exchange over the child's work to be friendly and collegiate.

All participant groups had traditional expectations of teachers that they should provide an oral report of a pupil's progress, possibly offering advice to the parent on supporting the child. On the other hand, there is some power shift from the traditional view with parents, and some teachers, perceiving of the teacher's role in a

balanced relationship where the teacher also actively listens to parents and is willing to address parents' specific questions. How does this compare to the role of the parent? The next section will investigate this question before comparing the Phase 1 data on roles to the Phase 2 questionnaire findings.

### **The role of the parent**

The teacher as information-giver implies that the parent will assume the role of listener while the teacher as listener who answers questions repositions the parent into a more proactive role. The interviews from Phase 1 highlighted a range of parent roles that are represented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Parents' roles during parents' meetings by site and participants groups (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	listen	support sch	provide soc context	ask q	express view	advocate	support c
Burgh teachers	1 KT2 about KP2B	2 BT1(+) these meetings BT2 cites(-) for BP2B	2 KT3	3	2 BT1 (-) prior but(+) these meetings	0	3
Burgh parents	0	1BP1B about BT1	1	3	1	2	2
Gateway teachers	0	3 GT1 cites(-) for TP1B meeting	2	2 GT1(-) where 'scrutinising'	2 GT2 cites(+) these meetings but (-) prior meetings	0	2
Gateway parents	1	3 GT1-GP1B clash of perceptions	0	3	3	0	3 GP1A
Hill teachers	2 (-) as HT2, HT3 want parents to participate	1HT2cites(-)	1	3 HT2&HT3 HT1 & HT3(-) if 'vociferous'	2	1	1 HT2(+) for HP2Ameeting (-) for HP2B meeting
Hill parents	3 to achieve a balance in perceptions on child	0	0	5 weak response HP2A HP1A HP3A	3 HP2B(-) prior meeting	0	4 HP1B, 2B,3B link to timeliness of information

*NOTE 1: Codes: listen-parent asks questions; support sch-parent supports the views & procedures of the school; provide social context-parent provides information from home context on child; ask q-parent asks questions; express view-parent expresses views in meeting; advocate- parent acts as advocate for child; support C- parent supports child .*

*NOTE 2: Italics = a previous meeting: (-) = this was cited as a negative experience: **Bold**= stressed by respondent.*

### *The parent supports the school*

Table 5.3 shows that more Phase 1 teachers believed a parent's role is to support the views and procedures of the school than the parents interviewed. Teachers across each site described times when they had not perceived that parents were supportive at parents' meetings. BT2 perceived that BP2B was not surprised when the teacher informed her that her child told lies in school. The parent did not participate in the study. Therefore, there is no comparative perception of the meeting. However, Teacher GT1 found that GP1B provided "resistance" to the teacher's report on the child's behaviour and rated her satisfaction as 4; Parent GP1B believed he had a frank exchange with an honest teacher over his child's behaviour and he remained supportive of the school, thus, grading his satisfaction as 5. Where teachers identified behaviour that they believed indicated a parent was supportive of the school, this included "she's just prepared to take anything you say on board" (GT2 about GP2B). It indicates that teachers look for signs that parents agree with the teacher's view and practice to decide whether a parent is supportive. Parents believed they were supportive if they get their children to "listen to the teacher" (BP1B) and "fit in with the way the class works" and if the parent is "willing to take any criticism" about the child (GP3A). Many teachers and some parents viewed parental support passively, while some parents saw this as a more active role. In Phase 1, no Hill parents identified a role of this nature.

### *The parent listens to the teacher*

The site where there was the greater expectation that parents should listen to the teacher was at Hill. However, closer analysis of the transcript indicates that the teachers are aware that parents listen but they are critical if this is the only role they are expected to fulfil. HT3 believed that many parents withdraw to a listening role as they are "intimidated" by parents' meetings. Her colleague, HT2, structured her model of parents' meetings to give parents an active role as she believed that parents will not really listen until their own concerns have been addressed. The Hill parents wanted to listen to the teacher as they already had a perception of their child's progress from elsewhere and they were listening with a view to comparing this

information: for example, Parent HP3A wanted a comparison to her views and information from her child, while HP3B saw the teacher and parent sharing the roles of listener and contributor to achieve a balance in the meeting of views:

“the role for both, I think, is to get to say your say and to be listened to, you know, then listen to the teacher as well. It’s got to be a kind of 50/50. You can’t just go in and say, ‘Right, okay, that’s it. Bye. They...they could write that in a letter, you know what I mean, whereas, when you’re face-to-face, different things come out with different kids – you can voice your opinion.”  
(HP3B)

None of the parents expected a passive listening role and the Hill teacher would have been disappointed if the parent did not participate. Elsewhere at Burgh, BT2 expected a more traditional relationship of teacher reporting and parent listening.

*Parent provides the school with information from the home context*

In Chapter 4, two teachers and one parent had stated that a purpose of parents’ meetings was to collect information on the social context of the child. One parent and five teachers described the parent role as providing the school with information. Teacher BT 1 outlined how information from BP1A about the competitive personalities of her twins helped her to make a National Testing decision. While other teachers described pupil contexts where it was important that they were made aware of changes in the home background; for example, BT3 usually found BP3A open about the home background but the presence of estranged father at the meeting frustrated an honest exchange of information. The only parent who described this role was BP1B who provided home information on the child, including medication, as she was asking the teacher for advice in handling her child’s behaviour. This code occurred more frequently amongst the teachers (5 out of 9 teachers compared to 1 out of 15 parents); teachers’ expectation that parents will provide background information is not balanced to their parents’ belief that this is one of their roles.

*Parent as questioner*

The previous codes had the potential to place the parent in a passive or active role. Participants described roles for parents that were clearly more proactive: the first one was asking questions. Teachers HT2 and HT3 had wanted parents to be more than a listener and other teachers discussed frustration when parents do not contribute to the meeting. BT3 compared BP3A and BP3B to less satisfactory experiences with parents:

“I mean, there are one or two parents who come and say virtually nothing, you know, they just come along, ‘I’m so-and-so’s mum’ ...and then they just add nothing. They’re waiting for you to say something. Whereas, these two parents obviously had questions that they wanted answered”. (BT3)

HT3 who proposed an alternative model for parents’ meetings, suggested that the school could reinforce the parents’ role of questioner by providing realistic access to information on the pupils.

The clarity and strength with which parents described their role as questioner varied. HP2A recalled asking questions but her overall transcript indicates that she is generally in a receptive role at these meetings. HP3A had an outline of what she wanted answered:

“I generally have my own agenda. I have things for each child that I require... confirmation of –‘Is there a problem with this?... I’m getting this at home... I need this verified...what’s happening here?’ (HP3A)

She explained that her confidence in entering these meetings probably stemmed from regular case meetings she attended for a sibling with a language disorder. Her recent status as a lone, working parent added to her feeling of responsibility that she had to ensure her children’s welfare through these meetings.

While 8 of the Phase 1 teachers cited parents asking questions, several teachers described uncomfortable situations where they perceived that they were questioned extensively. HT1 had been uncomfortable with HP1A questioning her on a discipline matter and this had reduced her satisfaction rating in comparison to the other meeting that she logged. HP1A on the other hand was fully satisfied and perceived that questioning had been needed to clarify some of the teacher's input. HT3 found previous close questioning on decisions to National Test pupils to have been "vociferous" and GT1 was dissatisfied that previously two parents had "absolutely questioned everything". There appears to be a fine line between a level of questioning that teachers encourage and a degree of questioning by parents that teachers find aggressive. How do parents know how to achieve this fine balance?

*The parent expresses a viewpoint*

Parents expected a role in expressing their viewpoint on their child: GP1A felt that he should identify if his child had any "weaknesses" and he would work with the teacher to address these; similarly, BP1A would give her opinion on her child and GP3A would use the meeting to "air any problems". BP1A felt her opinion should extend to her viewpoint on the teacher's practice. HP2B described prior, negative experiences where the ethos of the meeting had discouraged her from expressing her views:

"I think, when you go in to a parents' day, the teacher's putting you at ease straight away, then the parents' day runs smoothly. If you've got any problems or whatever, you'll voice them but if you go in and there's that – something just doesn't quite- quite feel right, then you won't. You'll tend to come out and I won't say what I wanted to say, especially if it comes to they've been having problems." (HP2B)

She cited a prior experience where she perceived that she did not get the opportunity to express her views and concluded that "I may as well not have been there because it didn't really make me feel any further forward with anything that had happened in

the room.” (HP2A) She had felt that the sociable quality of the teacher at this meeting had helped the communication between parent and teacher.

Within the four teachers that discussed parents expressing a view, two teachers related negative prior experiences. BT1 was frustrated when parents did not respond when asked to express their view leaving her to “just rabbit-on like a budgie”. She qualified the impact that a parent’s view can have at a June meeting when lack of time limited any responsive action. HT2 felt that parents at Hill school generally felt they could express their views but she was unhappy with a prior experience when she perceived that a parent’s view on how she assessed written work was ‘telling her how to do her job’ and she responded to the parent by referring to her years of practice, her seniority and local education authority policy. Again, the parent is perceived as crossing the line of acceptable input.

#### *Parent supports child or stands-up for child*

Table 5.3 shows that at each site, parents expressed the view that their role was to support their child. This referred to action that went beyond the meeting in that they would respond to the content of the meeting to support the child’s behaviour or learning at home. A typical response came from HP2B:

“I think my role as well is, you know, is, if they’re maybe lacking, they’re not doing so well at their reading or they’re not doing so great in their maths, then I can try to change that in the house.” (HP2B)

Teachers at each site agreed although HT2 doubted whether Parent HP2B would follow-through and provide the necessary support at home as “they nod in agreement when you’re talking to them at a parents’ night, but as soon as they go out the door... yes, they’ve heard before everything you’ve said”. (HT2).

Several parents linked their supportive role to how timely the information was from the school:

“But, as I said to one of the other teachers, that telling me at parents’ night, six months down the line, doesn’t help me because it’s over and past and there’s lots of other things went. So, to me, they’re telling me useless information because I can’t do anything about it at that particular time.”  
(HP3B)

The response of BP1A was more vociferous than only providing support for the child’s learning at home: this parent believed that “you’re just there to stick up for your child.” She envisaged herself as an advocate for her child. Parent BP1B believed that she had to attend the meetings to make sure that they got the support they needed as she was accountable as a parent for their education. HT2 also described a role where the parent can act in intercession for the absent child by mediating concerns from the pupil to the teacher. While these participants overtly identified this role, other roles may support advocacy behaviour.

#### *A vague idea*

The pupils were not asked directly about parental roles but their discussions revealed a general vagueness; whereas 17 out of 18 pupils were clear that teachers transmit information, they had a general idea that parents “discuss” them with class teacher. Only one junior stage pupil at Gateway suggested that parents ask questions.

#### *Parents in conflicting roles*

Three of the Phase 1 parents occupied potentially conflicting roles:

HP2A- SEN auxiliary in her own child’s class

GP2A- teacher in another primary school in the local authority

GP3A- teacher in another primary school in the local authority

Teacher HT2 believed that Parent HP2A assimilated information on her child during her daily duties. However, the interview indicated that the father took a leading role in parents’ meetings and had completed the actual diary.

GP2A brought her professional knowledge to bear in raising questions about her son’s progress in writing; her experience has led her to question the teacher’s

judgement and the school's testing procedures. She is aware of her dual role and chose not to pursue her disagreement:

“But I didn't – I didn't say anything about it. I just kept quiet because that's the teacher in me, like, ‘Just come here as a mum and not – not a teacher.’”

(GP2A)

This parent usually resolves any potential role conflict by letting the father take the lead at parents' meetings; however, this was the first time she had to attend on her own. GP3A also raised difficulties in fulfilling dual roles. Her problem was not as marked although her use of 'we' in the interview suggests that both parents were present. Both parents moved between the role of parent and teacher during the interview as they drew comparisons between the practice at Gateway and their own schools.

These parents bring their dual roles to bear in the interview and parents' meeting as they

- Use professional knowledge and judgement
- Evaluate the process using professional knowledge
- Move between roles during the interview

However, the role of parent is seen as paramount and they may use the presence of the other parent to manage the potential role conflict.

### **Seeking partnership**

A role of mutual support that was seen as important by both the teacher and parent emerged from the interview data. Table 5.4 indicates the spread of participants who raised this issue.

Table 5.4: Participants by site for parent-teacher partnership

site	respondents
Burgh teachers	BT1
Burgh parents	BP1B
Gateway teachers	GT1
Gateway parents	GP1A
Hill teachers	0
Hill parents	HP2B, HP3A, HP3B

More parents sought partnership with respondents at each site. Only two teachers responded and these were Infant teachers at different sites. It cannot be assumed that other respondents did not work together with complementary roles but these were the only respondents who overtly stated this joint role.

### **Phase 2 comparisons on teacher and parent roles**

In Phase 1, parents and teachers moved between discussing the actual roles and their perception of what these roles should be. In Phase 2 question 1.4, parents were asked to tick specified roles during the parents' meeting. The frequencies of responses across the three sites produced nominal data; therefore, it did not lend itself towards an analysis of variance. Differences between the sites are reported using chi-squared to indicate the pattern of responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Gorard, 2001).

#### *Parents' roles*

Table 5.5 presents the percentage frequencies with which parents indicated they adopted specific roles during parents' meetings.

Table 5.5: Phase 2 parent roles during parents' meetings meeting in rank order

parent role	Valid % of responses
Listen to class teacher	99
Ask questions	94
Express views	87
Look at child's work	80
Support child	79
Provide information on child	51
Support school	36
other	2

The most frequently cited role that parents recalled taking during the meeting was listening to the teacher but asking questions was also indicated by a similar proportion of parents. This substantiates the Phase 1 data where parents said they sought a proactive role. Here, also, supporting the child has a more significant place than supporting the school.

Viewing the child's work was not as prominent at Burgh where individual work is not consistently made available. Gateway and Hill had a 100% response for this behaviour. There was a statistically significant difference among the frequencies at the three schools ( $\chi^2(2) = 41.96, p < 0.001$ ).

Almost all the parents (91 out of 92) identified that they listened to the teacher's input with no significant site difference. However, no site had a 100% response for parents asking questions or expressing views at the meeting. Tables 5.6 and 5.7 illustrate the converse of sites where parents did not refer to these roles.

Table 5.6: Parents not asking questions by site

site	% of total	% of site total
Burgh	3	9
Gateway	2	6
Hill	1	4

Table 5.7: Parents not expressing a view by site

site	% of total	% of site total
Burgh	22	8
Gateway	6	2
Hill	11	3

In Tables 5.6, 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9, the % of total displays the percentage of parents choosing this response from the total amount of respondents to the questionnaire; while % of site total displays the percentage of respondents out of the total number of parents at a site that chose that response. Parents could choose more than one response to this section.

In Table 5.6, the percentage of parents that did ask questions was slightly higher at Burgh but this was not a statistically significant response. However, in Table 5.7, the pattern of frequencies of parents who did express their views was highest at Gateway and lowest at Burgh. The difference in frequencies at the three sites was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 3.71, p = 0.16$ ).

The pattern of frequencies of parents assuming the role of supporting their child is shown in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8: Parents supporting child by site

site	% of total	% of site total
Burgh	23	66
Gateway	33	91
Hill	24	82

Overall, the proportion of parents reporting supporting their child was highest in Gateway and lowest in Burgh. The difference in frequencies among the 3 schools is significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 6.44, p = 0.04$ ).

Table 5.9 shows the frequencies of parents supporting the school.

Table 5.9: Parents supporting school by site

site	% of total	% of site
Burgh	6	19
Gateway	18	52
Hill	11	37

There was a lower incidence of parents supporting the school at Burgh, whereas Gateway rated highest. The difference in frequencies among the three sites was significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 7.60, p = 0.02$ ). Parents were more likely to provide additional information on their child at Gateway but the difference among the three sites was not significant.

Two Burgh parents included other roles of,-

- Parent 1 - Discussed an educational psychologist's report that he had commissioned
- Parent 2 - Asked to speak to other teachers involved with the child

Across the sites, a range of parental roles was cited more frequently at Gateway and Hill; while Burgh had a lower range of parent behaviours reported. Table 5.10 illustrates the overall pattern.

Table 5.10: Pattern of parent roles across sites

parent role	highest frequency site	lowest frequency site
Listen to class teacher	Gateway Hill	Burgh
Ask questions	Hill	Burgh
Express views	Gateway	Burgh *
Look at child's work	Gateway Hill	Burgh *
Support child	Gateway	Burgh *
Provide information on child	Gateway	Burgh
Support school	Gateway	Burgh *
other	Burgh only	-

(\* indicates statistically significant difference among 3 sites)

### *Teacher's roles*

In Phase 2 question 1.5, parents reported their perception of teacher roles during the meeting. Table 5.11 shows the rank order of their responses.

Table 5.11: Teacher roles at parents' meeting in rank order

teacher role	valid % of responses
Provide information on child's progress	97
Answer specific questions	89
Listen to parent's views	86
Refer to notes	74
Give advice on supporting child	68
Suggest ways to work with parent	58
Other	2

The main answers linked to the traditional view that the parent listens to the teacher; however, a considerable proportion of parents felt that the teacher answered their questions and listened to their views. Almost three quarters of parents indicated that the teachers used notes in the meeting to prepare their input.

Cross tabulating the site data identified three areas of significant difference. Table 5.12 outlines the site responses in parents' perceptions that the teacher listened to them.

Table 5.12: Teacher listens to parent's views by site

site	% of total	% of site
Burgh	24	71
Gateway	34	97
Hill	27	89

In Tables 5.12, 5.13 and 5.14, the % of total displays the percentage of parents choosing this response from the total amount of respondents to the questionnaire; while % of site total displays the percentage of respondents out of the total number of parents at a site that chose that response. Parents could choose more than one response to this section.

The pattern of frequency of parents who stated that the teacher listened to their views shows that Gateway had the highest response while Burgh had the lowest rating. The difference in frequencies among the three sites is significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 8.90, p=0.012$ ).

A similar pattern was observable in Table 5.13 where Gateway showed the highest frequency of parents who believed that the teacher answered their specific questions while Burgh had the lowest frequency. The difference in the frequencies among the three sites is significant ( $\chi^2(2)= 10.34, p=0.01$ )

Table 5.13: Teacher answers specific questions by site.

site	% of total	% of site
Burgh	26	74
Gateway	34	97
Hill	29	96

In providing advice on supporting the child, Table 5.14 shows that Hill had the highest frequency while, again, Burgh was the lowest. The difference in the frequencies among the three sites is significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 8.42, p= 0.02$ )

Table 5.14: Teacher provides advice on supporting child by site

site	% of total	% of site
Burgh	17	48
Gateway	27	75
Hill	24	82

Two Gateway parents chose to insert other roles although these tended to refer to other aspects of the meetings:

- Teacher did not rush parent
- First meeting too soon in session

A lower range of teacher roles was cited by parents for Burgh staff. These are summarised in Table 5.15.

Table 5.15: Range of perceived teacher roles

teacher role	highest frequency site	lowest frequency site
Provide information on child's progress	Gateway	Burgh
Answer specific questions	Gateway Hill	Burgh *
Listen to parent's views	Gateway	Burgh *
Refer to notes	Gateway	Hill
Give advice on supporting child	Hill	Burgh *
Suggest ways to work with parent	Hill	Burgh
Other	Gateway only	

(\* indicates statistically significant difference among 3 sites)

Together, the responses to questions 1.4 and 1.5 suggest a less complex model of interaction at Burgh compared to Hill and Gateway.

### **Organisation of parents' meetings**

The differences in complexity of interaction may have been due to the range of parents' expectations; on the other hand, this may have been an outcome of the different models of organisation at each site. Table 5.16 outlines the key elements of the organisation observed by the researcher and described by the participants in Phase 1.

Schools did not present discrete models of organisation, rather, codes emerged within the category of organisation. Tables 5.17, 5.18 and 5.19 summarise how these aspects interplayed at each site and how the parents, teachers and pupils responded.

Table 5.16: Organisation of parents' meetings by site

	setting	access to pupil work	length of meeting	timing in session	other
Burgh	All teachers at desks in school hall- parents wait at seats in centre of hall.  Adult chairs available	Generally no access; some teachers bring language & maths jotters to hall to use during interview	5-10 minutes	November  May/June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Crèche run by older pupils &amp; children wait outside</li> <li>▪ Management present</li> <li>▪ Guidance signs in foyer- class labels in hall.</li> <li>▪ Parents sign-in</li> </ul>
Gateway	Teachers in classes- some have parents wait outside; others have parents in room.  Adult & child chairs available for parents.	Some in trays outside class; some have pupil trays in meeting room	10 minutes but varies	October  March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children waiting in corridors &amp; outside</li> <li>▪ Management available</li> <li>▪ No general signs to direct parents-3 teachers use class signs.</li> </ul>
Hill	Teachers in classes for individual meetings – parents wait at seats outside  Adult chairs available	Pupil work available in trays outside room	10 minutes but varies	November  April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Toys in hall for pupils</li> <li>▪ Management present</li> <li>▪ Running-order of meetings at each room</li> <li>▪ Class signs at each room</li> <li>▪ PTA sell tickets</li> <li>▪ Student teachers present</li> </ul>

Table 5.17: Organisation of parents' meetings at Burgh (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	setting	access to Cwork	time	timing	amount	P attend	confid	creche	trad	obs of sch	ST	mngt present
Burgh parents	3 BP1A ,BP1B (-)  BP2A (+) as relaxed & no C interruptions	3 (-) inconsistent BP1B links to P prepare	3 (+) flexible	3 (+) BP1B limited expectation of meeting 1	1 (-) BP2A wants more	1 (-) BP1B other parents	3 (-) BP1A, BP1B being overheard, hearing others  (+) BP2A	1 (+)	1	1  <i>BP2A has prior experience observing learning support</i>	0	0
Burgh teachers	3 (+) security  <i>BT2 (-) in previous school</i>	3 where (-) related to time available	3 (+) flexible (-) pressure & links to access C work	3 (+) able to use report BT1 late to reinforce C work	0	3 (+) generally (-) BT2, BT3 for parents <i>BP2B &amp; BP3A</i>	3 (+)	0	0	1 BT2 need chance to see C class work	1 <i>BT1 prior Year 3 student</i>	0
Burgh pupils recorded as group	1 (-) access to classrooms to see C work	1 (-) child links to setting	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Table 5.18: Organisation of parents' meetings at Gateway (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	setting	access to C work	time	timing	amount	P attend	confid	creche	trad	obs of sch	ST	mngt present
Gateway parents	0	5 (+)	6 (+) flexible  (-) late & pressure	6 (-) meeting 1 on T knowledge of C (+) meeting 2 on work reinforce	1 (-) GP1A links time & pressure	2 (-) GP1A & GP2A spouse unable to attend	6 consistency (+) informal, depends on setting (-) links overheard & pressure	0	1	0	0	0
Gateway teachers	3 (+) seating & security  GT3 (-) for other classrooms	3	3 (+) (-) on pressure, late & amount of pupils. GT2 links P input, content & T prepare. GT3 link C part(N)	3 (+) new timing due to reinforce work  <i>(-) old timing of PM 1</i>	0	1	3 (-) related to setting-> being overheard	0	0	0	0	3
Gateway Pupils Reported as group	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 Suggest crèche	0	0	0	0

Table 5.19: Organisation of parents' meetings at Hill (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	setting	access to C work	time	timing	amount	P attend	confid	creche	trad	obs of sch	ST	mngt present
Hill parents	0	3 (+)	6 (+) flexibility (-) length, late, amount of C, pressure	6 (+) as reinforce C work (-) no report to prepare	1 (-) need differentiate for pupils	0	6 (+) <i>HP3A (-) Secondary school experience</i>	0	1	0	1	0
Hill teachers	2 (+) seating <i>HT2(-) prior meeting</i>	3 (+) HT2(-) access to displays of work	3 (+) flexibility (-) late & team teaching HT1 (-) links to timeliness HT3 links to access to C work	3 (+) current timing as know C & reinforce work (-) <i>previously</i>	0	3 (+)	3 (+)	0	0	2 <i>previous model</i> HT3 ideal	0	0
Hill Pupils <i>Reported as group</i>	1	1	1 (-) link to amount	0	1 Suggest more due to (-) time-late	0	1 (+)	0	0	0	0	0

*NOTE 1: Codes for Tables 5.17-5.19: setting-the setting in which the meeting takes place; access to C work-the parent has access to the child's work; time-the duration of the meeting; timing-the time that the meeting occurred in the year; amount-the amount of meetings in a year; P attend- attendance by a parent; confid- the level of confidentiality in which the meeting was conducted; creche-the availability of a crèche; trad- interviewee refers to tradition on organisation; obs of sch-opportunities to observe the child's education out with the meeting; ST- student teacher was present at the meeting; mngt present-a member of the school management team is present at the meeting*

*NOTE 2: Italics = a previous meeting: (-) = this was cited as a negative experience*

### *Who attends?*

Bastiani (1986) found that teachers often assess the success of parents' meetings by the amount of parents who attend and complain that they often do not see the parents that they would particularly like to see. At Burgh, the issue of parents that do not attend was raised by teachers and a parent. When asked generally about how she felt parents' nights had gone, BT2 responded in terms of parental attendance:

“Very well with – in terms of the number of parents who came – I think on the last parents' night the response was 60 – 70% who came but, this one here, ehm, all my parents came with the exception of two so that was really good and that's out of 25 children. So, in terms of that, it was successful.”  
(BT2)

Parents at Burgh were asked to sign-in as they entered the building; this was for health and safety procedures but the school management also used this data to track parental attendance. Teacher BT2 expressed doubt that Parent KP2B would carry-out the role of supporting her child; her negative perception of the parent had been shaped by non-attendance at the previous parents' meeting. Due to non-participation by BP2B, comparative information is not available; however, a comparison can be made to a similar case at Hill. HT1 believed that HP1B had attended the summer parents' meeting after non-attendance at the first meeting as the research process had prompted him to do so. When the researcher visited the home, the parents provided information that indicated that this had been a chaotic household due to relocation of the family from elsewhere in the UK, temporary spousal separation and parental unemployment. Therefore, the reasons for non-attendance earlier in the year were more complex than the teacher had perceived. Hill was the only site that kept a record of parents' meetings with the head teacher sending a prompting letter to non-attending parents. (See appendix 18).

Both BP1B and BT3 tried to explain parental non-attendance. Teacher BT3 expressed disappointment that more parents do not attend and had experienced parents making appointments but not attending. She suggested this was because:

“Some of them say they forget. There’s something better on the television.”  
(BT3)

Parent BP1B had experienced a low turn-out of parents at a nursery parents’ meeting and found this difficult to understand as she personally took a high degree of interest in any source of information about her children. She suggested that some parents “have kids and they’re great when they’re babies but they can’t really be bothered the bigger they get.” (BP1B) These participants perceive that there is a general apathy amongst some parents towards attending parents’ meetings.

Where the school had experienced prior contact with both parents, comment was also made on which parent attended the meeting. Parents GP1A and GP2A were mothers who expressed disappointment that their spouse had been unable to attend as they usually attended as a couple; as discussed, GP2A dealt with role conflict through the father’s attendance. HT2 commented positively on both meetings as the fathers had attended, particularly, HP2B where the father had been estranged. However, Teacher BT3’s experience of a father of a divorced couple attending the meeting had led to a less satisfactory experience as the mother had been less open in providing information on the social context.

The meetings were primarily attended by parents and class teachers, although, at Gateway, all the teachers discussed the potential to ask for a member of the school management to be present where a teacher had concerns about the meeting. Teachers also used the school management as a point of referral where parents were unhappy that consensus was not being reached during the meeting. GT3 described the role of the head teacher during a meeting:

“(Head teacher’s name) was silent. I would do the presentation, you know. I would speak first and, if there are any points, she would come in or if she felt the parents were ... she would then come in and support. You know she’s there as help. She’s just there as an onlooker to make sure the situation is calm for me.” (BT3)

As no member of the management team was present at the logged meetings, there was no comparative information on how the parents perceived this arrangement.

During the researcher’s observation at Hill, student teachers were present to observe meetings. Parents had been contacted beforehand and they could opt-out of this arrangement. The researcher was able to talk to the Year 3 students during one such meeting when the parent had opted-out and they reported finding the experience helpful in preparing them for future meetings. BT1 was one of the teachers who had received no formal training for parents’ meetings and recalled her initial anxiety; one of her previous Year 3 students had attended a meeting and BT1 felt that this was a positive experience.

#### *Setting, confidentiality and access to pupils’ work*

The aspects of the setting, its confidentiality and access to children’s work varied across the three sites. Burgh had a setting of the school hall which reduced confidentiality and consistency in access to pupils’ work. In contrast, Hill had a class room setting with a high degree of confidentiality and all work accessible outside the rooms. However, Gateway represented a combination of these whereby all teachers used their class rooms but limited space to display pupil work or offer parental seating meant that some parents were present in rooms while other meetings were conducted which reduced the prospect of confidentiality but ensured all parents had access to their children’s work.

In Phase 1, all Burgh teachers were positive about the common setting of the school hall as they sensed that this contributed to their security. On the other hand, Parents BP1A and BP1B disliked the setting as it reduced the confidentiality of the meeting.

In the individual meeting setting at Hill, the parents did not discuss the setting while the teachers commented on rearranging seating to make it conducive to an adult conversation. One teacher had previously experienced an angry parent who had made her worried but she was generally happy with the level of security she felt in her classroom. The Gateway teachers demonstrated awareness that the lay-out of the school varied the confidentiality of the meetings. GT1 had a prior experience where a parent blocked her exit from the room; as a result, she now moved her seating arrangement in the room to give her easier access for security reasons. (This was the teacher who had also viewed a video on dealing with aggressive parents). Teachers favoured changing the setting where they perceived it increased their security: placing this in perspective, some of the teachers in the study recalled more tense discussions with parents but none stated that they had been physically attacked. The changes to setting increased staff satisfaction with the setting in Burgh but a more open setting in some Gateway classrooms led to professional concerns over confidentiality.

Parents and teachers at Hill were satisfied with the level of confidentiality at their meetings. Two Phase 1 Burgh parents criticised the lack of confidentiality but the school staff felt that there was appropriate confidentiality for meetings in the hall setting. While Burgh staff and teachers mismatched in their views of the confidentiality resulting from the setting, Gateway parents and teachers expressed the view that the inconsistent confidentiality resulting from various settings was not suitable.

Participants explained dissatisfaction with a lack of confidentiality by expressing their concern that they would be overheard. Parent GP2A was satisfied at this meeting but she rationalised parents responding differently:

“ I suppose, if I was sitting there and someone else’s parents were listening and you were getting told that your child was – not doing too good or whatever, then I would feel annoyed that someone else was perhaps listening in you know. But – but, it’s like everything else, if everything in the garden’s rosy, then you don’t mind but, if there’s any problems then – you do. (Laughs)” (GP2A)

Where parents were in open settings in the study and they did not object to the lack of confidentiality, the generally positive content recorded in the diary and interview agrees with GP2A’s statement. BP2A and GP1B felt that the open settings maintained a less formalised atmosphere to meetings; although GP1B would request a confidential setting if sensitive issues were being discussed.

It was reasonably predictable that, under certain circumstances, parents would not like their meeting to be overheard. Some parents, though, felt discomfort in overhearing the meetings of other parents. GP1A is an example of a parent who usually hears positive feedback about her own child but she wanted more privacy:

“I’m lucky enough that there’s never been anything to dis- discuss that’s been confidential or what have you but I have still been sitting and I’ve heard teachers talking to other parents and, to be quite honest with you, I’ve sat there and I’ve thought, ‘I don’t want to listen to this. It’s nothing to do with me.’ You can’t help but hear”. (BP1A)

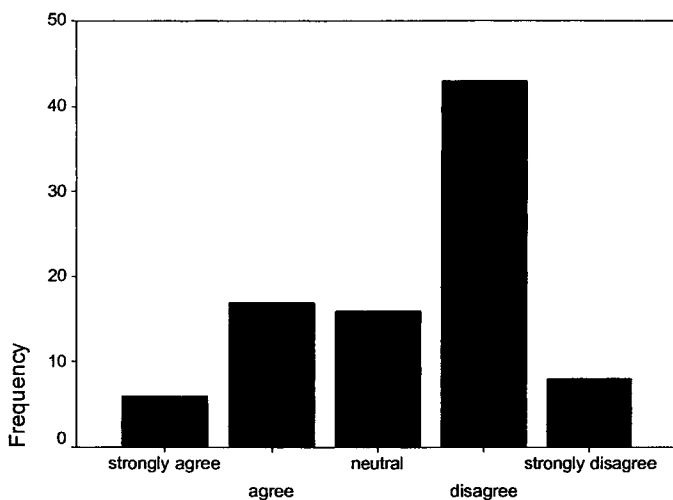
The Burgh teachers believed the meetings were private; however, the researcher observed from the parental waiting area that meetings could be overheard. Parent GP1A linked overhearing others to access to her child’s work; she did not want to overhear others so she spent less time in the class room looking at work if another meeting was in progress.

Parent GP1B had identified that the lack of confidentiality was a professional strategy to prepare other parents and keep meetings moving to time. Teacher GT1

agreed that an open setting reminded parents of the limitations of time. GP1A, though, felt pressurised by this arrangement, impacting on her willingness to respond to the teacher. BP1B agreed that an open setting put undue pressure on parents who were hearing sensitive content as they may feel embarrassed to respond in this setting.

In Phase 2, parents were asked to rank the statement Q1.7.11 ‘I felt there could be a bit more privacy’ (source GP1A). Figure 5.1 shows the responses were as follows:

Figure 5.1: Frequency of parents’ responses indicating agreement with “I felt there could be a bit more privacy”.(Q1.7.11)



opinion: I felt there could be a bit more privacy

Most parents disagreed with the need for more privacy however Table 5.20 indicates that there was a difference of opinion among the three sites.

Table 5.20: Parents' views by site on 'I felt there could be a bit more privacy.'

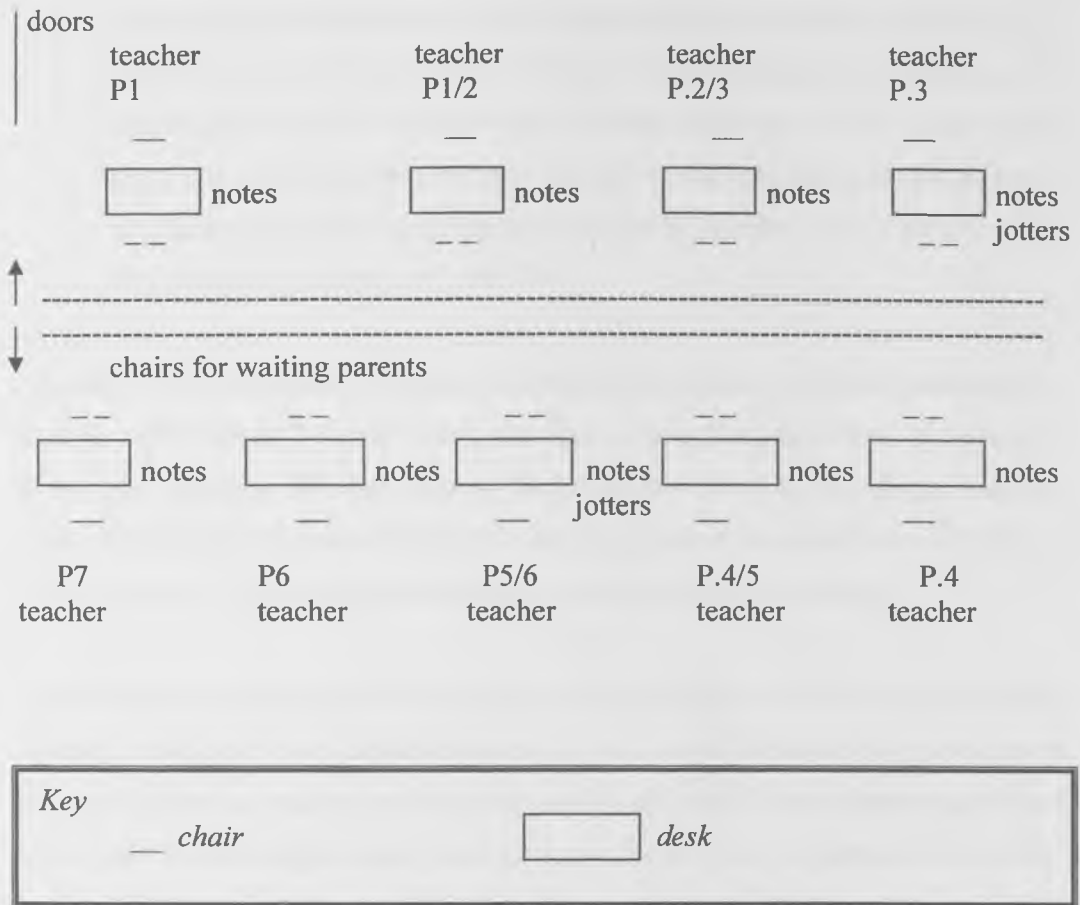
rating	value	Burgh	Gateway	Hill	total
Strongly agree	% opinion	50	50	0	100
	% site	9	9	0	7
Agree	% opinion	18	82	0	100
	% site	9	44	0	19
Neutral	% opinion	69	19	12	100
	% site	34	9	8	18
Disagree	% opinion	30	21	49	100
	% site	41	28	81	48
Strongly disagree	% opinion	25	38	38	100
	% site	6	9	12	9

On Tables 5.20, 5.21 and 5.22, the % of opinion displays the percentage of people choosing this response from the total amount of participants who chose that value; while % of site displays the percentage of participants at a particular site that chose that response.

This ordinal data lent itself towards analysis of variance by ranks and the Kruskal Wallis test was applied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Gorard, 2001). The pattern of frequency of parents wanting more privacy was higher in the open settings at Burgh and Gateway and lower in the consistently private setting at Hill. The difference in frequencies among the sites is significant ( $\chi^2 (2) = 17.5, p < 0.001$ ). Burgh was not as high as Gateway in the need for confidentiality; possibly, as teachers used different arrangements at Gateway, parents were aware of more private setting in which a meeting could take place, whereas the Burgh parents had all experienced meetings en masse in the hall for several years and may have shaped their expectations accordingly.

The head teacher at Burgh had stated that all pupils displayed their work; observation and the diary-interview revealed this was inaccurate with access to work involving a few teachers bringing some jotters to the meeting. Diagram 5.1 shows the lay-out in the hall and the teachers who referred to notes and brought pupil work.

Diagram 5.1: Lay-out at Burgh from observation notes



All the Phase 1 Burgh parents were unhappy at a lack of consistency in access to their children’s work: BP2A viewed jotters for her infant twins but was unable to view work by her Primary 6 child on the same evening. BP1B had incidental access to work over the year when she had come into the school over another issue and she blamed the increased security for limiting parents’ access. In a meeting over pupils’ work, this parent felt less prepared to engage with the teacher’s input without access to a range of the child’s school work:

“I’ve never really seen much of their work either than it’s been up on the board (*parent refers to Good Work Board at school entrance*) or if I’ve popped in- oh, well they bring stuff home but it might not be a bad idea to see, ‘Right, okay, how bad is his handwriting. Can I see it?’ I’ve never really had a chance. I have because he’s brought worksheets home and things but, you know, maybe he’s gone and picked-out the best bits, but, if he left it out, that would be good to see.” (BP1B)

Teacher BT1 is aware that the lack of access to work is not a preferred practice but Teachers BT2 and BT3 justify a lack of access to a range of pupil work by linking it to the time available; BT2 had reduced the jotters she took to the meeting to maths, handwriting and story jotters while BT3 only taking work of a child who is “really not progressing” (BT3) suggested a deficit model of parents’ meetings.

Elsewhere, discussion on accessing pupil work was positive. HT2 felt that the private meeting in the class room limited parents’ access to view displays in the room just as BT2 had wanted parents to be able to see pupils’ art work. Where displays are linked closely with developing a school’s ethos, it would seem to be important that a wider audience has access to this pupil work.

In Phase 2, parents were not asked whether they had access to pupil work but they were asked to record in Q1.4 their role at the meeting; this list included ‘looked at my child’s work’. In Chapter 4, it was discussed that 80% parents recorded this behaviour but there was a statistically significant difference among the three sites with every Gateway and Burgh parents recording this behaviour. Several Burgh parents added a note to Q1.4 to the effect that they did not have access to their child’s work.

The pupil responses on organisation had a limited range. This was partly due to the format and content of the interview schedule compared to the parent and teacher schedules that made direct reference to organisation but it may also reflect the pupils’

limited direct experience of parents' meetings. The older Burgh pupils were aware of the limits of the setting of the school hall; while the parents linked their dissatisfaction with confidentiality, the pupils suggested that the parents have access to the classrooms to allow them to view work. At each site, pupils raised the importance of parents having access to their work and, when asked what role they might have if they attended the meetings, the pupils suggested a new role code in showing their work to their parents.

*Time, timing and the amount of meetings*

The Phase 1 participants were asked to record in their diaries the length of their meeting. Some discussion at the interview stage overtly revealed where parents had entered the official length of the meeting while they admitted that the actual meeting time differed; the general uniformity of recordings of time suggests that other participants may have followed the same pattern. Observation at parents' meetings allowed the researcher to time a random sample of meetings for the participant teachers. The average length of a meeting ranged from 10 minutes 30 seconds at Hill to 7 minutes 40 seconds at Burgh; the setting and access to work contributing to the most common post-meeting parental behaviour at Burgh being to leave the building while some parents at Gateway and Hill chose to return to looking at their child's work.

Where Phase 1 participants cited time (the length of the meeting) positively, there appeared to be a perception of an unwritten contract whereby parents did not expect to always receive the official time in the belief that they would receive increased time when it was needed. There was a perception that equality lay, not in all parents having a meeting of the same length, but in all parents having an unwritten contract with the school that time would be allotted on need.

BT1 described the teacher's perspective on the flexibility contract:

“10(*refers to minutes*) - for most children – and if there’s something you want a bit longer, you can, sort of, pockle your .... Depends how big your class is as well.” (BT1)

In spite of school guidelines on timings, teachers retain discretion over the actual allocation of time. This allocation was based on a deficit model and, elsewhere, Parent GP2B was aware of this approach:

“I feel happy when it’s a short one and you know everything’s fine. It’s the long ones you have to worry about.” (GP2B)

This parent had recorded her meeting as 10 minutes in the diary but she described it in the interview as “about 4 minutes” and “very, very short”; however, she gave the meeting a satisfaction rating of 5.

Many Phase 1 parent participants were critical of short meetings that ran late. GP2B above was 50 minutes late for her meeting but she was less critical as she felt her house parent role allowed her to be flexible. Hill pupils were critical of meetings that ran late as, while they may not be in the meeting they still had to wait for their parent. Both parents and teachers felt under pressure from the limited time available and this had a range of outcomes:

- Limiting parental access to work (BT2,BT3,HT3)
- Difficulties for parents in assimilating information where there were several children in the family (HP1A,HP3A)
- Parents found it difficult to participate and teachers cannot encourage parents to participate (GP1A,GT2)
- The content of the meeting has a narrow focus (GT2)
- The teacher relied heavily on prepared notes (GT2)
- Pupil participation is not encouraged as it is viewed as time-consuming(GT3)
- The meeting is not held in a confidential setting to encourage increased parental turn-over (GT1,GP1B)

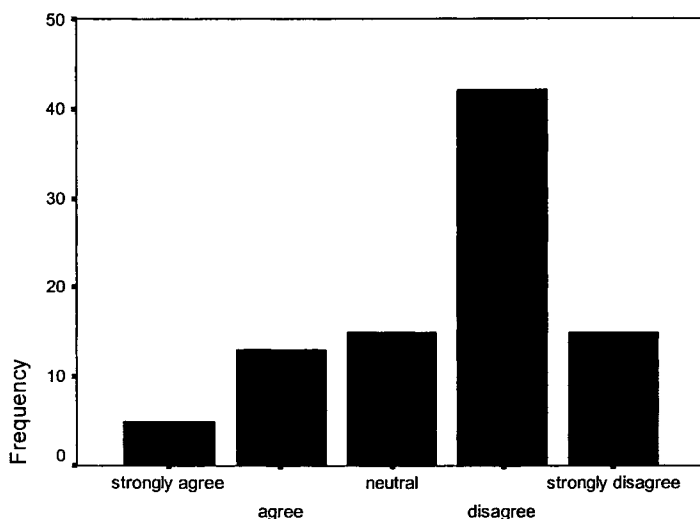
- The timeliness of information communicated over the session impacts on the time needed at the meeting ( HT1)

Special issues arose including finding the right balance of time to report where there are twins in a class, organising time for input where children are taught in a team teaching situation and the potential to differentiate the time according to the age of the child.

The issue of time led some parents to request additional parents’ meetings in the session to alleviate the pressure; however, no teachers raised undertaking additional parents’ meeting duties. One pupil at Hill suggested an increase in the amount of meetings as a solution to meetings running late.

In Phase 2, parents were asked to rate Q1.7.8 ‘It was a bit of a rush’ (source HP1B). Figure 5.2 shows the range of responses.

Figure 5.2: Frequency of parents’ responses indicating agreement with “It was a bit of a rush” (Q1.7.8)



opinion:it was a bit of a rush

Most parents disagreed that they felt rushed, followed by a neutral rating. Parents perceived they had the time they needed; this does not nullify the hypothesis of an

unwritten contract as the rating is based on parental perception of need meeting actual provision. Table 5.21 indicates the response at each site.

Table 5.21: Parents' views by site on 'It was a bit of a rush.'

rating	value	Burgh	Gateway	Hill	total
Strongly agree	% opinion	40	40	20	100
	% site	6	6	4	6
Agree	% opinion	31	46	23	100
	% site	12	19	12	14
Neutral	% opinion	20	40	40	100
	% site	9	19	23	17
Disagree	% opinion	48	26	26	100
	% site	62	34	42	47
Strongly disagree	% opinion	20	47	33	100
	% site	9	22	19	17

An analysis of variance using the Kruskal Wallis test on this ordinal data revealed no significant site pattern in parental perception of time allocation. In Q1.9 'other comments' section, the most frequently cited category was organisation with the most common response being negative feedback from parents on the aspect of time; two parents requested additional meetings to ease the pressure created by time.

Phase 1 data indicated a potential pattern in participant views on whether the meetings occurred at the right time in the school year. Burgh parents were generally positive about the November and May/June meetings although BP1B had limited expectations of the first meeting in Primary 1 as she felt its purpose was to let her know if her child had settled-in. Teachers BT2 and BT3 liked the timings of the meetings as the first meeting gave them time to get to know a new class and the second meeting followed the annual school report which acted as a means of preparation for the teacher. Teacher BT1 was concerned that the first meeting could be earlier as "you can do a lot of damage in those months" (BT1). Unlike her colleagues, she felt that having the meeting after issuing the report gave the meeting limited scope:

“They’re getting the report and really a lot of them come because they feel they have to come, there’s really no reason for them to come. I mean (*names parents BP1A and BP1B*) they were in a different position this year because there were concerns for both of them and there were bits there they could enjoy but there were also concerns. But some of them, like (*names 2 other sets of parents*), I mean, they just sat and smiled at me. I mean, their weans are brill. They really didn’t need to come. They could just’ve sat on the report.” (BT1)

To some extent, BT1 is operating a deficit model whereby parents’ meetings are for parents with children who have problems: this belief was in evidence elsewhere in Phase 1. She criticises the late second meeting as there is limited scope to provide reinforcement to these children.

Hill had made a recent change to the timing of the second meeting. Teachers and parents were generally happier with the earlier second meeting in April as it provided time for the participants to address issues raised in the meeting. HP2B and HP3B missed having the report beforehand as they used it as a means of preparation for the meeting. Although the first meeting was at the same time as Burgh, no one commented that this was too late.

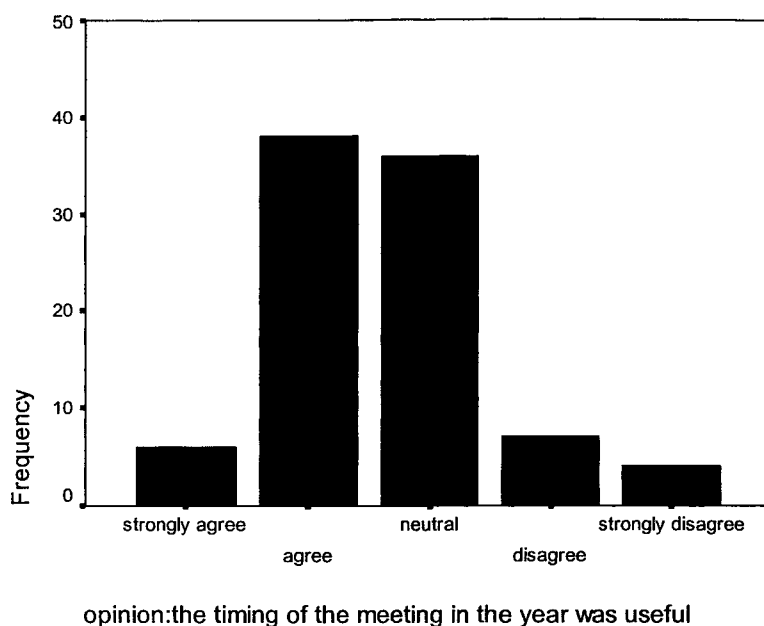
Gateway has also changed its meeting dates which raised the teachers’ satisfaction but the parents did not concur with this view. The main concern was the first meeting at the beginning of October (followed by a second meeting in March). Several parents doubted the teachers’ knowledge of the children as individuals at this stage; this knowledge emerged as an important interpersonal quality of the teacher in parents’ perception of satisfaction after a meeting. The early timing of meeting 1 led GP2B to disregard the teacher’s perspective:

“I don’t like the idea when you sit down and there’s somebody who’s never maybe met your child before and they’ve only had them- is it some – I think that one’s maybe only 10 weeks or something into the term and I feel as if they really don’t know your child at that point to be sitting there telling you things. ‘Cause sometimes I’ve thought to myself, ‘No, I don’t think that’s true what she’s saying’, you know. I’ll tell them that.” (GP2B)

The March meeting was welcomed by participants as providing time to reinforce pupils’ work.

In Phase 1, participants wanted a first meeting after a period when it was perceived that the teacher would have developed sufficient knowledge of the child as an individual. A second meeting that left time to take action on the content of the meeting was welcomed at Gateway and Hill with only one teacher at Burgh questioning the validity of a late meeting. In Phase 2, parents were asked to rate Q1.7.12 ‘ The timing of the meeting in the year was useful’ (source- composite of Phase 1 views). Figure 5.3 shows the range of responses.

Figure 5.3: Frequency of parents' responses indicating agreement with "The timing of the meeting in the year was useful" (Q1.7.12).



The most frequent response was for parents to agree with this statement (42%) but this was strongly followed by a neutral response (40%). This ordinal data was submitted to an analysis of variance by ranks using the Kruskal Wallis test (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Gorard, 2001). Most parents were satisfied in Burgh where traditional timings were used while Hill had recently altered its timing of meeting 2 but the parents had a positive response and no parents rated 'strongly disagree'. 15 parents agreed at Burgh but 8 were neutral and 9 fell into the combined two lower ratings with no parents choosing 'strongly agree'. Despite this outcome, the significance was low between the three sites but not low enough to be statistically significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 4.36, p=0.11$ ). The site responses to this question are presented in Table 5.22.

Table 5.22: Parents' views by site on 'The timing of the meeting in the year was useful.'

rating	value	Burgh	Gateway	Hill	total
Strongly agree	% opinion	83	0	17	100
	% site	16	0	4	7
Agree	% opinion	34	40	26	100
	% site	41	47	37	42
Neutral	% opinion	36	22	42	100
	% site	41	25	56	40
Disagree	% opinion	0	86	14	100
	% site	0	19	4	8
Strongly disagree	% opinion	25	75	0	100
	% site	3	9	0	4

In Q1.9 on 'other comments', four parents commented negatively on the timing of the meeting; three of these parents were from Gateway.

#### *Other aspects of organisation*

Other aspects of organisation arose less prominently during Phase 1. Several parents referred to tradition impacting on their expectations for the organisation of the meeting; this had a link to a parents' role during the meeting. All of these parents described doing "what my mother done" (GP1A). Therefore, they were maintaining a cycle of a conservative approach to these meetings. BP2A and several teachers (BT2, HT2 and HT3) discussed breaking out from the traditional model to give parents opportunities to observe children's work and work in progress outwith parents' meetings. The Hill teachers referred back to a prior site model that had included an open day prior to the meeting. Parent BP2A had previously had the opportunity to observe a learning support teacher working with her child and she had found this beneficial in guiding her on how to support her child at home. The head teacher at Burgh had described a previous time that the school had organised an open afternoon but the response had been too low; BP2A explained that her shift work had made it difficult to attend this event.

During observation at Burgh, the researcher noted a crèche for children while their parents were in the school hall. The crèche had previously been supervised by a member of the school's support staff but it was run by older pupils on this occasion. Only one teacher referred to the crèche and no parents discussed making use of it; however, three out of six of the pupils included it in their description of what happened at their meeting. Hill did not have a crèche but toys were sometimes made available in the waiting area for pupils. The Gateway group suggested this as a solution as they wait. A crèche appears to be an attractive solution if parents' meetings remained in their current format or if school adopted the partial attendance of pupils at meetings that some participants suggested; however, resourcing and health and safety issues would have to be fully considered.

In answering the research question 'What is the current structure and content of parents' meetings?', so far, aspects of structure have been addressed and the categories on participant roles address some aspects of the content. The chapter will conclude by tackling the actual content of the discussion.

### **The content of the meeting**

During the interviews, the Phase 1 parents were asked to comment on the clarity of the teacher's input: all the Burgh parents felt that the input had been clear; two parents at Hill (HP1A and HP3B) described having to ask the teacher questions to get her to clarify the content; at Gateway, only GP1B had asked for points to be clarified. It is reasonable to say that teachers gave input in a language that was generally accessible to most parents. Table 5.23 summarise the data on meeting content from the diaries and interviews. Appendix 19 provides more detailed tables of the content of specific meetings.

Table 5.23: Content of parents' meetings by site and participants groups (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited codes*)

	cognitive dev	social dev	P seeks advice	sch procedure	health issue	sec tran
Burgh teachers	3 all children (+)	3 BP1A/B,BP2A,BP3B(+) BP1B, BP2B,BP3A/B(-)	2 BP1B, BP3B	2 BP1A,BP2A twins in same class	0	1 P.7 teacher generally
Burgh parents	3 BP1A ,BP1B(-) BP1B,BP2A (+)	3 BP1A,BP2A(+) BP1B(-)	1 BP1B	2 twins issue	1	0
Gateway teachers	3 GP1A,GP2A/B, GP3A/B(+) GP1B(-) GT2 links to time(-)	3 GP1A, GP3A (+) GP1B,GP2B,GP3A(-)	0	1GP3B prior meeting- school captain duties	2	1 P.7 teacher generally
Gateway parents	6 All(+) GP1A(sibling),GP2A, GP3A, GP3B (-)	6 All (+) except GP3A. GP1B,GP3A(-)	0	3 (-) GP2A testing; GP2B sibling;GP3B links to cog dev (-)	2	2 both P.7 pupils
Hill teachers	3 HP1A/B, HP2A/B,HP3A/B (+) HP2A,B (-)	3 HP1A/B, HP2A, HP3A/B (+) HP2B (-)	0	1 HP1A(-) discipline	0	1 HP3B
Hill parents	5 HP1A,HP2A,HP2B, HP3A,HP3B (+) HP2A (-)	4 HP1A,HP2B,HP3B(+) HP1B (-)	2 HP1A,HP3A	1 HP1A(-) discipline	0	2 both P.7 pupils

*NOTE 1: Codes: cognitive dev-content related to child's cognitive development; social dev –content related to child's social development ; P seeks advice –parent seeks advice of the teacher related to the child ;sch procedure-content related to school procedures ; health issue – parent and teacher discuss the child's health; sec tran-content related to child's transition to secondary school .*

*NOTE 2: Italics = a previous meeting: (-) = this was cited as a negative experience ;(+) = this was cited as a positive experience*

Examining the nature of the content of the meetings in Table 5.23, there was almost a balance between content related to cognitive or academic development (14 interviews) compared to social development (13 interviews) described in the parental interviews. This indicates that information on the child, beyond a narrow interpretation of education, was valued. The teachers' interview schedules also indicated a balance. At Burgh and Gateway, the pupils described the content only as their cognitive and social development while the Gateway pupils focussed purely on cognitive development. Over all, 18 pupils described cognitive content while 11 pupils discussed content related to their social development. Across the participants groups, social development frequently assumed the singular focus of whether the child was behaving at school.

The three P.7 teachers at each site included secondary school transition in their content as experience had taught them that this would be a parental expectation. On seeking advice, a direct correlation did not always exist between parents who said they sought advice and teachers recalling that they gave advice.

The focus of the content became gradually narrower over the groups with the pupils, again, demonstrating the most traditional perspective on parents' meetings. Table 5.23 and Appendix 17 displayed the positive and negative dimensions of the content. In the initial phases of analysing participants' satisfaction with meetings, it appeared that 'nothing succeeds like success', that is, if the content confirms that your child is progressing well then you would be highly satisfied. Further analysis of the data indicated that the contributory aspects to satisfaction are not as straightforward.

In Phase 2, parents were not asked to describe the content of the meeting. However, they were asked to rate a comment that related satisfaction to their child's progress: Q1.7.3 asked them to rate 'I felt they never had a good thing to say' (source GP1A). Most parents strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. Clearly parents had found the content of the meetings to be balanced in their content. Table 38 shows some overlaps between meetings that had positive and negative input in the same

content areas on the child; some teachers discussed organising their content to try to give a balance to their contribution.

## CHAPTER 6 – WHAT ASPECTS OF CURRENT MODELS OF PARENTS’ MEETINGS SATISFY THE NEEDS OF THE PARTICIPANTS?

### **Satisfaction after the event: introduction**

Across chapters 4 and 5, categories have been discussed that will have contributed to the participants’ overall satisfaction with the meetings. This chapter aims to discuss the rationale that parents and teachers gave after the meeting to whether there had been a satisfactory outcome. The purposes that the participants brought to the meeting and the structure and content of the actual meeting will have contributed to the overall perception of satisfaction but what did participants identify as the overt contributing factors? Although parents were asked how they prepared before the meeting, this issue will be discussed as aspects of satisfaction as there was potential interplay between what parents did to prepare and their satisfaction at feeling prepared after the meeting. Phase 1 and 2 found that key issues in parent and teacher satisfaction included the progress of the child, the participants reaching a consensus view of the child and the interpersonal qualities of the participants. The chapter will conclude by examining any reported action taken by parents and teachers following the meeting.

### **The parent prepares**

A preparatory role was identified for teachers; however, the act of preparation and the feeling of having been prepared appeared to rest with the category of satisfaction. In Phase 1, parents were asked to record in their diaries what they did before the meeting. Table 6.1 indicates their methods of preparation, differentiating between diary and interview data.

Table 6.1: Parental preparation for meeting (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	report	P obs of C	C work	diary	inf f/back	talk to C	identify ques/ points	P not prep	P prep (-)
Burgh diary	2 including returning slip	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Burgh Interview	2	3	0 raised (-)by 2 parents	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gateway diary	0	1	0	0	0	5	4	0	0
Gateway Interview	0 raised (-) by 1 parent	3 <i>GP2B for sibling</i>	2	1	0	1	0	0	1 <i>GP2B for sibling</i>
Hill diary	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	1 HP3B 'no worries'	0
Hill interview	1 HP3A uses prior report	2 HP2A as SEN in class	3	1	1	0	0	0	1 HP3B for 'bad press' comment

*NOTE 1: Codes: report- parent prepared by reading school report; P obs of C – parent uses his/her own observations of the child to prepare; C work- parent prepared by viewing child's work prior to meeting; diary- parent used research diary to prepare; inf f/back- parent was prepared by informal feedback for the teacher; talk to C- parent prepared by speaking to child; identify ques/points- parent prepares points to raise or questions to ask; P not prep- parent does not prepare; P prep(-) - parent did not feel prepared for the content of the meeting.*

*NOTE 2: Italics = a previous meeting; (-) = this was cited as a negative experience.*

The model at Burgh for Phase 1 followed the 5-14 Reporting approach whereby the parent received a report on the child and replied in a feedback slip. Elsewhere, parents were unable to use this preparation method for meeting 2 due to the timing of the meeting prior to the final report. Chapter 5 discussed that most parents and teachers at Gateway and Hill believed that this made the meeting more purposeful as participants had time to address points that had arisen. Two parents at Hill, were disappointed that they no longer had access to a written report before the meeting. Some of the schools provided an interim report before the first parents' meeting.

Parents at all the sites also reported using other preparatory strategies. They discussed bringing their own observations of their child to bear during the meeting. Here, they were less likely to plan this beforehand (see diary data) but they brought this body of knowledge to bear during the meeting. While some parents discussed the availability of pupils' work as an aspect of organisation and a few cited this as their purpose for attending the meeting, here, parents used the viewing of work prior to the meeting as a method of preparation. In Chapter 5, Parent BP1B discussed how the absence of her child's work put her at a disadvantage in being prepared to engage with feedback from the teacher.

Parent GP3A believed that the absence of a report necessitated discussions with her child about school to ensure her preparation for the meeting. When asked to record their interaction with their child before the meeting, a notable amount of parents wrote that they spoke to their child. The content of these discussions fell under three headings;

- Asking the child to predict the content of the meeting
- Informing the child that the parent would be attending the meeting
- Asking the child if he/she had points that should be raised at the meeting

Headings 1 and 2 were most frequently cited. Thus, involvement of the child in the parents' meeting before the event was principally to prepare the parent rather than the child. The teachers were asked to record their involvement of pupils before the meeting with only Teachers HT3 and GT2 recalling talking to children before the meeting. (HT3 interview content later contradicted this evidence). Eleven out of 15

parents in Phase 1 reported talking to their child before the meeting, indicating that this was a frequent parental behaviour. The pupils in Phase 1 were not directly connected to the parents and only some of the pupils were in Phase 1 teachers' classes; however, their responses on communication before the meeting provide an interesting comparison. None of the 18 pupil participants recalled someone talking to them before the meeting.

Nine parents recorded preparing through thinking about questions or points they wanted to raise although this was not discussed during the interviews. In the same way, two parents had found it beneficial that they were asked to record the stages of the meeting in their diary. One parent had said that she had not prepared as the informal feedback she received from the class teacher over the session and the prior parents' meeting had led her to expect no difficulties at this meeting. Although she rated her satisfaction with the meeting as 5, HP3B had felt unprepared for content that revealed her child had been previously labelled as problematic by staff.

There was less substantial data from the Phase 1 teachers on parents' preparation. This could have resulted from a limited perspective or from a lack of expectation that parents should come prepared to parents' meetings (five teachers mention a parental preparation strategy with the use of the school report being the most common). However, Chapter 5 demonstrated that teachers expect to enter the meeting equipped and were dissatisfied in situations where they felt less prepared. No staff identified providing informal feedback to parents over the session however several teachers did describe 'open door' approaches; for example, HT1 stressed the timeliness of information to parents by communicating informally to them throughout the session so that important issues are not communicated too late.

In Phase 2, parents were asked to record their preparation. A few parents listed more than one strategy; on the other hand, there was a 26% non-response rate. As many of these participants completed all the other questions in the survey and some respondents marked the response line with a dash, this potentially has more

significance for non-preparation rather than a missed response. Table 6.2 displays the responses in rank order.

Table 6.2: Parental preparation strategies in rank order

preparation strategy	valid %
Talk to child	27
Identify question/points	17
Do not prepare	16
Report	16
Look at child's work	4
Talk to spouse/partner	3
Arrange childcare	3
Other	3
Informal feedback	1
Observation of child	0
Research process	0

The frequencies of responses across the three sites produced nominal data; therefore, it did not lend itself towards an analysis of variance. Differences between the sites are reported using chi-squared to indicate the pattern of responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Gorard, 2001). Statistical analysis did not reveal any significant difference among the three sites. Burgh had a low score for 'Look at child's work' ( $\chi^2(2) = 5.60, p=0.06$ ) which was not statistically significant but does have educational significance as no Burgh parent cited this behaviour in Phase 2. Parents relied mainly on speaking to their child; while significant to the parent and child experience, it has less of the marking of bureaucratic power of the teacher preparing using notes, reports and assessment records. Altogether 16% of Phase 2 parents reported not preparing with a potential additional group within the non-responses; teachers were entering the meeting with the authority advantage in this area. Several teachers and parents in Phase 1 cited the importance of on-going feedback in the session but there is little evidence of this approach here from the parents' perspective.

A total of 17% of Phase 2 parents prepared questions and points beforehand and a further 3% discussed the meeting with a partner. A notable amount of these parents are proactive in their intentions by reading the report, forming questions and talking to their child. This does not appear to be matched by the teacher’s expectations of parental preparation. Therefore, it could be argued that teachers need to consider in their model of practice opportunities for parents to put these points across and assume a positive role.

**Participant ratings of satisfaction**

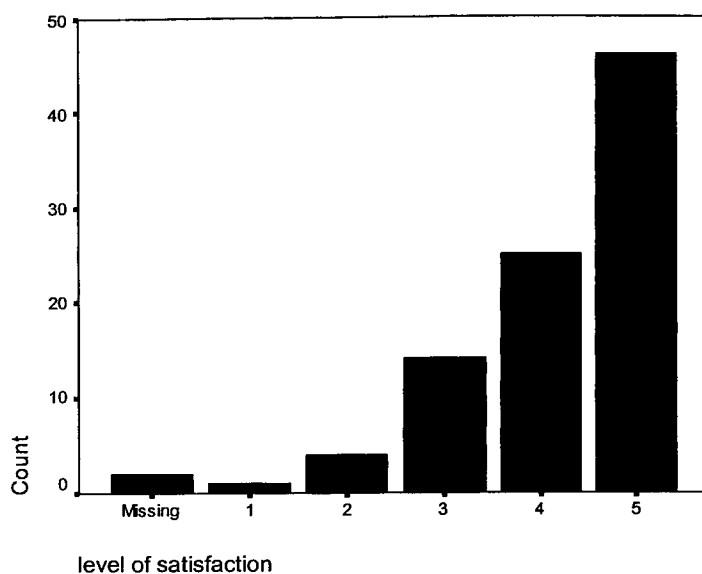
In Phase 1, parents and teacher were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the meeting on a 5 point scale from 1–dissatisfied to 5-satisfied. Table 6.3 presents the ratings at each site.

Table 6.3: Satisfaction ratings by site and participant groups (*numbers indicate number of participants who chose this level of satisfaction: teachers rated each meeting separately*)

	1 dissatisfied	2	3	4	5 satisfied
Burgh teachers	0	0	2	2	2
Burgh parents	0	0	0	0	3
Gateway teachers	0	0	0	1	5
Gateway parents	0	0	0	2	4
Hill teachers	0	0	0	2	4
Hill parents	0	0	0	3	3

The satisfaction ratings in Phase 1 are generally high at each site. This was matched by the outcome of Phase 2 satisfaction ratings. Figure 6.1 presents the responses.

Figure 6.1: Frequency of parents' satisfaction ratings with parents' meetings.



Most parents confirmed their overall satisfaction with parents' meetings, rating 4 or 5. With less than 10% of parents giving a low satisfaction rating of 1 or 2, this study appears to disagree with the level of dissatisfaction reported in secondary sector studies. Table 6.4 shows a comparison of ratings at each site.

Table 6.4: Phase 2 parental satisfaction ratings by site

		1 dissatisfied	2	3	4	5 satisfied
Burgh	% at site	0	6	12	28	53
	% of total	0	2	4	10	19
Gateway	% at site	3	6	15	21	54
	% of total	1	2	6	8	20
Hill	% at site	0	0	20	36	44
	% of total	0	0	6	10	12
	Total	1	4	16	28	51

In Table 6.4, the % of total displays the percentage of parents choosing this response from the total amount of respondents to the questionnaire; while % of site displays the percentage of respondents out of the total number of parents at a site that chose that response.

Hill had no parents citing the lower levels of satisfaction; however, more Burgh and Gateway parents chose the top rating of 5. Taking into consideration the evidence from Table 5.19, Hill appeared to use preferred elements of organisation in parents' meetings but the satisfaction is not rated as the highest, while Gateway had the highest scoring but also the greatest spread of scores with a mixed approach to organisation. The researcher chose not to subject this data to further statistical analysis as it would assume equal spacing between the ratings; the interview follow-up to parent and teacher ratings of contribution to meetings in Phase 1 had revealed that rating rationales differed. Instead, depth could be achieved by comparing teacher and parent ratings on the same meeting and by probing the interview data. While numerically the differences in satisfaction ratings do not appear marked, the participants were able to use these ratings to clearly differentiate through the interviews between complete satisfaction and meetings that raised particular issues. Table 6.5 displays comparative ratings while Table 6.6 presents the reasons for satisfaction given by participants at each site.

Table 6.5: Comparative parent and teacher ratings on satisfaction by site

(Differences are highlighted in **bold**)

site	teacher rating	parent rating	reason for differences
Burgh	<b>BT1 – 4</b>	<b>BP1A – 5</b>	No identified reason. Teacher has more (-) issues to report for BP1B but rates the meetings equally
	<b>BT1 – 4</b>	<b>BP1B – 5</b>	
	BT2 – 5	BP2A – 5	Teacher's difference in ratings due to perceived level of parental support
	BT2 – 3	BP2B - ?	
	BT3 – 3	BP3A - ?	Teacher's difference in 2 meeting ratings due to communication difficulties while divorced parents present for BP3A
	BT3 - 5	BP3B - ?	
Gateway	<b>GT1 – 5</b>	<b>GP1A – 4</b>	Parent dislikes open setting of meeting
	<b>GT1 – 4</b>	<b>GP1B – 5</b>	Teacher perceives parent as challenging & less supportive
	<b>GT2 – 5</b>	<b>GP2A – 4</b>	Parent uses professional knowledge & disagrees with teacher's view on child's progress
	GT2 – 5	GP2B – 5	
	TT3 – 5	GP3A – 5	
	GT5 - 5	GP3B – 5	
Hill	<b>HT1 – 4</b>	<b>HP1A – 5</b>	Parent feels her questions are answered but teacher unhappy at discipline issue being raised
	<b>HT1 – 5</b>	<b>HP1B - 4</b>	Parent believes meetings have a limited purpose
	<b>HT2 – 5</b>	<b>HP2A – 4</b>	Unclear as father completed diary but mother did interview
	HT2 – 4	HP2B – 4	
	HT3 – 5	HP3A – 5	
	HT3 - 5	HP3B – 5	

Table 6.6: Aspects of satisfaction at parents' meetings by site and participants (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	(+) progress	prior exp of CT	quali of CT	quali of P	P-CT agree	P views	timeliness	info
Burgh teachers	3	2 teacher taught siblings	3 cite(+) but BT1&3 link(-) to reports	2 BT2(+) friendly BT1(-)	2 BT1(+) BT2 (-) for BP2A	2 (+) BT1 for BP1A	1 <i>BT1 links to Org: timing</i>	1
Burgh parents	2	2 teacher taught siblings	2	0	3 BP1A re twins BP1B negates content(-)	1 BP1A	1	1
Gateway teachers	2 cite (+) but GT1(-) for GP1B	1	3 cite(+) but GT2 links(-) to Org:time	3(+) friendly but <i>GT1(-)verbal aggression</i>	2 GT1(-)for GP1B <i>GT2(-) prior</i>	1	1	3 all(+) but GT1(-) for GP1B
Gateway parents	2 both(+) but <i>GP1A(-)</i>	1	4 GP2A negates content(-) <i>GP2B sibling</i>	4 cite (+) but GP2A(-) on knowledge of child	4 3 cite(+) but GP2A(-) & <i>GP2B links Org: timing</i>	3	1 GP2B(+) this meeting <i>but (-) for sibling</i>	2 cite (+) but <i>GP2A(-)</i>
Hill teachers	3	0	3	2 <i>HT2(-) verbal aggression</i> <i>HT3(-) compares teachers</i>	3 all (+) but HT1(-)for HP1A HT2 (-) for HP2B links P role: support C	2 HT3(+) HT2 (-) being <i>told her job by parent</i>	1 HT1(+) her practice but (-) HP1A issue & other teachers	1 <i>HT1 links to T [prep]</i>
Hill parents	4	1 taught child before	6 5 cite(+) but <i>HP2B&amp;3B (-)</i> HP1A(-) team teaching links to knowledge of child	0	5 4 cite(+) but HP1A(-) expectations of child <i>HP1B(-) sibling</i>	2 <i>HP2B&amp;3B(-)</i> HP3B(+) this meeting	4 1 cites(+) but HP1B(-) <i>HP3A&amp;3B(-)</i>	2

*NOTE 1: Codes: progress(+)- satisfaction based on child making good progress; prior exp of CT- satisfaction related to having prior experience of the teacher ; quali of CT- satisfaction resulting from the interpersonal qualities of the teacher at the meeting ; quali of P- satisfaction resulting from the interpersonal qualities of the parent at the meeting; P-CT agree- parent and teacher agree over assessment/action on child; P views- parent's views are listened to & considered by the teacher; timeliness- important information is communicated to the parent in a timely manner; info- the nature & amount of information given satisfies the parent's needs .*

*NOTE 2: Italics = a previous meeting: (-) = this was cited as a negative experience*

*NOTE 3: Quali of CT was complex, therefore, detail is listed in Table 6.7.*

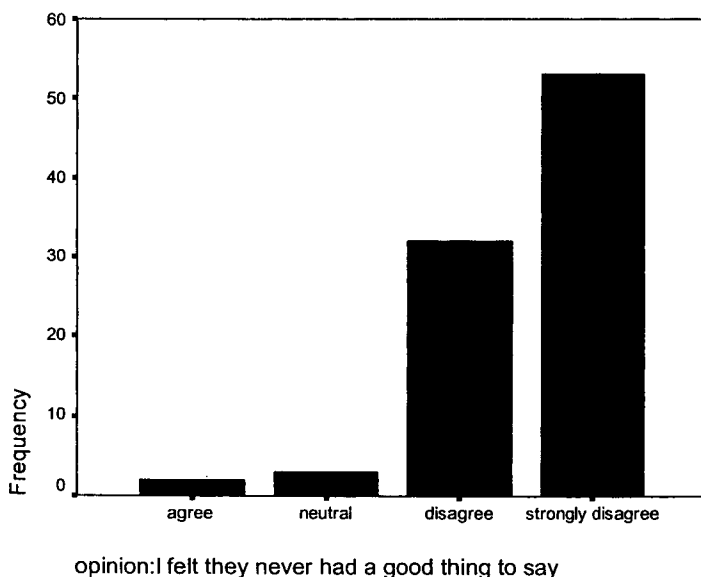
## Contributing factors to satisfaction

### *The child makes good progress*

While many participants related their level of satisfaction to a positive verbal report of a child's progress, this was not the most frequently mentioned reason in Phase 1. The most frequently cited reason by parents was the interpersonal qualities of the class teacher at the meeting. Next, parents valued the ability of the parent and teacher to reach a consensus on the child. Thirdly, they felt that their satisfaction rested on the pupil making positive progress at school. The teachers agreed that the interpersonal qualities of the class teacher were most important and this was followed by the importance that they reported positive progress by the pupil. After these, the teachers felt satisfaction depended on the parent and teacher reaching a consensus and a new code of the interpersonal qualities of that the parent brought to the meeting.

In Phase 2, parents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the perceived balance of the parents' meeting input. Figure 6.2 displays the responses to Q1.7.3 'I felt they never had a good thing to say'.

Figure 6.2: Frequency of parents' responses indicating agreement with "I felt they never had a good thing to say" (Q1.7.3).



Most parents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement. No one strongly agreed with one parent at both Burgh and Gateway agreeing. Chapter 5 discussed Phase 1 cases where the information provided indicated the child had academic and social difficulties but the parent rated the meeting highly and vice versa. Where the parental satisfaction is not based purely on the child's academic progress and social competence in class, what were the other contributing factors? Table 6.7 summarises the interpersonal qualities of the teachers that parents and staff believed were important at parents' meetings.

*The interpersonal qualities of the participants*

Table 6.7 outlines the nature of the interpersonal qualities of teachers that participants raised in Phase 1.

Table 6.7: Interpersonal qualities of teachers as parents' meetings by site and participant groups (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	honest	enc P input	know C	approach	patient	social	caring	helpful
Burgh teachers	2 BT1&3 link to positive reporting(-)	2 use questions	0	1	0	1	0	0
Burgh parents	2	1	1 BP1B negates content(-)	1	1	0	0	0
Gateway teachers	0	3 use questions GT2 conflict of Org: time(-)	1	1 beyond meeting	0	0	1	1
Gateway parents	3 GP1B negates content(-)	0	2 GP2A(-) GP2B sibling	3	0	0	0	1
Hill teachers	1	3 use questions	1	1 beyond meeting	0	1	0	0
Hill parents	1	1 HP3B(+) here but(-)prior	2 HP1A(-) in team teaching	4	1 HP2B(+) here but(-) prior	2 HP2B(+) here but (-) prior	0	0

*NOTE 1: Codes: honest- teacher is perceived as honest; enc P input- teacher encourages parent's input; know C- teacher is perceived as knowing the child as an individual; approach- teacher is perceived as approachable ;patient- teacher is patient in explaining content to a parent; social- teacher takes time to be sociable with the parent; caring- teacher is perceived as caring; helpful- teacher is perceived as helpful .*

*NOTE 2: Italics = a previous meeting; (-) = this was cited as a negative experience*

### *The interpersonal qualities of teachers*

The most common responses were that the teacher should be honest, approachable, know the child well and encourage parental input. However, Phase 1 suggested a difference among teachers and parents in terms of the desired qualities of a teacher. The teachers valued encouraging parental input by the strategy of asking questions. This differed from the 'T role: ask q' as teachers described their purposes differently between asking questions to gain specific information and asking questions to generally prompt the parent to participate. The parents wanted honesty and a sense that the teacher knew their child well but, principally, they wanted the teacher to be approachable.

In Phase 2, parents were given a list of these teacher qualities to select ones that they valued. Table 6.8 displays the responses in rank order. (Parents could tick more than 1 quality).

Table 6.8: Phase 2 teacher interpersonal qualities in rank order

teacher quality	valid% responses
Knows your child well	89
Approachable	86
Honest	85
Helpful	70
Encourages our input	55
Patient	49
Other	4
Previously known to you	3
Sociable	2

Statistical analysis of the nominal site data is reported using chi-squared to indicate any pattern of response. It indicated no difference among schools for the majority of the teacher qualities; this suggests that the interpersonal qualities transcend the model of practice in the school. Gateway had a greater proportion of parents choosing 'Helpful' (45% in the opinion compared to 30% at Burgh and 25% at Hill) and this

was the only quality that showed a statistically significant pattern ( $\chi^2(2) = 8.15$ ,  $p=0.02$ ).

Q1.3 had an additional instruction (Q1.3.1) in asking parents to double tick the most important quality. Possibly due to the questionnaire design, the response rate was 45 out of 92 people answering; this would reduce the reliability of the results, however, an interesting pattern emerged as the three top answers for this Q1.3.1 match the three most frequently selected answers for Q1.3. All the sites identified 'Know your child well' as the most important quality in each question and statistical analysis did not show any significant site pattern in the answers.

While the Phase 2 data confirmed the important interpersonal qualities of the teacher that contribute to parental satisfaction in the meetings, it could not explain how these qualities are communicated to the parent or why these are significant. It is necessary to return to the Phase 1 data to illuminate the three key qualities.

The teacher knows the child well as an individual

In Table 6.5, there are two examples where the parent's perception of the teacher's knowledge of the child has negated the content of the meeting. BP1B received some negative comments on her child's social and cognitive development; however, she rated her satisfaction with the meeting as 5. She rationalised her satisfaction repeatedly as linked to the teacher's knowledge of her child as she had "a good understanding of what made him tick" (GP1B); this included the teachers' knowledge of his medication and symptoms and her knowledge of interests in nature that he displayed at home but tended to underplay in public. The teacher's willingness to engage honestly with the parent in giving a balanced report of her observations of his qualities led to the parent to be accepting of less positive feedback. For this parent, it is often little observations on the child, such as his interests, that lead her to judge the rest of the information provided as reliable.

The rating of satisfaction of Parent GP2A did not match the teacher's rating and had a different perspective on the qualities of the teacher and the information provided.

This parent used her professional knowledge to form judgements on her child's progress and the school procedures on National testing. While she praised other interpersonal qualities of the teacher, her wariness over the teacher's knowledge of her child's language work led her to rate her satisfaction as 4, while the teacher's perception of a collegiate conversation led her to rate the meeting higher.

Parent HP3B summarised the importance of the teacher conveying that she knew the child well:

“It definitely makes a difference when the teachers, not only look at the kids as a kind of number, they look at them as if they're actual real people and that way, they tend to know about the wee bits that you tend to know about, like it comes through.” (HP3B)

This parent did not believe that this quality came through when teachers delivered a prepared input.

The teacher is approachable

Parents described approachable teachers as having “no personality clash” at the meeting (GP1B) and “dead comfortable” (GP2B). It is possibly in the absence of this quality that the dynamics of how approachability is communicated can be understood. Both Hill parents at the senior stage teacher rated their meetings as 5, in agreement with the teacher, and cited the quality of being approachable as contributing to their satisfaction. Both parents made comparisons to alternative, prior experiences. HP3A found the meeting “informal” with an absence of the “intimidation” she has felt previously. HP3B repeatedly linked her satisfaction to the flow of the conversation with the teacher:

“There’s certain teachers that you can get that- that it’s like drawing blood from a stone. But the type of teacher he’s got is very, very open – very, very natural. It’s always like you’re with the people next door, kind of thing, whereas you can get the other ones that just ... they’ll answer what you’re asking or straight away tell you what’s happening and end of story. But it definitely helps if you’ve got someone who’s coming and going with the ... well you feel easy in their company.” (HP3B)

The researcher probed the parent’s use of the term ‘flow’ in the meeting:

“I think it’s just the general kind of teacher’s attitude come ... personality... some of them haven’t got one.” (HP3B)

Elsewhere, this parent criticised the ‘black and white’ view of the profession. Rather than teachers altering their personality, perhaps the comments suggest that teachers should not allow the bureaucracy of the meetings to bury their personality; a personality to which other adults can relate on the power level of a partnership. Several teachers were aware that approachability cannot be confined to these meetings but must transcend into the teacher’s relationship with parents across the session.

The teacher is honest

In Table 6.5, there is a satisfaction rating difference between GT1 and GP1B. The parent’s perception that the teacher is honest negates negative comments about the child’s social development leading the parent to rate the meeting as 5; the teacher perceived a lack of parental support and rated the meeting as 4. The support for the quality of honesty in Phases 1 and 2 supports that parents want a realistic picture of their child. BP1B acknowledges that it is easier for her to see her child through “rose-coloured glasses” but the teacher’s description of her frustration in getting the child to do things that he lacks confidence to attempt led the parent to judge that it was:

“very honest because a lot of teachers, I think, would be frightened to say that but, I don’t know if I’m very honest back with her, that she knows I know he’s not an angel”. (BP1B)

Two teachers at Burgh made reference to structural influence on their ability to be honest as they negatively discussed the influence of positive reporting on professional honesty to parents as it often misled them to then be disappointed at the meeting:

“some of the airy-fairy reports you see now are so flipping positive that they get the wrong picture. There’s no ‘but’ and I think-I-I- tried to put the ‘but’ in as nicely and diplomatically as I can. I don’t want to shatter anyone’s illusions but I also don’t want them to go away thinking that everything is wonderful. I think you have to be honest and the report sheet doesn’t make it very easy to be honest.” (BT1)

The school used a bank of statements approach but the teacher found these “irrelevant” and the terminology of 5-14 Guidelines confusing. Her colleague, BT3, agreed that positive reporting procedures can lead parents to overestimate children’s progress.

#### *The interpersonal qualities of parents*

The issue of parental qualities at meetings was raised by the teacher participants in Phase 1. They praised many of the participating parents as ‘friendly’ but probing into less typical experiences led two teachers (GT1 and HT2) to discuss experiences when parents had been verbally aggressive or intimidating. The experience had led Teacher GT1 to change her model of practice but HT2 treated it as an isolated incident. BT1 had a prior experience of a parent not responding well at the first meeting but she related this to the timeliness of communicating the information linked to the timing of the meeting rather than purely the interpersonal qualities of the parent. HT3 felt uncomfortable when parents used the first meeting to compare the current teacher to the previous teacher. Overall, teachers found the interaction

with parents to be positive. However, when HT3 was asked about the impact of the research process, she responded that it had focussed her views and made her think about the positive interactions as well as the negative experiences as:

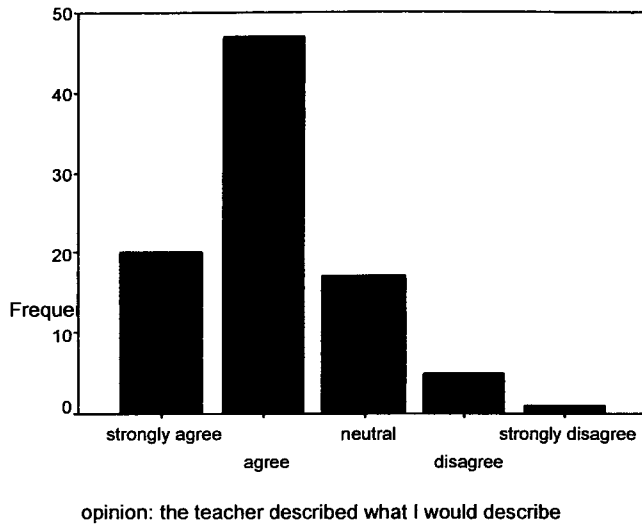
“I probably think of the ones I was not satisfied with more than the ones that went well.” (HT3)

#### *Reaching a consensus*

In Chapter 4, some Phase 1 participants identified a purpose of parents' meetings being to reach a consensus view. Table 6.6 shows that a greater number of participants in Table 6.6 linked their post-meeting satisfaction to the parent and teacher reaching a consensus view of the child's progress or future action. Table 6.5 shows that differences in satisfaction levels occurred on three occasions where teachers perceived that the parents did not fulfil the 'P role: support school' . Therefore teacher satisfaction was lower than parental score due to perceived lack of agreement. As the teacher's perceived positive qualities counteracted negative feedback received by BP1B, her satisfaction was also linked to the parent and teacher bringing together common views on the child to the meeting.

In Phase 2, parents were asked to rate Q1.7.4 'The teacher described what I would describe about my child' (source BP1B). The responses are displayed on Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3: Frequency of parents' responses indicating agreement with "The teacher described what I would describe about my child" (Q1.7.4).



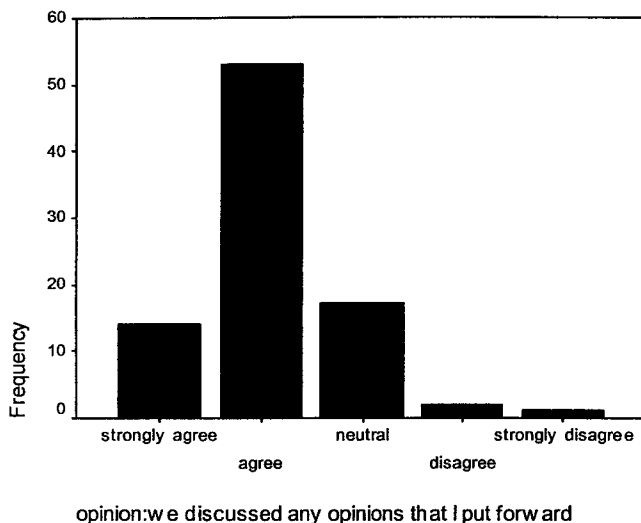
Most parents agreed with this statement with strongly agree and neutral having almost equal responses. An analysis of variance by ranks was applied to this ordinal data using the Kruskal Wallis test. While some parents disagree and strongly disagree at Burgh and Gateway, there was no site pattern to the data.

#### *Listening to parents' views*

In Chapter 5, 87% of Phase 2 parents recorded that they expressed their views at the meeting while 86% perceived that the teacher listened to their views at the meeting. There was a significant statistical difference among the three sites in both these behaviours, being perceived as occurring more frequently at Gateway and least frequently at Burgh. In Phase 1, where parents linked their satisfaction to the belief that their views were considered by the teacher, this was reported positively for the recorded meetings. However, Parents HP2B and HP3B recalled prior experiences where this caused dissatisfaction while Teacher HT2 previously did not consider a parent's views on her assessment of writing where she felt it was encroaching on her professional judgment.

In Phase 2, parents rated Q1.7.2 ‘We discussed any opinions that I put forward’ (source GP1B). Figure 6.4 presents the responses.

Figure 6.4: Frequency of parents’ responses indicating agreement with “We discussed any opinions that I put forward” (Q1.7.2.)



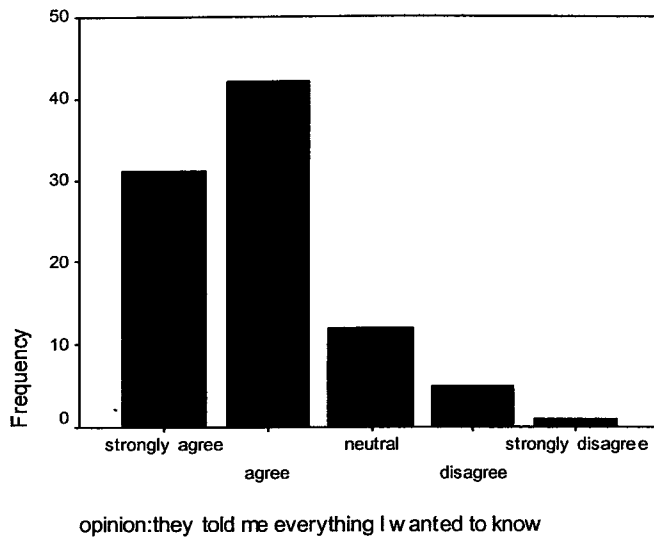
The majority of parents agreed with this statement. Grouping ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ together found 88% of Gateway, 76% of Hill and 67% of Burgh parents falling within these categories. This mirrors the pattern for the related roles in Chapter 5.

*Getting the right information at the right time*

Some Phase 1 participants linked their satisfaction to the nature and amount of information they had received satisfying their expectations while others talked about having information communicated to them in a timely manner. Teacher GT1 had been unhappy that her encounter with Parent GP1B had frustrated her ability to get across information in the way she had planned. Parents and teachers were asked to record in their diary any issues they were unable to discuss; the majority of participants had not encountered difficulty.

Figure 6.5 displays Phase 2 parent responses to Q1.7.1 ‘They told me everything I wanted to know’ (source BP1A).

Figure 6.5: Frequency of parents' responses indicating agreement with "They told me everything I wanted to know" (Q1.7.1).



The majority of parents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Analysis of variance indicated no statistically significant site pattern but it was noteworthy that no site had 'strongly agree' as the most popular response.

Phase 1 participants discriminated between information that was appropriate for the parents' meeting and that which needed to be communicated earlier. GP2B was positive about her meeting with GT2 but she was dissatisfied with the meeting for a sibling as the teacher had waited to the second parents' meeting to report that the child had been secretly doing his homework in class. The senior stage Hill parents discussed prior meetings where they felt that information had been communicated too late for the parent to take action. One stated,-

“I just got into the meeting and I says, ‘You said that I was last. So you’ve saved the best for last?’ and she was like that, ‘No, the worst.’ He’d spent the best of the term underneath a desk and that was the first I found out about it and I’m thinking, ‘There’s a problem here. Why aren’t you contacting me before now and why are we getting to this level before I’m finding-out that this child has spent a term underneath a desk?’ And that was the only one, if you like, that was not satisfactory. I was not a happy bunny.” (HP3A)

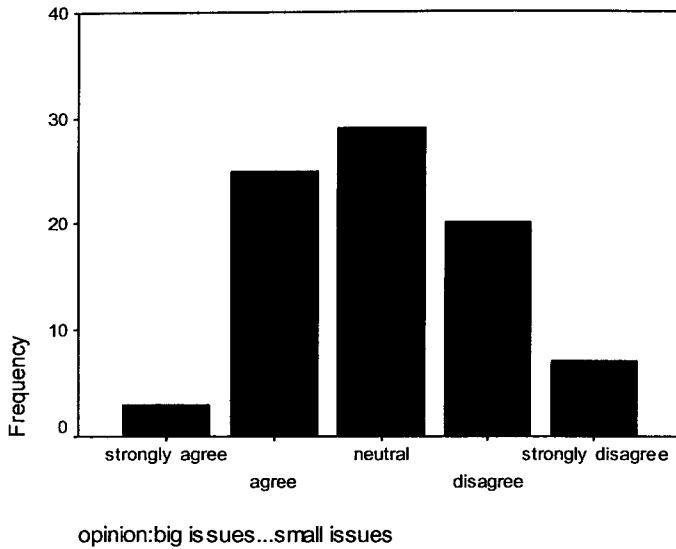
This led her to conclude that:

“big issues we deal with but smaller ones sometimes get pushed aside and it’s the time when we can go in and sort them.” (HP3A)

From a teacher’s perspective, HT1 found it difficult to understand why HP1A had waited until the parents’ meeting to raise a disciplinary issue over her child; the parent explained that the matter had happened before the Easter holiday and, therefore, her response had been delayed.

HP3A’s rationale was put to the Phase 2 parents. Figure 6.6 displays the responses to Q1.7.5 ‘Big issues are dealt with during the year but smaller ones can be pushed aside for parents’ meetings.’.

Figure 6.6: Frequency of parents' responses indicating agreement with "Big issues are dealt with during the year but smaller ones can be pushed aside for parents' meetings" (Q1.7.5).



Parents were mainly neutral on this issue but a significant percentage both agreed and disagreed. An analysis of variance by ranks among the site data was not statistically significant. Gateway agreed but there was a small difference to the next groups that were neutral or disagreed; Hill mainly disagreed or was neutral. This question had the highest amount of missing responses for any statement in Q1.7 at 9%; perhaps parents had no opinion or found the statement difficult to understand.

The key elements of satisfaction were verified by Phase 2, that is, the parent and teacher should come together to seek a consensual view of the child. This process is enabled by the interpersonal qualities of the participants and by the perception that the teacher listens to the parent's views. Participants respond well to positive comments but a successful report is not enough to satisfy the needs of the participants.

### **Action after the event**

The teachers and parents were asked to record any action taken after the meeting and the involvement of the child, at that stage. The children were asked about their participation after the meeting at the interview. Five teachers (2 Burgh, 2 Gateway and 1 Hill), 23 parents and 17 pupils recorded child involvement at this stage. Where teachers responded positively, the discussion with the child related to pupil behaviour, pupil readiness for National testing, relating that the parent was pleased and reminding a child to bring items to school. The parents reported praising the child, discussing ways in which they could improve on the child's work or behaviour, relating the content of the meeting to the child and using punishment.

There was no direct connection between pupils interviewed and the parents or teachers who participated in Phase 1 but there was a mismatch in perceptions of this stage of the meeting. None of the pupils recalled a class teacher discussing the meeting with them; the teacher input may have been specific to certain individual pupils rather than a common model of practice. Most of the children recalled a parent discussing the meeting with them with the exception of a P.4 pupil at Burgh. The reported content of these parent-child discussions compares as follows:

Parent describes content discussion as:

1. Praise
2. Future action to improve work/behaviour
3. Information provided by the teacher.
4. Punishment

Pupils describe content of discussion as:

1. Rewards
2. Action to improve work/behaviour
3. Information provided by the teacher.
4. Punishment

There is a reasonable match between the parent and child reporting of the discussion. In addition, some parents described thinking about the meeting afterwards, including discussing it with the other parent, thinking about appropriate action to take and reviewing the content of the meeting. Some parents recorded taking action after the

meeting that included supporting the child’s learning, talking to the child and banning the child from taking toys to school as a result of the teacher’s input.

In Phase 2, the questionnaire asked parents to record action taken after the meeting; approximately half the participants reported taking some form of action. Gateway parents were more likely to take action with Burgh parents being least likely (22% of the total participants compared to 14%); however, this was not a statistically significant difference. Where parents had responded positively, they were asked to list their action and the responses were coded using Phase 1 codes. Table 6.9 shows the parental action in ranked order.

Table 6.9: Parental action after the meeting in rank order

action	valid % of parents
Support child’s learning	30
Talk to child regarding progress	21
Praise	5
Other	3
Discuss meeting with other parent	1
Punish child	0
Reflect on the meeting	0

The most frequently indicated form of action was for the parent to support the child’s learning as a result of the content of the meeting, followed by talking to the child about progress at school which was indicated by about one fifth of parents. There is potential overlap between parents who described supporting the child and talking about progress. Therefore, about half (or less) of the children were receiving feedback from a meeting that was about them. Regardless of concerns of some pupils in Phase 1, none of the Phase 2 parents recorded punishing the child. While this may be accurate, the respondents may be aware that is not always socially desirable to admit to punishing a child and that this could be misinterpreted where the questionnaire would not clarify the nature of the punishment. There is also the possibility that, what parents perceive as support, the child may feel is punishment.

At Hill where there was greater pupil anxiety about punishment and, as a result of prior experiences of his parents' response to parents' meetings, a P.4 pupil was cautious about potential pupil participation:

“I wouldn't like to be in the classroom at the same time in case my mum... the teacher showed my mum my work and, if I had messy writing, then my mum would keep me instead of getting outside and playing and she'll shout at me and tell me to write sentences over and over again, neater.” (Hill child 4)

Table 6.10 provides a comparison of the post-meeting parental action at each site.

Table 6.10: Parental action after the meeting by site

behaviour	rating	Burgh	Gateway	Hill
Discuss with other parent	% at site	3	0	0
	% of total	1	0	0
Support for child	% at site	12	33	48
	% of total	4	12	14
Talk to child re progress	% at site	19	30	11
	% of total	6	11	3
Praised child	% at site	6	3	7
	% of total	2	1	2
Other	% at site	0	6	4
	% of total	0	2	1

In Tables 6.10, the % of total displays the percentage of parents choosing this response from the total amount of respondents to the questionnaire; while % of site displays the percentage of respondents out of the total number of parents at a site that chose that response.

Discussing the meeting with the other parent was only raised at Burgh; in comparison, some Phase 1 participants referred to the importance of having the other parent present. Table 6.10 shows that, across the three sites, the percentage of parents specifically identifying praising the child was low; however, one cannot assume that the parents were not positive when they talked to the child about progress at school. The frequencies of responses across the three sites produced nominal data; therefore, it did not lend itself towards an analysis of variance. Differences between the sites are reported using chi-squared to indicate the pattern of responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Gorard, 2001). Only one action displayed a different pattern between the three sites that was statistically significant: Burgh had a markedly lower number of parents supporting the child after the meeting ( $\chi^2 (2) = 10.39, p = 0.35$ ). Three parents recorded behaviours classified as 'other'. These were:

- Gateway parent arranged a follow-up meeting with the teacher to monitor progress
- Gateway parent contacted the speech therapy for an assessment of the child
- Hill parent had regular meetings with the teacher and made use of the daily diary to communicate with the school

### **Current pupil participation**

Chapter 6 indicated that pupil participation before parents' meetings within the current models of practice was sporadic at school and where it did occur at all it was focussed on parent preparation for the meeting at home. None of the participating schools had pupils attending the meetings; Chapter 5 showed that, where children were present at the school, they waited for parents outwith the meeting or attended a crèche. Chapter 6 findings point to more involvement at home after the meeting as pupils were informed about its contents but, again, there was sparse involvement in the school setting. In both Phases of the research, the potential for pupil participation at meetings was investigated. The responses of pupils, parents and teachers at each site indicating the desired nature and extent of child participation are displayed in Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3.

Table 7.1: Potential pupil participation at Burgh (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	C part Y	C part N	C part UN/D	C part variables	C part role
Burgh teachers	1	1 (AF) mediate info(-)	1 (CF) anxiety(-) (AF) C as manipulator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nature of C 1</li> <li>▪ age↑ 1</li> <li>▪ issues discussed 2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ express view 2</li> <li>▪ id support 1</li> </ul>
Burgh parents	1	2 (CF) self-esteem(-) (CF) mediate info (CF) anxiety (AF) C as interrupt	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ nature of C 1</li> <li>▪ issues discussed 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ express view 1</li> <li>▪ hear views 2</li> <li>▪ id support 1</li> </ul>
Burgh pupils	6	0	0	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ show P work 3</li> <li>▪ view work 1</li> <li>▪ express views 1</li> </ul>

*See key on page 189.*

Table 7.2: Potential pupil participation at Gateway (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	C part Y	C part N	C part UN/D	C part variables	C part role
Gateway teachers	1	2 (CF) mediate info (CF) understanding(-) (AF) mediate info (CF) self-esteem (-) (AF) C as interrupt	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ issues discussed 1</li> <li>▪ confidentiality of setting 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ hear views 2</li> <li>▪ express views 2</li> <li>▪ id support 1</li> </ul>
Gateway parents	2 (CF) self-esteem	1 (CF) self-esteem (CF) anxiety (CF) mediate info (AF) mediate info	3 + (CF) self-esteem but - (CF) self-esteem (AF) mediate info (CF) mediate info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ age ↑ 5</li> <li>▪ partial attendance 1</li> <li>▪ issues discussed 2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ id support 1</li> <li>▪ express views 3</li> <li>▪ non-participation 1</li> </ul>
Gateway pupils	4 (CF) mediate info (CF) C rights	2 (AF) tradition	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ partial attendance 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ C play 1</li> <li>▪ Id support 1</li> <li>▪ Question CT 1</li> <li>▪ Express views 1</li> </ul>

*See key on page 189.*

Table 7.3: Potential pupil participation at Hill (*numbers indicate number of participants who cited code*)

	C part Y	C part N	C part UN/D	C part variables	C part role
Hill teachers	2 (AF) mediate info(-) (CF) C rights	0	1 (CF) understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ issues discussed 2</li> <li>▪ (+) evenings 1</li> <li>▪ age↑ 1</li> <li>▪ partial attendance 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ express view 3</li> <li>▪ hear views 1</li> </ul>
Hill parents	1	4 (AF) tradition (AF) mediate info (AF) C as interrupt (CF) anxiety (CF) mediate info	1 (CF) understanding (AF) C as interrupt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ age↑ 3 ↓ 1</li> <li>▪ partial attendance 1</li> <li>▪ confidentiality of setting 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ hear views 2</li> <li>▪ express views 4</li> <li>▪ id support 1</li> </ul>
Hill pupils	2 (CF) mediate info	4 (CF) anxiety	0	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ express views 1</li> </ul>

See key on page 189.

*NOTE 1: Codes: C part (Y) – the child should participate in the meeting; C part(N) – the child should not participate in the meeting; C part (UN/D) – the respondent is undecided about child participation at meetings; C part variables – the participant cites variables under which child participation at meetings may take place; C part role –the anticipated role of the child during the meeting.*

*NOTE 2: Subcodes:*

*C Part-*

*AF=reason given is focussed on the adult*

- *C as interrupt – child perceived as an interruption to the meeting*
- *Tradition – Adult refers to tradition that child is not present at the meeting*
- *Mediate info – the presence of the child would lead the teacher to mediate information to the parent*

*CF=reason given focuses on the child*

- *Self-esteem – meeting will effect child's self-esteem*
- *Mediate info – the adult mediates information to the child*
- *Anxiety – participation in the meeting would create anxiety for the child*
- *Understanding – participation is linked to the understanding of events by the child*
- *C rights – the child has a right to be present a the meeting*

*C PART VARIABLES: nature – participation depends upon the nature of the child; issues discussed – participation depends upon the issues being discussed during the meeting; age-participation depends upon the age of the child (↑ - older children: ↓ - younger children); partial – child should participate for part of the meeting only; confidentiality – the child should participate if the meeting is held in a confidential setting; (+) evenings – child participation would require additional meetings.*

*C PART ROLES: express views – child expresses his/her views at meeting; hear views – child hears views of parent and teacher at meeting; id support – child identifies his/her own learning needs; show P work – child shows work to parent; view work – child has an opportunity to view his/her work; question CT – child can ask the teacher questions; play games – child may attend but play games while the adults talk; non-participation – child attends in a non-participatory role.*

## Potential pupil participation

### *Pupil participation?*

In Phase 1, the majority of the pupils stated that they would like to attend their parents' meetings; the pupils tended to have clearly polarised views whereas the adults could be undecided and tended to have more participants selecting variables that would affect their decision. The responses compare as follows:

Parents	4 yes	7 no	4 undecided
Teachers	3 yes	4 no	2 undecided
Pupils	12 yes	6 no	0 undecided

(Pupil 'yes' responses were higher in the pilot stage)

The majority of adults were against pupil participation although a notable amount of parents were undecided. Some of these parents could describe conditions that might support the child attending. Although the majority of pupils were in favour of attending the meetings, the pattern varied over the sites with all the Burgh pupils and a majority of four of the Gateway pupils in support of the idea compared to a minority of two pupils at Hill. Table 7.4 compares the pupil responses on participation by the stage of the child.

Table 7.4: Pupil responses for and against pupil participation in parents' meetings by stage.

	infants	juniors	seniors
yes	3	4	5
no	3	2	1

Pupil willingness to participate in the meetings appeared to increase with the age of the child. Parents cited as a factor in pupil participation that the child should be older, with the exception of one parent who felt that taking part at a younger age would demystify the process. Teachers also discussed pupil participation being more suitable as the child matured. It appears that pupil willingness to participate and

parental opinion that they could meaningfully participate agree that this is related to the age of the child.

### *Rationalising the decision*

Participants frequently described reasons for their views on pupil participation. These reasons fell into two groupings: (CF) those that focussed on the welfare of the child; (AF) those that focussed on the interests of the adult. Tables 7.1 to 7.3 record that the most frequently cited adult reasons that benefited the child were that the adult had the role of mediating the information from the meeting to the child, hearing the contents of the meeting would impact on the child's self-esteem or create anxiety and the child may not understand the contents of the meeting. In mediating information to the child, adults frequently perceived that they had a protective role towards them in selecting balanced information and communicating it in a supportive way.

HP3A represented concerned parents as she talked about her younger child:

“with the wee one, to bring her in and the teacher starts to tell me, ‘Well, she talks too much’, our (*names child*) would just start bubbling. She would just start crying and she’d get all upset and there’s no point in that. Whereas, if I can get it then go out and, like, ‘The teacher says you’re talking too much’ (*gentle tone*), the tears start and it’s like, ‘But I don’t mean to’ (*tone of child crying*) and you can deal with it”. (HP3A)

Other parents simply believed that, in this model of practice, it was the adult role to report suitable meeting content to the child.

While mediating information was the most common response from pupils, they demonstrated awareness that the content of the meeting was edited and they wanted full disclosure instead. A junior pupil at Burgh clearly explained her choice to attend as,-

“I would know all the stuff as my mum and dad wouldn’t tell me”.  
(Burgh child 3)

She currently received no feedback from her parents or teacher after a parents' meeting.

The adult perception that they have to mediate meeting information links to their concerns that access to unedited information will impact on the child's self-esteem or create anxiety. At Gateway, two parents believed that pupil participation would be beneficial for their self-esteem although the general consensus agreed with the parent referred to in Chapter 5 on confidentiality, that is, one is happy for others to hear the content as long as it is positive. Four pupils felt that their participation would make them anxious; these were the Hill pupils that indicated that they would not like to attend. This perception may be linked to pupil responses on after meeting behaviour in current meetings as they were more likely to discuss punishment than pupils at other sites. A senior pupil at Hill was adamant that he would not like to attend:

“I wouldn't like to be there because, if I got a bad report, I'd probably get shouted at inside the school or something.” (Hill child 6)

Similarly, a Hill infant was anxious that her presence would result in immediate punishment:

“I don't want to go into the class and be part of it in case my work is messy and my mum keeps me in or something.” (Hill child 2)

Discussion with pupils often revealed that they did not have work or behaviour difficulties. However, their reluctance stemmed from perceived immediacy of punishment if they were present at the meeting. Also, it indicates that these children fear that the meeting will actually be a reprimand from the adults.

Lewis and Lindsay (2000), discussed in Chapter 3, asserted that the understanding of the child of events was more important than the age; two parents and two teachers

questioned whether the child would be able to understand the meeting. Frequently, responses depended upon the current model of practice. For example, GT1 did not want pupils present to listen to “an adult conversation” that they would not understand. However, some adult participants suggested that pupil participation would necessitate a new model of practice to allow pupils to understand and participate meaningfully in the meetings. BT1 suggested that the pupils would have to be clear on what they could expect at the meeting:

“I think the agenda we have as parent and teacher is too airy-fairy. I think the children would need to know more specifically ehm... and I think you’d need to balance it as well. I think it’d have to be a good bit that’s being discussed, something that they were pleased about then something that they weren’t so happy about so that they’d get a balance rather than it all being negative. That would be too demoralising. Then, if it’s all praise, that gives as false impression.” (BT1)

HT2 raised that, if schools genuinely want to involve pupils, teachers will have to approach the meeting with “a different attitude” and be willing to listen to the child’s input.

Within the research study, pupils were able to reason their decisions although there tended to be a stage pattern; while Hill infants offered a reason, junior and senior pupils more frequently explained their views.

The adults also displayed self-interest in disagreeing with pupil participation. The most frequent response from teachers and parents was that the presence of a child would lead to the class teacher mediating information to the parent or deterring the parents from providing social context information to the teacher. Parent HP3B described the adult concerns:

“I feel ... the teacher tends to, kind of, hold back slightly because the child’s there... if there’s something that maybe the child’s been doing that’s bad or ... that kind of thing. I would feel they would hold back too much in fear that the kid gets upset too much ‘cause they’re sitting listening to it. And vice versa, maybe something that I think they’ve got a problem with, that they can’t do, and I’m trying to explain to her what they can’t do and then they’re going to feel inadequate that they can’t.” (HP3B)

Therefore, the majority of responding adults approved of mediating information to the child but the pupils were aware that content was edited and many found this unacceptable. On the other hand, adult respondents, particularly parents, were uncomfortable with the prospect of having information mediated to them due to pupil presence. Adult reasoning was often founded on a conservative view of parents’ meetings based on their current models; some participants suggested that a step towards pupil inclusion would necessitate thinking creatively in the future.

#### *A context for pupil participation*

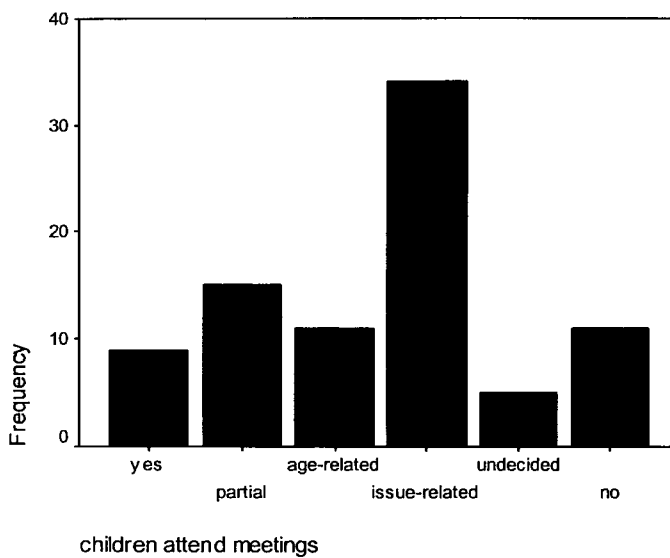
Pupils had clear views on their participation but the adults’ views were less clearly defined. As parents explained their reasoning for their views, variables emerged towards a model of possible participation. The most common conditions that adults placed on the meetings were the age of the child, the issues being discussed and aspects of the organisation. The most common response among parents was that they felt that pupil participation would be better for older pupils as they would understand the content and be able to make a meaningful contribution. Teachers were more concerned with the issues being discussed in front of the child, that they should not be confidential or likely to upset the child. Other aspects related to changing the organisation so that children attended for part of the meeting to allow privacy for the adults to discuss more confidential topics, clearly relating to adult concerns about mediating information. Organisational changes that were suggested also included the confidentiality of the setting to protect the child from embarrassment and having additional evenings as pupil participation was viewed as an addition to the current

model rather than a central change. The only modification raised by a child was a senior Gateway pupil who suggested partial attendance by the child at the meetings.

### *Comparison to Phase 2*

In Phase 2, parents were given a range of options on pupil participation and they were asked to choose one response; where they chose non-attendance, they were asked to explain their view and these responses were coded using Phase 1 codes. Figure 7.1 displays the range of responses.

Figure 7.1: Frequency of parents' responses indicating views on potential pupil participation at parents' meetings.



The most frequent response was that children should attend dependent on the issues being discussed, thus, as in Phase 1, future participation would have to examine the structure and agenda for these meetings. 13% of parents were unwilling to have pupils attend and 6% were neutral on the issue, therefore, 81% of respondents were willing to have children participate in the meetings in some form. Table 7.5 provides a comparison of responses across the three sites.

Table 7.5: Phase 2 –The percentage frequency of parents’ responses to alternative degrees of pupil participation at parents’ meetings by site.

child participation	value	Burgh	Gateway	Hill	total
Yes	% site	0	21	12	11
	% total	0	7	4	
Partial	% site	16	21	16	18
	% total	6	7	5	
Age-related	% site	16	3	20	13
	% total	6	1	6	
Issue-related	% site	36	38	4	40
	% total	13	13	14	
Undecided	% site	10	7	0	6
	% total	4	2	0	
No	% site	23	10	4	13
	% total	8	4	1	

*(Due to rounding-up, percentages for total do not add-up to 100)*

In Tables 7.5, the % of total displays the percentage of parents choosing this response from the total amount of respondents to the questionnaire; while % of site displays the percentage of respondents out of the total number of parents at a site that chose that response.

The frequencies of responses across the three sites produced nominal data; therefore, it did not lend itself towards an analysis of variance. Differences between the sites are reported using chi-squared to indicate the pattern of responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Gorard, 2001). Comparing the sites, while some parents rejected pupil participation at each site, more parents at Burgh chose this option. No parents at Burgh selected unconditional acceptance of pupil participation whereas there were positive responses at Gateway and Hill. The difference in frequencies of response on pupil participation among the 3 sites was significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 5.91, p = 0.05$ ). The ‘undecided’ response rate was low, indicating that Phase 2 participants had more clearly defined views than Phase 1.

Respondents who explained their rejection of pupil participation provided a variety of reasons. The responses are displayed on Table 7.6.

Table 7.6: Phase 2 parental reasons for rejecting potential pupil participation at parents' meetings.

reason	number of parent citing reason
Attendance would affect the child's self-esteem (CF)	2
Attendance would make the child anxious (CF)	1
It is traditional that children do not attend (AF)	2
The adult is concerned that the presence of the child would lead the teacher to mediate information to the parent. (AF)	5
Other	1

The most frequently cited reason was that the presence of the child would lead to information being mediated between the parent and teacher; this explanation focussed on self-interest. The most frequently cited child-focussed reason was that participation would result in anxiety for the child. These responses possibly considered pupil participation within current models. Some parents chose ways to overcome the concerns by selecting partial attendance by the child or attendance at an older age.

#### *A participatory role for the child*

Where participants considered pupil participation in Phase 1, they were asked about the potential role for the child at the meeting. The results are displayed on Tables 7.1 to 7.3. Most commonly, the teachers and parents responded that children would express their views, hear the views of the teacher and parents or identify areas of school work where they felt they needed support. The pupils expanded the range of their roles to include showing the parent their work, viewing their own work, questioning the class teacher and attending but playing separately; showing their

work and expressing their views were the most frequently cited roles by the pupils. Across the sites, the Hill pupils suggested a more limited range of roles although this may be related to their general reluctance to participate in meetings. Comparing the pupil stages, all stages contributed towards pupil roles but, again, the juniors and seniors tended to identify new roles. It was interesting to examine the roles that pupils did not identify for themselves; they did not choose hearing the views of teachers and parents or attending in a non-participatory role. Clearly, the pupils did not see their potential role as passive but as an active, participatory one.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: RECONSTRUCTING PARENTS' MEETINGS

### **Introduction**

Chapters 4 to 7 have used the research questions that emerged from the literature review in Chapter 2 to deconstruct parents' meetings. This current chapter seeks to move beyond the linear model of question and answer to reconstruct parents' meetings in primary schools around the core concept of advocacy. Categories of data were identified in the previous chapters with the research questions used to group these categories logically. The researcher will now aim to relate some of the key findings to the core concept. Strauss and Corbin (1998) advocate the use of a core category to bring the outcomes of coding together to create a coherent discussion. While this chapter is informed by their work, it does not aim to stringently apply their use of paradigm to relate categories to the core category. A paradigm would require the writer to relate each category to the core category by its conditions, phenomenon, context, action and consequences.

The discussion will examine the roles of teachers, parents and pupils in relation to parents' meetings and advocacy. It will suggest that, while parents are seeking more practical roles, the teacher primarily remains in the role of expert. In the advocacy process, this places the power base with the professional. As advocacy describes a process whereby one seeks recognition from another with power, the parent is placed in the role of advocate for the pupil to the teacher as the authority. The various changes to parental representation described in Chapter 2, have placed an obligation upon parents to seek accountability for their child's educational provision. The study suggests that, while teachers maintain the primary role as expert, parents are expecting more proactive roles in the process. As parents become more proactive and teachers act to retain their professional authority, the interaction of professional and advocate has excluded the perspective of the child. This leaves pupils in search of self-advocacy at meetings in which they may be the object of discussion but they are not present. Legislation supports the participation of the child but the study suggests

that some adults may not be ready for a radical change in the established balance of power.

### **Teacher as expert**

#### *A shared expectation of the teacher as expert*

Chapter 4 focussed upon the research question, 'What expectations do parents, teachers and pupils have of parents' meetings?' This generated a category named purposes. Across the research participants, the key purpose of parents' meetings remained that they exist to allow the teacher to transmit information on the pupil. In Phase 1, this was the main answer from pupils and the purpose cited by most teachers. Phase 1 parents had a high expectation of this purpose and Phase 2 parents mainly agreed that the teacher should lead the conversation. Across the three Phase 2 research sites, all the Burgh parent participants expected the teacher to lead the meeting.

In Chapter 2, Hornby's (2000) models of parental involvement are outlined. The findings of this study suggest that parents' meetings fall within the 'expert model' whereby the teacher is the expert who disseminates information to the parent. This current chapter will aim to argue that parents' meetings shift across Hornby's model to show influences of the 'protective model' (parent and teacher have clearly defined functions) and the 'consumer model' (the parent adopts the role of consumer) as well. In contrast, 'Reporting 5-14' describes a 'partnership model', including two-way communication and joint decision-making. However, the study did not find consistent application of this model in the primary school context.

As the expert, the teacher assumes authority in setting the agenda and deciding the valid issues during the parents' meeting. Hornby (2000) also described common teacher attitudes towards parents. The corresponding attitude that appears mainly to underpin the expert model is that 'parents are less able', allowing the teacher to choose to dismiss parental information. Where parents are unwilling to accept the expert view, attitudes that may appear include 'parents as problems' and 'parents as adversaries'.

As the main expectation that teachers will transmit information reinforces their expert role, teachers in Phase 1 were the main group that perceived a purpose of parents' meetings lying in seeking information about the pupils' social context. The study suggests that implicit judgements are made on families within a relatively short space of time. These judgements are unlikely to be made neutrally, therefore, contributing towards teachers' attitudes to parents. During the study, the judgements of some teachers reinforced the professional attitude of 'parents as causal' identified by Hornby (2000), that is, they have poor parenting skills.

It would be misleading to conclude that the participants perceived in this study the sole purpose of parents' meetings being for teachers to transmit information. Parents having a goal of seeking their own information and the aim of achieving a consensus were strongly represented. Clearly, the traditional expectation that parents attend to hear from the professional about the pupil persists but it is being challenged by other expectations.

#### *The teacher adopts the role of expert*

Chapter 5 investigated the research question, 'What is the current structure and content of parents' meetings?' In describing what happened during the meeting, the content analysis generated the category "teachers' roles". Across Phases 1 and 2 of the study, the dominant answer was that the teacher was an information-giver. Over two thirds of Phase 2 parents also indicated that the teacher gave advice during the meeting. Both of these roles support the teacher as expert. Teacher roles that place the professional in a less authoritarian role, such as listening to parents and answering their questions, were disproportionately represented in Phase 1. Phase 2 parents indicated greater use of these roles by teachers. Again, suggesting that traditional models persist at parents' meetings but that they are being currently tested. There was a statistically significant difference across the three sites in teachers providing advice, listening to parents and answering questions; Burgh was the lowest scoring of the three sites, suggesting that the teacher as expert persisted more strongly in this context.

In the study, respondents rarely perceived a singular role for the participants. However, the balance and range of roles varied between parents' meetings. Parents criticised cases where teachers assumed the singular role of expert as this led to a monologue, leading some parents to question the purpose of their attendance. In Chapter 2, Simpson (1996) was cited as advising strongly against teachers lecturing parents at meetings. Parents' responses on their satisfaction with parents' meetings proposes that this varies between individual teachers rather than being purely about models of practice at each site. Where parents cited more positive experiences, they had perceived that there was a balance and flow to the discussion.

### *Preparation and professionalism*

The outcomes of the study indicate that the "teacher as expert" view persists but this tradition is not uncontested. Many parents seek more proactive roles in the process and it is argued that the autonomy of the teaching profession has been eroded through a technical model of practice (Patrick, Forde & McPhee, 2003). Chapter 2 argued that teachers maintain greater autonomy in private practice that has not been open to policy or legislation: this is achieved through a bureaucratic approach to meetings including in their preparation. All the participating teachers recorded methods of preparation for parents' meetings with the dominant approaches including the creation of paperwork (making notes) or the collation of information on pupils through existing paperwork (reports, assessment records and pupils' work). In practice, parents have limited access to the same paperwork. In the absence of a school report, parents relied on more informal methods such as talking to the child. Some meetings gave parents an opportunity to view pupil work; however, a Hill teacher argued that the amount of work to be digested in a limited time disadvantaged the parent.

The parents in the study had varying levels of access to the same paperwork as the teacher. Burgh school provided parental access to a limited range of jotters and, in many cases, no pupil work at all. It could be argued that the key point here is, not whether parents have access to the same documentation, but how the school

facilitates parents having meaningful time and an environment to assimilate its contents. It should be considered that, for some parents, access and time may not be enough to provide an equitable preparation to the professional as the literacy levels and degree of confidence in dealing with professional papers, such as assessment records, will vary.

The professionals in the study maintained the expert role through their preparation. Several teachers reported dissatisfaction where they had felt unprepared for parents' meetings, supporting Stacey's (1991) argument that teachers need to feel that they hold all the relevant information in a meeting. This experience was rarely extended to consider the parallel experience of the parent as few teachers in Phase 1 discussed the expectation that parents prepared for the meeting. Nearly three quarters of the Phase 2 parents recorded that the teacher used notes during the meeting. The argument is not that teachers should not use notes but that schools should reflect on the power imbalance created in the expected preparation for teacher, parents and pupils.

Further, teachers need to reflect on how they make use of these notes during the meeting. The majority of Phase 1 and 2 parents recorded high rates of satisfaction with these meetings. However, Phase 1 parents could cite other experiences of parents' meetings that were less positive. Several parents criticised teachers giving a "spiel" (GP2A) so that the notes served as a prepared speech. Where several teachers discussed the stress of early experiences of meeting parents and 8 out of 9 teachers had no formal training in this area, it is understandable that they may deal with their discomfort by relying upon their preparation. The difficulty here lies in the potentially authoritarian image of the teacher that may be transmitted to the parent. Parents in Phase 1 expressed positive views where teachers' personalities and interpersonal qualities were communicated during the meeting. During Phase 1, two teachers identified a positive strategy in student teachers being encouraged to attend parents' meetings during school placement. This has the potential to overcome inexperienced teachers' reservations in meeting parents. It should be considered how this strategy is supported in the school, including, encouraging an open-minded

approach to this practice and avoiding introducing teachers at a formative stage to negative professional attitudes towards parents.

The study supports the assertion of the findings of Walker (1998) that teachers continue to hold the props of power at parents' meetings. Teachers need to consider how preparation can facilitate a dialogue rather than create a barrier to communication.

### *Organising to safeguard the role of the expert*

In considering the question 'What is the current structure and content of parents' meetings?', a category of organisation was identified with related sub-codes, including setting, confidentiality, time and timing in the session. The nature of the organisation was set at each research site by the school. The study suggested various overt and covert ways that teachers organise to safeguard their role as expert.

Setting, confidentiality and access to pupil work – Burgh teachers decided on an open setting for the perceived security risks. This was raised in Phase 1 by parents as reducing confidentiality at the meeting. Phase 2 parents were more critical about the setting in Gateway where only some teachers used an open setting. Phase 2 parents indicated highest agreement that they felt they had confidentiality where individual meetings were held privately in classrooms at Hill school. This affected what parents were prepared to discuss and how comfortable they felt viewing pupil work before and after the meeting while other parents were present. In this open setting, it is reasonable to conclude that parents are less likely to challenge the teacher as expert or for an honest dialogue.

Phase 2 reinforced that there was significantly more dissatisfaction expressed where parents did not have access to their child's work in Burgh school. Elsewhere, the physical lay-out of Gateway made access to children's work not conducive leading to work being displayed in rooms where meetings were in progress or laid-out in narrow corridors. Again, where parents have limited access to their child's work, they may feel less prepared to engage with the teacher's remarks during the meeting.

At Burgh, some teachers used children's work as a part of a deficit model of meeting parents, that is, to show parents what pupils could not do. All the sites followed tradition in that, where children's work was available, it was displayed at the meeting. There is potential for schools to consider whether this gives meaningful access to a range of pupils' work in a confidential setting where parents can prepare themselves to meet with the teacher. Some of the pupils in Phase 1 suggested a potential role for themselves in attending the meeting and showing the work to their parents: this has potentially positive implications for the development of ethos and citizenship in schools.

Time, timing and amount – The schools set the time of the meetings but Phase 1 data revealed that teachers decide the actual duration. Here the study suggested an 'unwritten contract' where the parent and professional believed that the teacher would give as much time as was needed. This belief was founded on a deficit model of the purposes of parents' meetings, whereby the meetings served little purpose for parents of children who were progressing well at school but longer meetings were held where children had difficulties. In some cases, meetings appeared to have lost purpose for able children: this needs to be reconsidered. Phase 2 parents generally did not feel rushed at the meetings. Where time was an issue, consideration needs to be given to what the study revealed about its effects on the parent- teacher dialogue including parents having difficulty in participating, teachers having limited opportunity to encourage parents' input and meetings having a very narrow content focus.

Phase 2 did not indicate a statistically significant difference in parents' responses on the different timings of the meetings in the year among the three sites. These timings were decided by the school. Phase 1 participants were positive where schools had decided to change from the end-of-year report-meeting pattern as it provided time for reinforcement, thus, giving the meeting a real purpose and avoiding repetition by the teacher of the content of the report. Phase 1 Gateway parents were wary of an early first parents' meeting as they doubted the teachers' knowledge of their child at that point. This presented a threat to the role of the teacher as expert and one parent

reported disregarding any professional information, at this point. Aspects of timing varied in parental satisfaction; however, parental views were not the driving force as schools set the timing of the meetings in the year.

*Achieving satisfaction: the challenge for teachers*

The purpose and role of the teacher transmitting information may remain central to expectations and practice, but the final research question, 'What aspects of the current models of parents' meetings satisfy the needs of the participants?' gives some insight into whether the traditional expert approach is enough to satisfy teachers, parents and pupils. In an expert model of parents' meetings it could be expected that participants' highest satisfaction was achieved where the teacher gave positive feedback on pupil progress. While this was important to teachers, the interpersonal qualities of the teacher during the meeting were more important to parents and rated favourably with teachers as well. This supports the findings of Silverman and Stacey (1989) that parents of SEN pupils valued similar qualities during meetings. There was a relationship between the Phase 1 and 2 data in identifying the importance of the teachers being perceived as knowledgeable about the child as an individual, approachable and honest.

Hornby (2000) stated that the parents have a 'hidden agenda' to find-out whether the teacher knows the child well and this appears to be supported here. This type of information can not be communicated through formulaic reporting of assessment as Hornby states that this is more likely to be conveyed through anecdotes on the child. Comments from Phase 1 parents agreed that feedback on children's interests and unique responses lead parents to trust the other judgements of the teacher. This requires that teachers regularly reflect on how they know each child as an individual and take action to acquaint themselves with this information where it is not evident. The study suggests that parents bring their observations of the child to the meeting and look for areas of consistency with the professional's feedback.

Both parents and teacher raised the issue of teachers being perceived as honest. The literature states that parents in England found reports to be broad and unclear with

parents uncertain on future action (Clark, 1998; Power & Clark, 2000). This study suggests less confusion with the content of meetings but some professionals were critical that positive written reporting led to disappointment at the parents' meetings as teachers attempted to put the reporting statements into context.

The level of satisfaction also resulted from the perceived approachability of the teacher. This study found that aspects that may be perceived as being professional by teachers, such as using notes and maintaining neutrality can be interpreted by parents as a lack of empathy or unwillingness to engage in a dialogue with the parent. It could be argued that, rather than suppressing individuality in the presentation of the role of expert, parents value teachers allowing their personality to show in these meetings. Parent HP3B likened this to chatting with a neighbour, allowing the parent to feel on an equal standing to the teacher. This proposes that caution must be shown in developing practice regarding parents' meetings: while policy may seek to provide equality of provision, it may reduce more sensitive aspects of teacher individuality that parents value and to which they can relate.

#### *Pupil self-advocacy: a challenge to professionalism*

The main expectations of parents' meetings support the model of teacher as expert but it has been argued that the consumer model has informed these meetings as the professionals prepare and feedback with a perception of parents as clients.

Nevertheless, the challenge from the parent as active consumer is shifting them towards more proactive roles. As the teaching profession has adjusted since the 1980s to the parent as advocate, it now faces a new challenge to the teacher as expert through the legislation and policy that supports greater pupil self-advocacy.

In Phase 1 of this study, both the teachers and parents had mainly negative or undecided responses to pupil participation at parents' meetings. Teachers supported a protectionist perspective on the child as they believed that absence protected the child from anxiety and low self-esteem. Garner and Sandow (1995) and Roche (1999) identified that acknowledging the right of the child to be consulted is counter to the professional culture. However, Rudduck (2002) proposed ways in which pupil

participation in school can strengthen the quality of teachers' work by accessing the fresh perspective of the child.

### **Parent as advocate**

#### *The shift in parental expectations*

The study indicated that the teacher as expert remains dominant. On the other hand, as parents assume an advocacy role, other expectations are emerging. In Phase 1, the purpose that parents seek specific information was highly cited by parents. Phase 2 presented a less strong case for proactive behaviour in parents bringing their "own agenda", suggesting that advocacy behaviour lies in being responsive during the meeting. That having been said, parents described a range of methods that they used to prepare before the meeting. The involvement of the child at this stage was generally to benefit the adult's preparation. Teachers need to consider the extent to which they conduct meetings in a way that permits parents to raise any questions that they have prepared.

Parents in Phase 1 were more likely than teachers to view parents' meetings as a mediation process where the aim was to arrive at a consensus. In valuing this expectation, it follows that parents believe that their views on the child should be valued equally to those of the professional. This belief runs contrary to the perception of the teacher as expert. Swap (1993) highlighted the difficulty in resolving varying opinions where the timescale for the meeting was limited.

While the relationship between the parent and teacher in the primary context may be based on the professional spending more time with the pupil than in the secondary school, the literature that states that parents seek a social link to the teacher may be overstating its case (Newsom & Ransom, 1983; Clark, 1998). The social perspective had some support from Phase 1 participants but Phase 2 parents were mainly neutral on this issue.

### *Parents in search of a role*

Where the perception is that the teacher assumes the role of expert, passive roles might be expected for the parent. Such parental roles that Phase 1 participants described were supporting the school, listening to the teacher and providing the teacher with social context information on the child. In this Phase, more teachers expected parental support for the school and the provision of background information. Here, the teacher defines the needs to be met by the parent. Hornby (2000) described these clear roles as part of the 'protective' model of working with parents while Crozier (1999a) similarly describes teachers defining partnership by parents meeting the needs of the school.

Chapter 2 argued that the rise of the consumer model of education had charged parents with an advocacy role and increased professional accountability. The participants in this study described proactive parental roles that support this argument. Phase 2 parents cited listening to the teacher as their main role during the meeting but there was also a high incidence of parents asking questions and expressing their views. Parents also gave a good level of response to supporting their child at the meeting. Again, there was a lower range of parental behaviours recorded at Burgh, supporting the conclusion that this was a fairly traditional model that limited the dialogue during the meeting.

Phase 1 teachers were dissatisfied when parents did not participate during the meeting. On the other hand, some teachers described discomfort when they felt interrogated. Parents were expected to be an advocate for their child but they could have difficulty in judging a level of involvement where they would not be judged as a 'problem' or 'adversary' (Hornby, 2000). Moore's (1994) research highlighted a clash in perceptions whereby what the parents sees as a query, the school may interpret as a complaint.

### *The advocate: the role that unites and divides*

Crozier's studies (1999a; 2001) conclude that equitable treatment for parents may not mean treating all parents equally. She found that class and ethnicity can have

profound effects on parental expectations and their ability and willingness to exercise parental power under the consumerist philosophy of education. These factors were not examined in the present study. However, feedback from parents suggested that factors within the control of the school can affect the ability of parents to act proactively at these meetings. As previously discussed, these include the organisation of the meeting and the interpersonal qualities of the teacher. Some parents were able to prepare more fully for meetings and assume proactive roles. These often reflected their individual abilities whereas schools should aim to empower more parents by including approaches that encourage genuine parental input and by considering the differing support that parents may need to participate.

As the consumerist philosophy has arguably empowered some parents, it has also divided parents by their ability and willingness to assume the advocacy role. Debatably, disempowering parents reinforces the role of the teacher as expert. However, parents being without a genuine voice at parents' meetings leads to a monologue from the professional rather than a dialogue between interested and informed parties.

#### *Appraising the process*

The parent as advocate is supported by responses to the final research question on satisfaction with parents' meetings. For Phase 1 teachers, the interpersonal qualities of the teacher at the meeting followed by the child making good progress were the main sources of satisfaction. However, Phase 1 parents favoured the interpersonal qualities of the teacher and the perception that a consensus was reached during the meeting. Phase 2 parents identified key teacher qualities and most agreed or strongly agreed that they had reached a consensus at the meeting. Phase 1 suggested that parents may not frequently and explicitly identify reaching a consensus as a purpose but they are aware when they reflect on the meeting of whether they are satisfied that a consensus was achieved. To reach a consensus, the parent places equal value on his/her perception of the child in the reporting process. Following the meeting, many parents continued to take action. The parent and pupil descriptors of the content of feedback after the meeting matched in Phase 1. While just over half of the Phase 2

parents reported taking action including supporting their children and talking to the children about their progress. Chapter 2 linked partnership with parents to pupil attainment (Tomlinson, 1984; Johnson, 1990; MacBeath & McCall, 2001). The findings of the present study illuminate a practical example of how parent-teacher dialogue may lead to support for pupil learning being extended into the home environment.

*Pupil self-advocacy: a challenge to the new order*

The role of the parent as advocate is prompted and reinforced by the absence of the focus of these meetings: the pupil. The consumerist model has created a proactive role for some parents and they appear to be shifting their expectations and roles as parents' meetings in alignment with this philosophy. Parents have new expectations that include gaining specific information from the teacher and they adopt roles that support this aim including asking questions and expressing their views. Phase 1 parents, in agreement with the teachers, were hesitant to move to complete pupil participation. An irony is suggested in this study in that some parents believe it is their role to mediate information to the child and some pupils demonstrated awareness that information was mediated to them. On the other hand, a frequently cited parental reason to exclude pupils was the fear that parents would then have moderated information given to them by the teacher. Parents perceived that they were making progress in gaining access to the specific information that they wanted but they did not want to extend advocacy to children as they felt it would be detrimental to the gains in parental rights. These findings are consistent with the assertion of Prout (2000) that parental rights and pupil rights are often viewed as diametrically opposite. Phase 2 parents were more likely to accept pupil participation in some form but this still mainly depended on the type of information discussed at these meetings.

## **Pupils in search of self-advocacy**

### *Limited expectations*

Pupils' expectations related closely to the answer to, 'What is the current structure and content of parents' meetings?' Pupils were not present at any of the parents' meetings in the study and this limited their perspective on what happened at the current meetings. In Phase 1, nearly half of the parents and a few teachers reported involving the child before the meeting; however, the pupil participants did not perceive of any preparation, at this stage. Closer consideration of the type of involvement by parents shows that children were consulted before parents' meetings primarily to prepare the adult.

### *Reinforcing the role of teacher as expert*

The second-hand experience of the pupils of parents' meetings led many to hold traditional expectations of these events. They saw the teacher's role as mainly to report information on their progress. They had little knowledge of what their parents did at these meetings. The pupils had a narrow perspective on the content of the meetings, believing that they focussed on their cognitive and social development.

### *Children as self-advocates at parents' meetings*

The current practice described in this study indicates that pupils' non-attendance at parents' meetings is due to a paternalistic or protectionist perspective by the adults. Franklin (1986; 1995) describes children's rights that protect them from perceived harm. Here, adults identify this harm as damage to the child's self-esteem and the creation of anxiety. A logical development of this view is that adults believe that children are ignorant of the information about them that is discussed. In the study, pupils had a narrow perspective of content but they did know that their work and behaviour were reviewed. Further, some Phase 1 parents described talking to their child before the meeting to ask for a prediction of its content and for any issues that should be raised. It could be argued that there is a contradiction in parents believing that children are knowledgeable enough about their progress in school to prepare the

parent but not aware enough to participate when these issues are discussed during the meeting.

Franklin (1986; 1995) also discusses rights that empower children. The practice described in this study did not suggest that pupils' powers of self-advocacy were enhanced: they reported little preparation before the meeting, they were excluded from the meeting and they had information mediated to them by adults after the meeting.

The potential to participate was welcomed by the majority of pupil participants. The teachers and parents in Phase 1 were more hesitant but the majority of Phase 2 parents were willing to participate in meetings with children present in some form. There was a significant difference in response rate between the three sites with Burgh more likely to reject potential pupil participation.

The key variables linked to participants agreeing to pupil participation were age and the issues being discussed. Roche (1999) has argued that pupils' rights should increase with age. The adult participants in Phase 1 agreed that pupil participation was appropriate as pupils progressed through primary school. Chapter 2 argued that pupils could be involved in expressing a view at an early age but this would depend on the structure and content of the meeting. Phase 2 parents agreed that the main variable in pupils attending would be the issues that were being discussed at the meeting.

When participants were asked to consider the role that pupils would have at a parents' meeting, the responses included expressing a viewpoint, hearing the views of the teacher or parent and identifying aspects of school work where they needed support. Pupils were able to suggest further roles such as showing their work to the parent. The comparison of suggested roles indicated that pupils were looking to be actively involved, mainly through expressing their views, rather than having a non-participatory role. This has implications for the development of parents' meetings in

that children must perceive that they have a meaningful participatory role where they are to be genuinely engaged with the process.

Although the majority of the children in this study were positive about potential participation and they could envisage proactive roles for themselves, developments to support the right of the pupil to attend these meetings should be sensitive to empowering and to diminishing the child (Garner & Sandow, 1995). To this end, adults would have to acknowledge the child's right to non-attendance (Walker, 1996). MacLure and Walker (1999) found that pupils were concerned that their presence would lead to a 'show trial' and the responses in the present study, particularly from Hill pupils, seemed to agree. This indicates that such meetings need a shared purpose and agenda that respects the presence and views of all the participants.

### *Thinking outside the box*

Clearly, when the researcher spoke to Phase 1 participants, the potential for pupil participation was more frequently interpreted as, 'How can we fit children into the current parents' meetings?' It is, therefore, understandable that Walker (1996) concluded that meetings would be longer and more complicated. Similarly, one can relate to why pupils fear a 'show trial' where the purpose and content of meetings indicated a deficit model.

Where schools and parents are willing to consider the potential for pupils to engage as self-advocates, a fresh approach is needed to the structure and agenda of parents' meetings. This point was raised by some of the Phase 1 teachers. Participants need to reflect on the variety of purposes proposed by this study and start by considering a title for these meetings that genuinely reflects the expectations of parents, teachers and pupils. An innovative title that reflects purposes based on pupil, teacher and parent participation should help to define new roles for the participants. Sharing the agenda and potential roles in a meaningful way to parents and at an appropriate level to the stage and understanding of the child should help to reassure children that this meeting should contribute positively to their education; communicate to parents that

they are not expected to chastise their child during the meeting to demonstrate that they are supportive parents. It should also indicate to professionals that they have a broad educational expertise to offer but they should listen and learn from the child and parent to support the education of their common interest – the child.

### **The Primary-Secondary comparison**

Impetus was given to this study by the general question – were the recent research findings located in the secondary school context relevant to the primary context? The literature on secondary school parents' meetings highlighted stress and dissatisfaction often linked to organisation (Reid, 1984; Walker, 1998). The present study indicated that organisation is one factor that parents consider but their satisfaction rests on the individual encounter with the teacher, in particular, the interpersonal qualities of the teacher and parental opportunities to express their views towards reaching a consensus with the professional. An example of this was shown in Gateway where Phase 1 parents criticised the timing of the first meeting and both Phase 1 and 2 parents felt that the setting reduced the confidentiality. However, Phase 2 analysis indicated a greater range of pupil and teacher roles during the meetings and parents were generally satisfied with the meetings.

As in the secondary sector, most Phase 1 teachers had no formal training to prepare them for parents' meetings (Reid, 1984; Walker, 1998). This led them to rely on personal experience and induction into the professional culture. They did recount stressful meetings but they also had generally positive ratings for the meetings recorded in Phase 1. This study also indicates that teachers hold the props of power at these meetings and may use their professional expertise as a means of protection. Overall, the primary sector gives a more positive message about parents' meetings. However, the traditional model of the teacher as expert is under challenge by the parent as advocate.

Walker (1998) found that pupils were not proportionately represented in the secondary sector; where pupils could attend, they were not actively encouraged to do so. This study shows that the schools in this study, similarly, did not encourage pupil

self-advocacy. The pupils were generally positive about possible participation but they worried about the potential for immediate punishment. Parent HP3B was concerned about her primary child being at the meeting because she had attended a secondary meeting for a sibling where a child had been shouted at by a teacher. This suggests that some secondary schools may believe that they include pupils but that they have yet to achieve the correct ethos that is supportive to all participants. Primary schools can learn from the literature from the secondary context and the views of the participants of this study to seek the means to achieve genuine self-advocacy for pupils.

### **Implications from the study: introduction**

This study was introduced by referring to Lewis and Munn on the importance of research connecting to “the normal range of work” to establish its “worthwhileness” (Lewis & Munn, 1997 p.15). Chapter 1 then attempted to establish the relevant professional and national context for a study on parents’ meetings in the primary sector. Chapter 8 outlined the many implications of this study for practice and theory embedded in its discussion. The current chapter aims to identify the key implications and cluster them according to the particular stakeholders for whom they have relevance. In doing so, the researcher will demonstrate that the thesis contributes to theory and practice, particularly in relation to primary education.

### **Communicating the findings of the study**

The potential impact of any findings identified in a professional doctoral thesis will depend on the extent to which they can be communicated in the relevant professional contexts, as well as its genuine contribution to pertinent knowledge in the field of study. The implications for the researcher of the outcomes of this study connect to the scope for communication of its key ideas, and, therefore, the potential impact of the thesis. The researcher has communicated the developing research and final implications to the academic community by contributing papers to several conferences:

- Scottish Educational Research Association’s Annual Conference, Dundee 2002
- The European Research network about Parents in Education, Gdansk 2003
- Scottish Educational Research Association’s Annual Conference, Dundee 2004

Further, she intends to submit papers from the study to academic journals following the completion of the thesis. The presentation of these conference papers and the follow-up discussions have provided dialogue related to theory and practice with academics both within and out with the field of partnership with parents in national

and international settings. These presentations led directly to links with Learning and Teaching Scotland and the Quality in Education unit at the University of Strathclyde.

Connections have been created to the field of education that have allowed the researcher to communicate her findings and contribute to professional thinking:

- She worked with the Development Officer from Learning and Teaching Scotland related to Assessment in Learning Project 9 'Reporting to Parents and Others'. This included collecting separate data for Project 9 from Initial Teacher Education students.
- She established links to schools participating in Project 9 that had requested conference papers from the researcher. This led her to contribute to discussions on the progress of the schools' action research projects.
- She was approached twice by The Times Education Scotland to write a piece on her findings; initially the researcher declined as the research was still in progress and she did not want to jeopardise her working relationship with the research participants. The researcher has now indicated that she will contribute to TESS during January 2005.
- She has contributed her findings to on-going work in the Quality in Education unit, University of Strathclyde, including providing feedback to one of its researchers on an initial draft of her work for the Scottish Executive Education Department on parents' meetings.
- She shared any papers with the participating schools to facilitate discussion of the emerging findings during the study.
- She established a specific workshop for Initial Teacher Education students based on the findings of her study

Through communication in the academic community and beyond, the researcher has aimed to enable the findings and implications of this study to have a real impact. The main groups of people that the study should impact upon are identified in the following section.

## **Implications for whom?**

### *Teachers*

This study has illuminated the range of purposes and opinions on parents' meetings for teachers, parents and pupils. For teachers, it provides a perspective on parents' meetings beyond what the professional does simply to satisfy their own needs. The study was justified as examining an aspect of the individual, private practice of teachers. Perkkyla (1997) proposal that the generalisability of work lies in professionals identifying what they can do from the issues that it reveals.

Communication of this study in the professional sector should encourage teachers to continue the discussions of sharing and reflecting on their practice at parents' meetings. These discussions need to debate frankly professional attitudes towards working with parents and providing greater autonomy for pupils. This takes time and due acknowledgement of this needs to be shown in the education system. Teachers need to be able to reflect on the purposes that underpin their work rather than fulfilling the technician role described by Patrick et al (2003). For example, Phase 1 findings indicate that some teachers hold a deficit model of parents' meetings and this is recognised by parents who welcome short meetings as it indicates that the child is progressing well. A professional discussion of the purposes of parents' meetings needs to re establish their purpose for pupils who are making good progress at school.

Teachers need to use the findings of the study, not only to reflect on their purposes for parents' meetings, but to question the extent to which they recognise the purposes for parents and the potential participation by pupils in their practice. The findings of this study suggest that parents are seeking more proactive roles in these meetings and teachers need to examine whether they recognise this shift. A comparison of the present study with the literature from the secondary school sector concurs that teachers maintain a power imbalance with parents through their organisation of the meetings and their preparation beforehand. The teaching profession needs to be open to examining how they can carry out these aspects of their work in a manner that facilitates dialogue with parents rather than stifling their views and questions.

An examination of what leaves people feeling satisfied with these meetings indicated that the success or failure of these events can be attributed to the qualities of the individual teacher. Parents want teachers who have personalities that they feel they can interact with; they want the teacher to be knowledgeable about their child as an individual, to be approachable and to communicate honestly with parents. This outcome of the study offers teachers practical insights on which to develop their practice. However, teachers need to think about whether all of this can be communicated in a single meeting of five to ten minutes or whether they need to think about how they communicate these qualities throughout the school year.

The willingness of pupils in Phase 1 of the study to participate in meetings and the acceptance of Phase 2 parents of pupil participation in some format, presents a new challenge to primary teachers. Many schools have taken steps to meet the requirements of the Children (Scotland) Act (1995) and the Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc Act (2000) to incorporate the views of pupils at a minimal level. A major attitudinal shift is required to embed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12 at a fundamental level and in a holistic manner. Parents' meetings in the format typically shown in this study sit uncomfortably with other legislative and policy changes in that they exclude pupils in discussions about their progress at school. The teaching profession needs to be proactive in leading discussion about greater pupil participation rather than having their behaviour interpreted as professional self-interest.

### *Parents*

This study has implications for parents. It provides a mechanism of communication to the teaching profession about the expectations and needs of parents; these needs are as pluralistic as the parents that a school serves (Crozier, 1999a; 2001). This chapter has previously stated that parents seek a dialogue and teachers need to examine whether these meetings allow this to take place. The study also indicated different ways in which teachers maintain the upper hand in these meetings. Schools need to encourage parents to prepare for these meetings. This can be enhanced by providing parents with meaningful access to their child's work. Some parents

indicated that they already prepare including talking to their child and preparing questions. Schools, therefore, need to be prepared to follow-through on parental preparation during the meetings to allow parents to ask their questions and express their views. Parents rated highly their satisfaction where they perceived that they were able to express their views and work towards a consensus with the teacher.

### *Pupils*

Chapter 3 justified including pupils in this study as Save the Children (1996) had highlighted the lack of consultation with children on matters that affect them. The study provided pupils with the opportunity to talk about meetings that talk about them rather than with them. It also asked teachers, parents and pupils to think about the potential for pupil participation at future meetings. The study indicated that there is willingness for pupil participation in some form in schools. Some adults remained resistant but the study highlighted the contradictions in adult views about children's abilities to comment on and hear about their progress at school. Against this background, teachers and parents need to justify the exclusion of pupils and the maintenance of paternalistic attitudes towards children.

Not all the children in this study were willing to attend parents' meetings. There was some indication that the age of the child influenced the sophistication of their understating of these meetings; any development would have to take this into consideration. Some pupils were hesitant about the potential for punishment during the meeting. Schools and parents will have to recognise that non-attendance is as valid a decision by a child as attendance. Therefore, attendance would have to be optional. The implication for the future of parents' meetings indicates that they need to be re-examined and, potentially, restructured meaningfully to integrate the expectations and purposes of teachers, parents and pupils.

### *School management*

The analysis in this study focussed more on the key themes related to parents' meetings in the primary school. While it included some site analysis, it did not seek to present one site as having the definitive model of practice. It was hoped that this

would allow teachers and schools to identify issues of relevance to their context rather than have them dismiss the findings, because the model of a particular site did not exactly match their school's parents' meetings. Extending this argument, teachers in nursery and secondary education settings may identify issues that they may want to pursue; the researcher would not argue that her findings are automatically applicable to other contexts as her study has identified some differences, as well as overlap, to the literature based on SEN and secondary education.

Having said this, the researcher did identify sites where parents and teachers had a greater range of roles during these meetings, while Burgh, particularly, appeared to follow a more traditional and limited pattern of interaction. Any school manager wanting to incorporate the findings of this study into school development would honestly have to appraise the current standing of that school in working with parents and in encouraging pupil participation. The researcher was made aware during her visits to the three schools and in her data collection that these sites varied in levels of teacher, parent and pupil autonomy. The actions of the school management would have to build upon the existing culture and ethos of the school. Further, at the outset, any school management would have to reflect on the extent to which they encourage the participation of the teaching staff in expressing their views as this can contribute towards an ethos of staff's consultation with parents and pupils.

#### *Local and national education*

Patrick et al (2003) provides a cautionary note in the managerialism of the teaching profession so that teachers become akin to technicians. As this study indicated that the individuality of teachers has a strong influence upon parental satisfaction, it may appear attractive to bring teachers' practice into line with centralised guidance on how to conduct a parents' meeting. This is also fraught with danger. Parents complained of a professional approach that led to a monologue devoid of personality from the teachers. Centralisation of practice endangers teachers showing their personality. Parents found teachers who did this more approachable, therefore, redressing the power imbalance between the professional and the parent. This study has argued that professional practice in working with parents and in including pupils

is heavily underpinned by skills and attitudes. These are the aspects that any national initiative needs to encourage in a professional debate. Teachers are unlikely honestly to engage in any process of change where they perceive their professional autonomy as under threat. It could be argued that attitudinal change needs to come from the teaching profession and cannot be externally imposed upon them at authority or national level.

### *Initial teacher education*

The findings of Phase 1 of this study were that teachers lacked training in working with parents and, specifically, in conducting meetings with them. Thus, it concurs with research findings at UK and European level (Reid, 1984; Bogdanowicz, 1994; Walker, 1998). While this study indicates that Initial Teacher Education needs to include work on working with parents, it would be superficial to suggest that this should only be addressed at ITE level or that this could be achieved by merely presenting the findings of this study to students. Chapters 2 and 8 argued that working with parents and pupils is strongly underpinned by professional attitudes and the findings on parental and teacher satisfaction indicate that this is strongly related to professional and interpersonal skills.

This has implications for providing professional development at pre and post qualifying levels when teachers have varying levels of autonomy and experience in working with parents. The introduction of the Standard for Initial Teacher Education in Scotland (2000) and the Standard for Full Registration (2001) should provide impetus for professional training to enable teachers to meet the competences linked to working with parents. Phase 1 of this study, identified practice was praised whereby Year 3 ITE student had opportunities to attend parents' meetings. The nature of any professional development needs to move beyond acquiring knowledge; teachers need unthreatening opportunities to examine their attitudes and to develop their skills in working with parents and pupils. This has already led the researcher to refocus her teaching on reporting to parents to ask students to discuss attitudinal statements about working with parents and pupils (drawn from research data) and to

think in practical terms about how they can communicate the interpersonal qualities that parents value at meetings.

### *The researcher*

The current chapter has already argued that this study has affected the researcher in that she has communicated its findings in academic and professional contexts and it has impacted upon her teaching as a lecturer in Childhood and Primary Studies. However, the actual process of carrying out the research for this study has also influenced the researcher and has had implications for her future work. The process of researching and using a variety of research approaches and techniques of data collection has enlarged the researcher's repertoire of expertise. This knowledge-base is currently used to support students at pre and post-qualifying levels in practical investigations. It is hoped that it will be extended into supporting students at Masters and, eventually, Doctoral level. The research experience has also shifted the researcher's focus towards further research studies and in using an action-research based approach to collect data to bring about improvements in her teaching. While the researcher may not use all these research approaches again, it has given her greater confidence to interrogate qualitative and quantitative research studies by others. In summation, it has contributed towards her theoretical understanding by providing an apprenticeship in research.

The process of undertaking this study has made a practical contribution to the researcher's understanding of working with teachers, parents and pupils who were selected as a sample to discuss their views and experiences. In particular, the researcher believed that she had developed a good level of communication and practice in her years of working with parents. However, she was drawn to re-evaluate her preconceptions of families as her visits into homes made her aware that all the participating parents were keenly interested in their children's education and spoke enthusiastically and with knowledge about their children. The unnerving factor for the researcher was her surprise that this was true regardless of socio-economic background, family composition and the age of the parent. The researcher thought

she knew this before embarking on this study but it seemed more real and apparent following her actual conversations with parents.

### **Summarising the main contribution of the study to theory and practice**

The main contribution of the present study to new theoretical knowledge derives from the fact that perceptions of parents' meetings as a topic which has not hitherto been investigated in the primary school context. The present study was able to investigate the relationships between teachers and parents through using parents' meetings as the point of contact. These relationships have been set against the discourse of partnership and inclusion. The present study found that this is not an association of equal partners as the professional had tended to set the terms of the relationship. Between parents and teachers, the relationships differ and this present study suggests that there is evidence of a shift towards some parents expecting proactive, advocacy roles. The shift towards the parent as advocate has empowered some parents but it has been argued that it has had negative consequences in perpetuating the absence of pupils from the dialogue on their educational progress. The parents' meetings represented by the three schools in this study present a protectionist perspective on children's rights; that is, the adults believed that excluding pupils protects them from potential emotional distress. However, the study has presented the perspectives of pupils who want to be present at parents' meetings; these pupils present an argument for rights of empowerment for children and describe proactive roles for self-advocacy.

It should be acknowledged that parents' meetings are frequently located in the literature on parent-teacher partnership. The initial constructs for Phase 1 of the study were informed by this literature. As such, it led to a method that investigated parents' meetings with the model of partnership in mind. The strength of an approach that was informed by grounded theory is that it allowed new and hitherto unexplored ideas to emerge. In this context, the theme of advocacy was suggested by some of the data. The researcher was then able to investigate this through extending the literature review, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). On the other hand, a potential weakness should be acknowledged in the method of the study as it was not able to focus purely on advocacy. Some parents were engaging in active roles including

asking questions and expressing views. The extent to which this was purely advocacy or partnership rests on the motivation and perception of an equal power base by the parents. This suggests that there is potential in extending this study to examine other meetings and communication where parents intercede on behalf of their child. Moore's study (1994) presents an interesting start in her work on how teachers, parents and pupils perceive parents raising queries at school. In essence, this study has raised a theme that would benefit from further, specific investigation.

The main contribution of the study to professional practice derives from multiple perspectives on parents' meetings, namely, those of pupils, parents and teachers. The evidence gathered indicates practical and professional implications that include the need for teachers to use the findings of the present study to reflect on how their practice affects the power balance between parents and themselves. While the language of partnership is frequently used in the discourse on working with parents, the findings of this study question whether parents' meetings make a contribution as the professional frequently sets the agenda and controls the organisation of parents' meetings. The findings of the study have practical application as they clearly identify professional skills and attitudes that positively contribute to creating a dialogue between parents and teachers. Parents wanted more than a verbal report from the teacher: they wanted their views to be heard; they wanted to work with the teacher towards a consensus on their child's progress; and they wanted teachers who were knowledgeable on their individual child, approachable and honest. The present study suggests that the teaching profession needs to be forward thinking in its practice in working with parents and pupils. The expectations of parents regarding their role in parents' meetings are shifting and teachers need to think about how they recognise this in their work. Just as the teaching profession has to shift to accommodate more inclusive working with parents, it needs to be proactive in including pupils in participating in their own education. This present study found the majority of pupils to be willing to participate in parents' meetings and over four fifths of the parents in the survey would shift towards some format of meetings that included the children. However, this study argues that the way forward may not be through parents' meetings as represented here. Future meetings in primary schools that discuss the

educational progress of pupils will need to be genuinely inclusive of parents and pupils. The findings of this study suggest that this may require a new agenda and, possibly, a new format of meeting.

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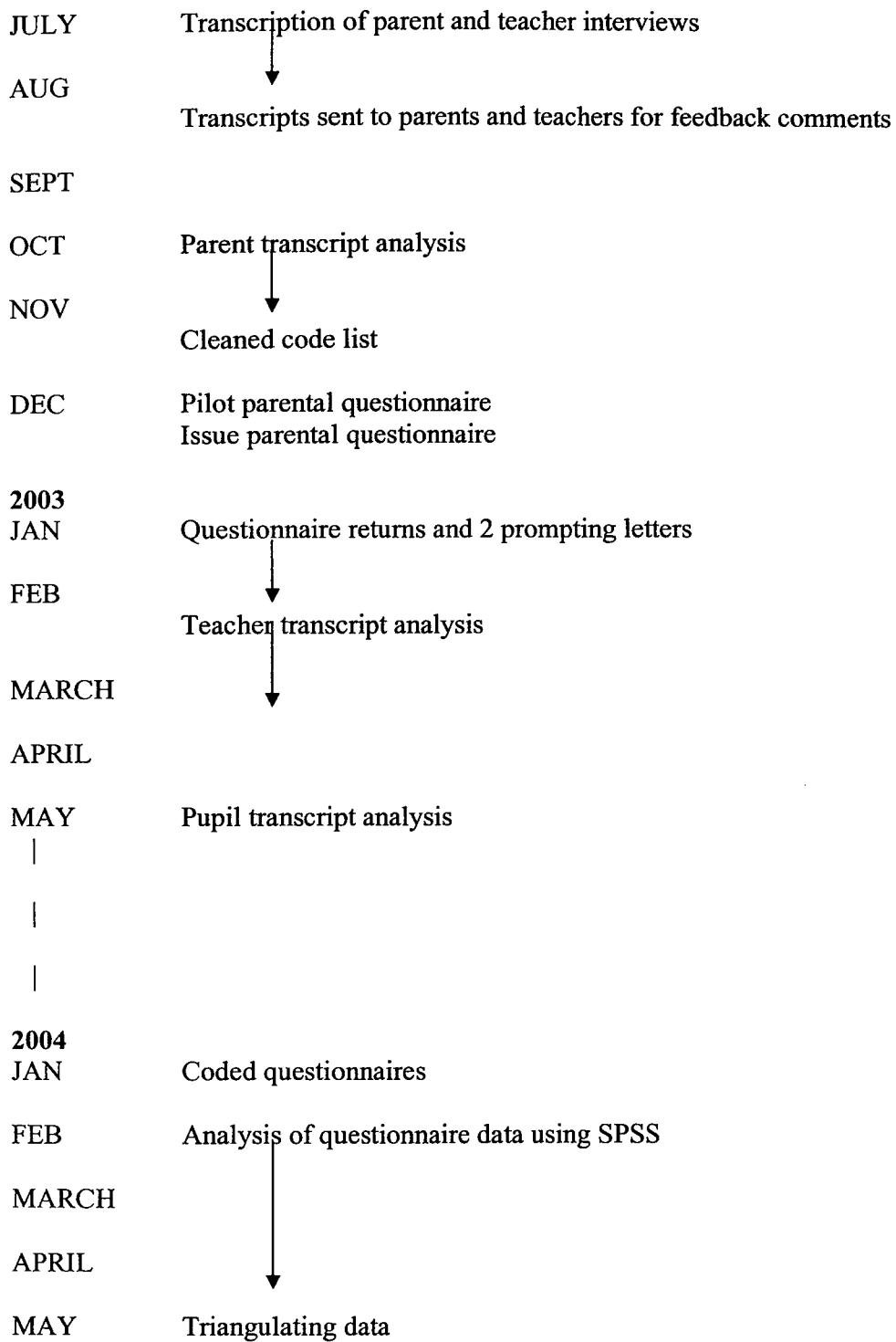
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APPENDIX 1  
RESEARCH TIMETABLE

## RESEARCH TIMELINE

<b>2001</b>	
NOV	Obtained local education authority informed consent
DEC	
<b>2002</b>	
JAN	Obtained informed consent from pupils Invited to speak to Gateway School Board
FEB	Pilot pupil interview schedule Invited to speak to Burgh School Board Pupil group interviews
MARCH	Obtained informed consent from Gateway and Hill parents and teachers Pupil interview transcriptions Piloted parents and teacher diaries Met Gateway teachers: phoned Gateway parents Issued Gateway diaries Observed at Gateway parents' meeting – 14/3/02 evening Gateway diary returns ↓ <i>(arrow indicates stage of research on-going)</i>
APRIL	Pilot parent and teacher interview schedules Plan Gateway interviews from diary content Gateway parents and teacher interviews Met Hill teachers: phoned Hill parents Issued Hill diaries Observed at Hill parents' meeting – 24/4/02 afternoon Obtained informed consent from Burgh parents and teachers
MAY	Hill diary returns Plan Hill interviews from diary content Met Burgh teachers: phoned Burgh parents Observed at Burgh parents' meeting – 29/5/02 afternoon Hill parents and teacher interviews ↓
JUNE	Burgh diary returns Plan Burgh interviews from diary content Burgh interviews with parents and teachers



APPENDIX 2

COMMUNICATION WITH LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

29/10/01

Dear (*director of education*)

As a lecturer in the Primary Education Department who is currently undertaking an Ed.D, I am writing to seek permission to approach three schools located within your Authority. I have selected this area as I frequently visit students on placement there and have a good level of partnership with schools. The purpose of my research is to examine the relevance and effectiveness of parents' meetings. Through my postgraduate teaching and CPD work, I became aware that teachers have varied personal contacts with parents and that biannual parents' meetings are a focal point for communication. I intend to examine:

- The expectations that parents, teachers and pupils have of parents' meetings
- The content and approach to the meeting
- The extent to which these meet the expectations of the participants.

It is anticipated that this will illuminate an aspect of primary education practice and provide a model(s) of effective practice.

If you are willing for the research to progress, I have planned a study that includes:

- Group interviews with a sample of pupils to ascertain their views and involvement in parents' meetings (6 per school for main study + group of 6 for pilot stage)
- A sample of teachers and parents maintaining a brief log of their meeting that would be the focus of follow-up semi-structured interviews (6 parents and 3 teachers per school)
- Following initial data analysis, a questionnaire across the parent and teacher population of one school.

The research adopts a grounded approach as the recent literature on parents' meetings has focussed on secondary schools, limiting the degree of certainty with which one can enter this topic in the primary sector. Qualitative data would be collected from a small sample and then verified more quantitatively on the larger sample of the school population.

The research would take place over a period under 2 years; I have included a copy of my research timeline as an indication of how this would unfold. Informed consent would be sought from all participants, including the pupils. The names of the Authority, schools and participants would remain confidential; they would be referred to by codes with the researcher being the only person to hold names in order to track the participants. The research has passed a synoptic paper phase and is now being scrutinised by an Ethics Committee at Faculty level to insure that the research continues to meet the necessary standards.

I am aware that the scope of the study requires strong commitment from all involved. However, it is hoped that involvement in the study will generate healthy reflection and debate on this key aspect of practice. I have three particular schools that I would like to approach:

*Burgh  
Gateway  
Hill*

Of course I would be open to alternative suggestions. I am endeavouring to get a mix of social class as this has been identified in literature as a contributory factor to parents' expectations and behaviour at these meetings.

I would be happy to supply any further relevant information, such as the methodology section of my synoptic paper, or to meet with a representative of your Department to discuss my proposals further. Corroboration of my research intentions can be established from my supervisor, Mr. Donald Christie, Senior Lecturer (Dept of Educational Studies, Jordanhill Campus, University of Strathclyde G13 1PP).

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

9/11/01

Dear *(name of local education authority staff)*

Thank you for your prompt response to my letter seeking access to 3 primary schools in *(name of local education authority)* for research purposes. I include the forms that I was required to complete and a synopsis of my study. The synopsis expands upon information supplied in the initial letter. As stated in the letter, I would be grateful if I could be granted access to:

*Burgh*

*Gateway*

*Hill*

I see from the Authority research guidelines that a SCRO search may be necessary where access to pupils is requested. I have already been checked as I was a teacher for 13 years, with my last Authority being *(name of the local education authority)*, and I remain a fully registered member of the General Teaching Council as required for my post as lecturer in Primary Education. My supervisor for the Ed.D is Donald Christie, Senior Lecturer in Educational Studies at the Faculty of Education.

I look forward to your response and I am happy to be contacted directly if any further information can be provided to support my application.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Inglis

Work no. 0141 950 3745

# EDUCATION AUTHORITY RESPONSE

APPENDIX 3

INITIAL CONTACT LETTER, RESEARCH SYNOPSIS AND FOLLOW-UP  
LETTER TO SCHOOL

**RESEARCH: THE PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS AND RELEVANCE OF PARENTS' MEETINGS IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**STAGE 1 OF RESEARCH**

JANUARY-JUNE 2002

**PART I GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH PUPILS**

PILOT STAGE: 1 school 6 pupils video record

ACTUAL INTERVIEWS: 3 schools

SAMPLE: 6 pupils per school with 2 pupils selected from each stage of the primary school (except P.1) to ensure cross-section of opinion and experience. Pupils need not be related to parents in study. Researcher will check names selected with school management before proceeding to interviews.

CONSENT: Informed consent will be sought from the pupils by issuing the standard (*name of local education authority*) letter with covering letter from researcher outlining purpose of research and encouraging parents to discuss this with pupil before signing on their behalf. Consent from pupils will also be verbally checked prior to interview. Confidentiality will be ensured.

RECORDING: Video later to be transcribed and analysed.

TIMING: 20-30 minutes

CONTENT: *Pupils will be asked to discuss whether they already attend parents' meetings and how they would feel about the opportunity to do so. They will be asked if issues related to the meeting are discussed with them either before or after by their teacher or parent(s).*

**PART II PARENT & TEACHERS' LOGS OF PARENTS' MEETINGS**

PILOT STAGE: Informal using parents and teachers out with 3 research schools

LOGS: 3 schools

SAMPLE: 3 teachers and 6 parents per school. 2 parents of each teacher in study. Teachers would be volunteers and would sign an informed consent form. Parents would be randomly drawn and approached to ask if they will participate. They would also sign an informed consent form. Socio-economic information on the

parents would be beneficial to the study; this could be sought from the school or the parents directly – this will be discussed with the school.

PRIOR TO LOGS: Researcher will meet briefly with parents and teachers, separately, and discuss recording and any questions they may have.

LOGS: The participants will be asked to record what they did and thought about before, during and after the meeting. Prompts for recording will be:

*Before – contact method for meeting; preparation; prior thought; pupil involvement at this stage*

*During – timing; balance of communication; content; satisfaction level; pupil involvement*

*After – action taken as a result of the meeting; pupil involvement*

TIMING: parent 30 minutes max      teacher 45 minutes (time will also be dependent on the amount the participants are motivated to write)

ANALYSIS: analysis of this data will arrive at some themes for the semi-structured interview stage

### **PART III      GENERAL OBSERVATION OF PARENTS' MEETINGS**

The researcher would appreciate the opportunity to attend the parents' meeting to observe general organisation. This will not involve direct observation of individual parents' meetings.

### ***PART IV      SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS & TEACHERS***

SAMPLE: As for logs of meetings.

WHEN: Negotiable. Following data analysis of log data but prior to summer holidays.

WHERE: Researcher is willing to negotiate interviews in school or at home of participants.

CONTENT: Interview schedules will differ between teachers and parents but there will be a good degree of overlap. Questions will be set but prompts and probes will be planned individually from log entries.

Teacher interview content: *purpose of parents' meetings; expectations; factors teachers thought about prior to meeting; were all the issues covered (if not, why?); training they have received for participating in parents' meetings; future for*

*meetings; their responses to pupil involvement; whether participation in the research changed their practice in any way*

Parents interview content: *purpose; expectations; extent to which they concurred with / understood content of meeting; were all issues covered( if not, why?); ways forward; their responses to pupil involvement; whether participation in the research changed their usual approach to parents' meetings in any way*

TIMING: parents 30 minutes                      teachers 30-40 minutes

ANALYSIS: Analysis of this data will lead to the creation of a questionnaire to use on a larger sample of parents and teachers.

## **STAGE 2 OF RESEARCH**

### **PART V        PARENTS & TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE**

The researcher will use the data from Parts I-IV to construct a questionnaire that will be issued to the teachers and parents in 1 school. This will take place in the 2002-2003 school session.

**FEEDBACK TO SCHOOL**: The researcher will provide verbal feedback to the participant schools at the end of stage 1 and a written report, as required by the local authority, at the end of the research project.

**INFORMING THE POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS**: Apart from contact as outlined above, the researcher will be willing to meet with staff, Pupil Council and/or School Board to outline the study. She will also be willing to provide an insert to the School Newsletter.

Gillian Inglis  
University of Strathclyde  
Dept of Primary Education  
76 Southbrae Dr  
Jordanhill  
Glasgow G13 1PP.

[g.inglis@strath.ac.uk](mailto:g.inglis@strath.ac.uk)

24/1/02

Dear (*name of head teacher*)

Thank you for sending on the information that I requested. Please convey my gratitude to the staff that volunteered to participate in the study. It is my intention to start with the group pupil interviews and I have included a list of the pupils that I have selected; I would appreciate if you could alert me to any pupils for whom this would not be a suitable experience, for example, if it would cause undue stress. Providing the list is suitable, I would be grateful if the enclosed letters could be sent home to the parents to seek their permission. I have included a master copy of the letter for your reference purposes and to be used if a substitute has to be found for a participant. The letters ask the parents to respond by 4<sup>th</sup> February. Please let me know if any child cannot take part in the discussion.

I would like to suggest dates for the discussions as follows:

PILOT INTERVIEW Friday 8<sup>th</sup> February 9.30am

INTERVIEW Monday 18<sup>th</sup> February 1.30pm

Again, please let me know if these dates are not suitable. I will arrive about half an hour before the interview is due to start to allow me to set up the recording equipment. I would appreciate if a private space could be set aside for the interview to take place and if arrangements could be made to release the pupils from class for half an hour.

On my first visit, I offered to speak to the Pupil Council or School Board or to insert an item in the school newsletter to inform people about my study. I am willing to fulfil this if you want to contact me to make any such arrangements.

Thank you again for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Inglis

APPENDIX 4

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR PUPIL INTERVIEWS

23/01/02

Dear parent

I am a lecturer in the Department of Primary Education at Strathclyde University. I would like to ask permission for your child to participate in a research study as part of a study for my Doctor of Education degree.

The purpose of the research is to look at the effectiveness of parents' meetings (also referred to as parents' evenings) and I will be discussing this topic with a selection of pupils, parents and teachers in several schools. I will be interviewing groups of children to find out about their views on parents' meetings.

The interview will take place within the next month and your child will be part of a group of 6 children from different classes that will take part in the discussion. The interview will take place in the school building during the school day and will last less than 30 minutes to minimise any disruption to your child's education. The interview will be videotaped and later transcribed into written form. Your child may request to view the video, if desired. The research findings will be reported in a doctoral thesis but the names of the children and the school will not be used; confidentiality will be assured. This presents an opportunity for pupils to participate in a broader discussion about the experience of parents' meetings. Care will be taken to ensure that this is a positive and interesting experience for your child

Permission has been granted from *name of education authority* and the head teacher to research within the school. I would be grateful if you could discuss participating in the study with your child. Please sign and return the attached slip to the head teacher by 4<sup>th</sup> February 2002 if you and your child agree to his/her participation. I will also check with the children before the interview if they want to take part and they remain free to withdraw at any time.

I can be contacted to answer any questions at 0141 950 3745 (work) or through my research supervisor, Donald Christie, Senior Lecturer (0141 950 3360).

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Inglis

**REPLY TO RESEARCH INTERVIEW REQUEST**

**RESEARCHER:** Gillian Inglis

**STUDY:** Parents' meetings

I have discussed participation in the group interview with my child.

**PLEASE TICK YOUR CHOICE**

I **give** permission for my child to take part.

I **do not give** permission for my child to take part.

Name of child-----.

SIGNED BY PARENT/GUARDIAN -----

DATE-----

Please return this slip to the head teacher by 4<sup>th</sup> February 2002

Thank you

APPENDIX 5

PUPIL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PRIOR TO INTERVIEW:

- ❖ Collect informed consent forms
- ❖ Locate room and plug point
- ❖ Display 'Do not enter' sign
- ❖ Arrange furniture
- ❖ Set-up video camera and check. Set for automatic.
- ❖ Put game cards, outline, pad & pen in place
- ❖ Collect children

PREAMBLE:

- ❖ Who am I? ( informal 1<sup>st</sup> name)
- ❖ Purpose of research and what will happen during group interview
- ❖ Explain confidentiality
- ❖ Reassure children that they do not have to supply an answer unless they feel happy and confident to do so
- ❖ Check consent and method of recording – explain what will happen to the video
- ❖ Ask the children if they have any questions Labels for names

BUILD RAPPORT WITH GROUP:

- ❖ Ask children to introduce themselves
- ❖ Play 'Taboo' type game around table. No need to put hands up – can speak freely.



Link into interview

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### INTRODUCTION

We are going to discuss when your parent comes to school to discuss your work with the teacher.

Some people call these parents' evenings or parents' meetings. What do you call these?

*(Go round group)*

### DEVELOPMENT

**Q1: Have you ever been at a parents' meeting?**

*(Alter vocabulary suitably)*

Prompt: go round group

R: 'YES'

R: 'NO'

Probe:

What happened at the meeting?

What do you think happens at a meeting?

What did you do during the meeting?

X check: how do you know?

**Q2: Did anyone discuss the meeting with you before it took place?**

Prompt: A teacher or parent? A friend?

R: 'YES'

R: 'NO'

Probe:

What did they discuss with you?

Would you have liked someone to discuss it with you?

**Q3: Did anyone discuss the meeting with you after it took place?**

Prompt: A teacher or parent? A friend?

Did anyone tell you what happened?

R: 'YES'

Probe:

What did they discuss with you?

R: 'NO'

Would you have liked them to discuss what was said with you?

**Q4: Would you like to go to your parents' meeting and take part?**

Prompt: Go round group

R: 'YES'

Probe:

What do you think you would be able to add to the meeting?

R: 'NO'

Why not?

**CONCLUSION**

*We are almost at the end of the interview: is there anything else you would like to say about parents' meetings?*

Prompt:

Are there any changes you would like the school to make to the meetings?

## EVALUATION

Now that you have taken part in the interview – what do you think about taking part in a research project?

Probe: has it made you think about parents' meetings differently?

**Did you find any of the questions difficult to answer?**

R: 'YES'

Probe: why was that?

Is there anything you would like to ask me or say about the interview?

*Thank participants for taking part and organise safe return to class.*

*(If children want to watch video, organise with school.)*

## MATERIALS:

- ❖ List of children's names and classes
- ❖ Children's badges ( spare stickers)
- ❖ 'Do not disturb' sign
- ❖ tripod
- ❖ video camera
- ❖ video tape ( & spare)
- ❖ Dictaphone ( for backup)
- ❖ Pad & pen
- ❖ Game
- ❖ Blutac
- ❖ Extension cable

## GENERAL PROMPTS (Robson, 2001, p.234)

- ❖ Anything more?
  - ❖ Could you go over that again?
  - ❖ Mhmm
  - ❖ Silence
  - ❖ Glance
- Repeat back section from interview

APPENDIX 6  
OBSERVATION SCHEDULE HEADINGS

## **SCHOOL OBSERVATION**

6.30-6.50 G  
6.50-7.10 Obs 1  
7.10-7.20 W  
7.20-7.30 G  
7.30-7.50 Obs 2  
7.50-8 W  
8-8.10 G  
8.10-8.30 Obs3  
8.30-8.40 W  
8.40-9 G

G= general observation  
Obs= Observation of  
target classes  
W=write up notes

## **INFORMATION**

### **General**

Inside/outside  
Welcome sign? List?  
Children's work?

### **Parents**

What are they doing?  
Timings  
Parent patterns  
(e.g. pairs)

**Children?**

**Other?**

APPENDIX 7

EXCERPT FROM THE RESEARCHER'S REFLECTIVE DIARY.

I couldn't cover everything that emerged from the interviews so I've mainly focused on SATISFACTION, PURPOSE – ROLES, ORGANISATION and PUPIL PARTICIPATION.

1.1 SATISFACTION RATING: Although the satisfaction can be inferred from later answers in the questionnaire, I've decided to use it here as:

- It helps to tune the parents' thinking into the subject of the questionnaire
- People in the log-interview stage commented that it really made them think about a personal attitude to meetings rather than just accepting what they get

Use tick format to be consistent in the questionnaire

1.2 PREPARATION: An attitude statement measures how prepared people feel but I'd still like to know what people do. I initially had a list of the codes from the interviews but realised this would be confusing as not all schools give a report out at interview 1. Will use existing codes to group open data that I get back.

1.3 TEACHER QUALITIES: Interested in this area as it will be helpful when communicating work to teachers and ITE student i.e. what interpersonal skills do they need to think about when conducting a meeting. Use my codes but left it open for any others. Found it hard to be succinct about what 'being sociable' is. Wonder if this would be better as a ranking question as parents may just tick every box, making the information limited. However, concerned that I may introduce too many different formats in the one questionnaire.

1.4 PARENT ROLES: Added in looking at child's work as access to work can be an issue. Other headings come from my codes. I've tried to express these in the person of the parent to keep them focused on their opinions and attitudes. Included option for anything that comes-up that I haven't covered, so far.

1.5 TEACHER ROLES: Added in that teacher has prepared notes as it came up in the interviews and could also be useful when trying to make this pragmatic for the profession. Other headings from my codes.

1.6 ACTION BASED ON THE MEETING: left this open and I will use existing codes to code this afterwards – danger in a list of making suggestions to people that they should have taken action.

1.7 ATTITUDES: This covers satisfaction, purpose and organisation. Tried to achieve a mix of positive and negative statements as recommended in Robson. Found that parents were not that concise so this was difficult. I had to alter some statements slightly as they were context dependent. Inserted last statement on timing myself as parents tended to talk in the specifics of their site (.e.g. Gateway has a very early meeting 1, Burgh has a late meeting 2).

## Sources of statements:

1. *They told me everything I wanted to know* **BP1A (p1) SATIS-INFO**
2. *We discussed any opinions that I put forward* **GP1B (p1) SATIS-P VIEWS**
3. *I felt they never had a good thing to say* **GP1A (p3) SATIS-PROGRESS**
4. *The teacher described what I would describe about the child* **BP1B (p1) SATIS-P-CT AGREE**
5. *Big issues are dealt with during the year but smaller ones can be pushed aside for parents' meeting* **HP3A (p4) SATIS-TIMELINESS**
6. *I've really got a good idea what's coming* **BP1B (p9) SATIS- P PREP**
7. *I generally have my own agenda* **HP3A (p3) PURP- P INFO**
8. *It was a bit of a rush* **HP1B (p5) ORG-TIME**
9. *It should be the teacher leading the conversation* **HP1B (p2) PURP- T INFO**
10. *It's a really good way to get a personal attachment to the teacher* **HP3B (p7) PURP-SOC LINK**
11. *I felt there could be a bit more privacy* **GP1A (p1) ORG-CONFID**
12. *The timing of the meeting in the year was useful. My statement* **ORG-TIMING**

To avoid the section becoming too long, I did not put in a statement on PURP-P-CT CON as I felt this could be inferred from SATIS- P-CT AGREE. Also did not put in statement on PUR-SUPP C as could be inferred from roles section. Selected statements from stronger responses from interviews.

Wondered if I should take out 'neutral' section on questionnaire for, although Robson shows this, he also advises avoiding this to force a response.

1.8 CHILD PARTICIPATION: Tried to find a way to be concise in this section. Think I have included too many statements and could omit '*Children's attendance at the parents' meetings will depend on the issues being discussed*'. Included '*undecided*' as parents fell into this category in the interviews.

1.9 OPEN QUESTION: Included a 'sweeper' in case there is any burning issue that the parent feels I haven't allowed them to say. Can use existing codes for this.

2 PERSONAL INFORMATION: Asked for stage of children as this has sometimes affected people's views and expectations in the interviews. Kept to asking for occupation as I think it's less problematic but will allow me to look at the social composition of the respondents.(As in Crozier)

CONCLUSION: Reiterated some letter information in case these become separated.

*Put in a section for coding.*

*Plan to use good quality paper.*

*Have covering letter.*

*Already faxed/written to schools for information.*

*Have names of some students who will do pilot for me – mainly B.Ed.1s and some B.Ed.4s.*

APPENDIX 8

TEACHER DIARY– Actual logs were created by reducing pages to a A5 booklet.



Research Study: Parents' meetings

Participant code

Log for interviews with:

**INTERVIEW 1**

Parent/guardian of

**INTERVIEW 2**

Parent/guardian of

*You should read the instruction on page 2 before writing in the log.*

### **Instructions for completing log**

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The following instructions should help you complete the log: if you have any questions, please contact the researcher at:*

*Gillian Inglis  
Department of Primary Education  
University of Strathclyde 0141 950 3745*

*The log refers to parents' meetings, also known as parents' nights or evenings. It is laid-out in 3 sections:*

- 1. Before the meetings – to be recorded beforehand e.g. the day before*
- 2. Record of the meetings – to be recorded as soon after the meetings, as possible. This should describe what happened at the meetings.*
- 3. After the meetings – this section allows you to record anything that you did or thought about afterwards.*

*Each section has questions to help guide your writing. If you want to write more, you are welcome to use blank pages or to attach further sheets of paper. The comments made should only relate to the parent-teacher meetings specified on the front cover. Section 2 asks you to record comments about meetings 1 & 2 separately.*

*The contents of this log will remain confidential (as outlined in my letter) and will be used towards a follow-up interview with yourself.*

*The log should be completed by Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2002. I would be grateful if you could return it in the SAE provided.*

**Part 1 :BEFORE THE MEETINGS**

*How was contact made to organise the parents' meetings?*

*What did you do to prepare for the meetings?*

*Did you organise the environment for the meetings in any way?*

*Did you discuss the meetings with either child at this stage?*

please tick  
response

Yes

No


*If 'yes', what did you discuss?*

**Part 2 :RECORD OF MEETINGS**

*Where did the meetings take place?*

**RECORD OF MEETING 1**

*Estimate the duration of the meeting*

***Meeting 1***

*mins*

*Describe the content of **meeting 1** below.*

*RECORD OF MEETING 1 ( continued)*

*Was the child involved at meeting 1?*

please tick  
response

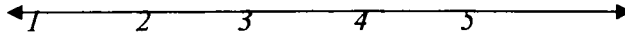
YES

NO


*Rate below the amount of contribution you made to meeting 1.*

*Low*

*High*

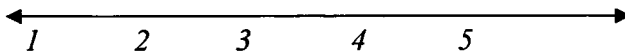


Circle the number that describes your response.

*Rate below your level of satisfaction with the experience of parents' meeting 1.*

*Dissatisfied*

*Satisfied*



Circle the number that describes your response.

*Were there any issues that you had wanted to discuss but were unable to at meeting 1?*

RECORD OF MEETING 2

*Estimate the duration of the meeting*

**Meeting 2**

	<i>mins</i>
--	-------------

*Describe the content of meeting 2 below.*

RECORD OF MEETING 2 (continued)

Was the child involved at **meeting 2**?

please tick  
response

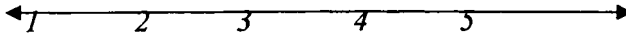
YES

NO


Rate below the amount of contribution you made to **meeting 2**.

Low

High

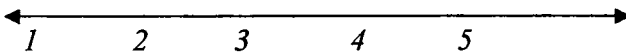


Circle the number that describes your response.

Rate below your level of satisfaction with the experience of parents' **meeting 2**.

Dissatisfied

Satisfied



Circle the number that describes your response.

Were there any issues that you had wanted to discuss but were unable to at **meeting 2**?

**Part 3: AFTER THE MEETINGS**

If your response to any of the following questions is 'yes', please explain your answer further.

*Did you think further about the meetings?*

please tick  
response

YES  
NO


*Did you take any action as a result of the meetings?*

please tick  
response

YES  
NO


*Did you discuss the meetings with either child after they took place?*

please tick  
response

YES  
NO


***Thank you for completing this log.***

***Please check over the sections to ensure that all parts have been completed.***

## APPENDIX 9

PARENT DIARY – Actual logs were created by reducing pages in to a A5 booklet.



Research Study: Parents' meetings

Participant code

Log for interview between:

Parent/guardian of

Please enter date & time of meeting:

*You should read the instruction on page 2 before writing in the log.*

### **Instructions for completing log**

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The following instructions should help you complete the log: if you have any questions, please contact the researcher at:*

*Gillian Inglis  
Department of Primary Education  
University of Strathclyde 0141 950 3745*

*The log refers to parents' meetings (also known as parents' nights or evenings). It is laid-out in 3 sections:*

- 1. Before the meeting – to be recorded beforehand e.g. the day before*
- 2. Record of the meeting – to be recorded as soon after the meeting, as possible. This should describe what happened at the meeting.*
- 3. After the meeting – this section allows you to record anything that you did or thought about afterwards.*

*Each section has questions to help guide your writing. If you want to write more, you are welcome to use blank pages or attach further sheets of paper. The comments made should only relate to the parent-teacher meeting specified on the front cover.*

*The contents of this log will remain confidential (as outlined in my letter) and will be used towards a follow-up interview with yourself.*

*The log should be completed by Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2002. I would be grateful if you could return it in the SAE provided.*

**Part 1 :BEFORE THE MEETING**

*How was contact made to organise the parents' meeting?*

*What did you do to prepare for the meeting? ( e.g. what did you think about in relation to the meeting?)*

*Did you discuss the meeting with your child at this stage?*

please tick  
response

Yes

No

*If 'yes', what did you discuss?*

**Part 2 :RECORD OF MEETING**

*Where did the meeting take place?*

*Estimate duration of meeting?*

*Minutes*

*Describe the content of the meeting below.*

*RECORD OF MEETING ( continued)*

*Was your child involved at the meeting?*

please tick

YES

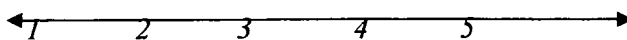
response

NO


*Rate below the amount of contribution you made to the meeting.*

*Low*

*High*

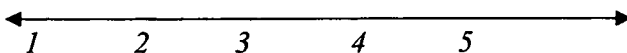


Circle the number that describes your response.

*Rate below your level of satisfaction with the experience of this parents' meeting.*

*Dissatisfied*

*Satisfied*



Circle the number that describes your response.

*Were there any issues that you had wanted to discuss but were unable to at the meeting?*

**Part 3: AFTER THE MEETING**

If your response to any of the following questions is 'yes', please explain your answer further.

*Did you think further about the meeting?*

please tick  
response

YES

NO


*Did you take any action as a result of the meeting?*

please tick  
response

YES

NO


*Did you discuss the meeting with your child after it took place?*

please tick  
response

YES

NO


*Finally, was this meeting typical of you experience of parents' meetings?*

please tick  
response

YES

NO


If you ticked 'no', please explain how this meeting differed.

*Thank you for completing this log.*

*Please check over the sections to ensure that all parts have been completed.*

*The log should be completed by Mon 18<sup>th</sup> March 2002 and returned immediately afterwards in SAE to:*

*Gillian Inglis  
Department of Primary Education  
University of Strathclyde  
76 Southbrae Drive  
Jordanhill  
G13 1PP.*

APPENDIX 10

LETTER TO HEAD TEACHER ON PARENT AND TEACHER SELECTION

26/2/02

Dear *head teacher*

Thank you for your continued co-operation with my research study. I am about to commence the next stage, which involves parents and teachers keeping a log of their meeting. I have selected a sample of parents from the classes of the teachers who have volunteered their participation as follows:

<i>P.3 GT1</i>	<i>GP1A</i>
	<i>GP1B</i>
<i>P.5 GT2</i>	<i>GP2A</i>
	<i>GP2B</i>
<i>P.7 GT3</i>	<i>GP3A</i>
	<i>GP3B</i>

I would be grateful if you could have the enclosed letters distributed to request informed consent to participate. Again, I have asked the participants to return the slips to your office by Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2002. Please let me know if anyone declines to take part; I have included a master copy of each letter for your reference and to be used in the case of a substitute having to be sought.

I will telephone to check participation and to arrange a possible time when I can come to the school to make myself available to answer questions from participants and issue the logs. I appreciate that a time before/after school hours may be more convenient.

I would also be grateful if I could attend the parents' meeting on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March for general observation: I would not expect to directly observe any parent-teacher meetings.

Thank you in anticipation of your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Inglis

APPENDIX 11

PARENTS AND TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT LETTERS

5/3/02

Dear Parent

I am a lecturer in the Department of Primary Education at Strathclyde University. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study as part of a study for my Doctoral degree.

The purpose of the research is to examine the effectiveness of parents' meetings (also referred to as parents' evenings). I have already completed interviews with groups of pupils from (*name of school*). (*Name of teacher*), the teacher of your child has volunteered to participate in the study and I am contacting you as a parent of one of her pupils to request your assistance.

The study would involve 1 parent in your household who will attend the forthcoming parents' meetings on 23 & 24 April 2002. It will involve keeping a log sheet about the meeting that you will receive beforehand. Completion should take no more than 30 minutes with the contents remaining confidential. The log will form the basis of a follow-up interview with myself. This interview would be arranged at the convenience of yourself and would be taped, later to be transcribed. The length of the log and interview will be dependant upon your input. The findings will be reported in a doctoral thesis but neither you or your child's name nor the identity of the school will be used; you are welcome to request a copy of the interview transcript. This presents an opportunity for you to participate in a broader discussion about your experience of parents' meetings.

Permission has been granted from (*Name of local education authority*) and the head teacher to research within the school. Please sign and return the attached form to indicate your willingness to take part. The slip should be returned to the head teacher's office by Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2002. You remain free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I can be contacted to answer any questions at 0141 950 3745 (work) or through my research supervisor, Donald Christie, Senior Lecturer ( 0141 950 3360).

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Inglis

**REPLY TO RESEARCH REQUEST**

**RESEARCHER:** Gillian Inglis

**STUDY:** Parents' meetings

I have read the accompanying letter.

**PLEASE TICK YOUR CHOICE**

I **am willing** to take part in the study.

I **am not willing** to take part in the study.

Name of parent/guardian who will participate-----.

Relationship to pupil named in letter-----  
(mother, father , other)

Signed by parent/guardian-----

date-----

Contact telephone number -----  
(This information will not be passed to others or used for any purpose other than the study outlined in the letter.)

**Please return this slip to the head teacher by 14<sup>th</sup> March 2002**

Thank you

26/2/02

Dear *(teacher's name)*

I am a lecturer in the Department of Primary Education at Strathclyde University. I am writing to thank you for volunteering to participate in my study of parents' meetings.

The study involves you keeping a log related to 2 of your parent-teacher interviews during the forthcoming meetings on 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> March 2002. I will contact you soon with the log sheets and the names of the 2 parents involved. Completion should take less than 45 minutes with the contents remaining confidential. The log will form the basis of a follow-up interview with myself. This interview would be arranged at the convenience of yourself and would be taped, later to be transcribed. The length of the log and interview will be dependant upon your input. The findings will be reported in a doctoral thesis but neither your name or the school's will be identified; you are welcome to request a copy of the interview transcript. This presents an opportunity for you to participate in a broader discussion about your experience of parents' meetings.

I am aware that you have already been approached by your head teacher and have consented to take part in the study. I would be grateful if you could sign and return the attached form to indicate that you are still willing to take part. The slip should be returned to the head teacher's office by Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2002. You remain free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I can be contacted to answer any questions at 0141 950 3745 (work) or through my research supervisor, Donald Christie, Senior Lecturer ( 0141 950 3360).

Thank you for your continued co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Inglis

**REPLY TO RESEARCH REQUEST**

**RESEARCHER:** Gillian Inglis

**STUDY:** Parents' meetings

I have read the accompanying letter.

**PLEASE TICK YOUR CHOICE**

I **am willing** to take part in the study.

I **am not willing** to take part in the study.

Name of teacher-----

Class of teacher-----

School-----

Date-----

Contact telephone number -----

*(This information will not be passed to others or used for any use other than the study outlined in the letter.)*

**Please return this slip to the head teacher by 4<sup>th</sup> March 2002**

Thank you

APPENDIX 12

PARENT AND TEACHER INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT LETTER

2/8/02

Dear

May I thank you again for participating in the research project on parents' meetings. I have included a copy of the transcript of our interview for your record. Please take time to read over it to check it is a fair reflection of our conversation. There are times when the recording may not have been clear, therefore, the transcript will read 'tape unclear'. I can be contacted if you feel any part of the transcript is not an accurate reflection of the interview or if you can recall any parts where the transcript says the tape is unclear. I have anonymised the transcripts to conceal the identity of the participants and these will be further coded at the writing stage to ensure that the adults, pupils and school are not identified.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Inglis (0141 950 3745)

APPENDIX 13

PARENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

BEFORE INTERVIEW

- Check over parent's log & make notes on interview sheet for prompts & probes
- Photocopy diary so that parent can refer to a copy
- Telephone to arrange interview
- Double-check recording equipment

**PREAMBLE**

- Reintroduce self
- Reiterate purpose of research and link between log-interview
- State level of confidentiality
- Explain method of recording and how this will be used
- Check consent
- Ask if there are any questions

**INTRODUCTION**

Q1 I would like to discuss your recent visit to the school to discuss (*child's name*) work with the teacher. Would you normally refer to this as a parents' meeting?

PROMPT: Do you call this a parents' night or a parents' evening?

Q2 How did you feel that the meeting went?

PROMPT: Can you tell me more?

**DEVELOPMENT**

Q3 PROMPT: REFER TO MEETING SATISFACTION LEVEL IN LOG.

Do you still feel the same level of satisfaction?

PROBE: 'NO' => why?

' YES' => can you identify any particular aspects of the meeting that made you satisfied?

Q4 To what extent did you agree with the report from the teacher?

PROBE: Was it what you expected?

Q5 Did the teacher's input seem clear or did you feel that some parts needed further explanation?

PROBE: Why do you think that was the case?

Q6 PROMPT: OUTLINE ANY ISSUES ARISING FROM MEETING FROM LOG

further?

PROBE: 'NO'=> /  
'YES' => What are these?

Q7 PROMPT: REFER TO LOG RATING ON HOW TYPICAL MEETING WAS

'TYPICAL' => what experiences have you had at parents' meetings that were less typical?

'NOT TYPICAL' => how was this meeting different from your other experiences of parents' meetings?

Q8 What purpose do you feel that these meetings fulfil?

Q9 What do you expect to be the roles of the teacher and yourself at the meeting?

PROMPT: REFER TO LOG RATING FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION

PROBE: Are you satisfied with the amount that you were able to participate in the meeting?

PROBE: 'NO' => what would you have liked to be able to say or do?  
'YES' => /

Q10 Would you like your child to be present to participate at the meeting?

PROBE: 'NO' => Why not?  
'YES' => what role do you see for him/her?

Q11 Are you satisfied with parents' meetings in their current format?

PROBE: 'YES' / 'NO'  
=> do you feel the time is adequate?  
=> are you satisfied with when they occur in the year?  
=> are you satisfied with the level of confidentiality?  
=> PROMPT: DESCRIBE GENERAL ORGANISATION  
OBSERVED: Would you like to see any aspect of the organisation changed?  
=> do you see any other changes that you would like to see to parents' meetings?

**CONCLUSION**

Q12 We are almost at the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to add about parents' meetings?

**EVALUATION/REFLECTION**

Q13 Do you feel that participating in this research project has changed your thinking regarding parents' meetings?

PROBE: 'NO' => /

'YES' => In what way?

**THANK PARTICIPANT & DRAW INTERVIEW TO A CONCLUSION.**

APPENDIX 14  
TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**GILLIAN INGLISTOPIC: PARENTS' MEETINGS**  
**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHER PARTICIPANT CODE**

**BEFORE INTERVIEW**

- Check over the parent's log & make notes on interview sheet for prompts & probes
- Photocopy diary so that teacher can refer to a copy
- Telephone to arrange interview through school
- Double-check recording equipment

**PREAMBLE**

- Reintroduce self
- Reiterate purpose of research and link between log-interview
- State level of confidentiality
- Explain method of recording and how this will be used
- Check consent
- Ask if there are any questions

**INTRODUCTION**

Q1 I would like to discuss the recent meetings you had with parents to discuss pupil progress, in particular, the meetings related to (*name of parent-pupil*)

1

2

Would you normally refer to this as a parents' meeting?

PROMPT: Do you call this a parents' night or a parents' evening?

Q2 How did you feel that these 2 meetings went?

**DEVELOPMENT**

Q3 PROMPT: SPECIFY PARENT-TEACHER MEETING. REFER TO MEETING SATISFACTION LEVEL IN LOG.

1

Do you still feel the same level of satisfaction with the experience of that parents' meeting?

PROBE: 'NO' => why?

'YES' => can you identify any particular aspects of the meeting that made you satisfied?

Q4 PROMPT: SPECIFY PARENT-TEACHER MEETING. OUTLINE ANY ISSUES ARISING FROM MEETING IN LOG

Are there any issues arising from the meeting that you have considered further?

PROBE: 'NO'=> /

'YES' => What are these?

REPEAT Q3&4 FOR OTHER PARENT-TEACHER MEETING.

Q3 PROMPT: SPECIFY PARENT-TEACHER MEETING. REFER TO MEETING SATISFACTION LEVEL IN LOG.

2

Do you still feel the same level of satisfaction with the experience of that parents' meeting?

PROBE: 'NO' => why?

' YES' => can you identify any particular aspects of the meeting that made you satisfied?

Q4 PROMPT: SPECIFY PARENT-TEACHER MEETING. OUTLINE ANY ISSUES ARISING FROM MEETING IN LOG

Are there any issues arising from the meeting that you have considered further?

PROBE: 'NO'=> /

'YES' => What are these?

Q5 Would you have described these 2 meetings as 'typical' of your experience of parent-teacher meetings?

PROBE: 'NO' => how were these meetings different from a typical meeting?

'YES' => what experiences have you had at parents' meetings that were less typical?

Q6 What purpose do you feel that these meetings fulfil?

Q7 What do you expect to be the roles of the parent and yourself at the meeting?

PROMPT: REFER TO LOG RATING FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION IN THE 2 MEETINGS

1

2

PROBE I: Are you satisfied with the amount that you were able to contribute during the meeting?

PROBE Ia: 'NO' => what would you have liked to be able to say or do?  
'YES' => /

PROBE II: Are you satisfied with the amount that the parents contributed during the meetings?

PROBE IIa: 'NO' => What would you have liked them to do/say?  
'YES' => What was the nature of that contribution?

Q8 Are there particular strategies you use to conduct the meeting?

PROMPT: REFER TO NOTES FROM LOG

Q10 Would you be willing for pupils to be present to participate at the meeting?

PROBE: 'NO' => Why not?

'YES' => what role do you see for him/her?

PROBE: How would you feel about pupil participation?

Q11 Are you satisfied with parents' meetings in their current format?

PROBE: 'YES' / 'NO'

=> do you feel the time is adequate?

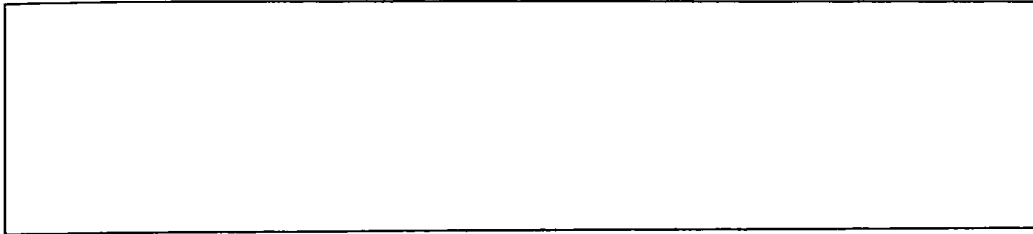
=> are you satisfied with when they occur in the year?

=> are you satisfied with the level of confidentiality?

=>PROMPT: DESCRIBE GENERAL ORGANISATION

OBSERVED: Would you like to see any aspect of the organisation changed?

=> do you see any other changes that you would like to see to parents' meetings?



CONCLUSION

Q12 We are almost at the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to add about parents' meetings?

Q13 Do you feel that participating in this research project has changed your thinking regarding parents' meetings?

PROBE: 'NO' => /

'YES' => In what way?

THANK PARTICIPANT & DRAW INTERVIEW TO A CONCLUSION.

APPENDIX 15  
EXAMPLE OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

**Pre-coding overview**

BP1B is a young mother with four children: two boys are at Burgh primary school; one girl is in nursery; and one boy is a toddler in the house with the mother.

Parent (P) rated satisfaction at 5. She relates this to:

- 1) Class teacher (CT) honesty
- 2) Having the P questions answered
- 3) CT knowledge of the individual child that matches the P perception of the child
- 4) CT previously taught her older son
- 5) CT approachable out with parents' meetings

Point III led the P to agree with the verbal report. She found the input clear although she asked the CT to suggest ways that she could support her child's learning at home.

Issues discussed included:

- 1) Home->school behaviour
- 2) Confidence
- 3) Areas of strength and weakness in the curriculum
- 4) Health difficulties ( asthma)

P felt prepared for the parents' meeting (PM) as she received a report card beforehand: this allowed her identify areas that she wanted to find-out more about. This PM was typical of her experience and she expressed general satisfaction with the level of CT knowledge of her children. She cited one occasion where CT illness had led to her older child not having a PM.

The P perceives the purpose of PM being to:

- 1) Find out if P-CT views of the child match
- 2) To assess whether the CT likes her child (linked to SATIS point 1 above)
- 3) To find out how P can support child's learning
- 4) To ascertain progress: cognitive ( refers to 5-14 levels); behaviour/social; physical (health)

The P perceives her role at PM being:

- 1) To 'support the school'
- 2) Be honest
- 3) Inform the CT regarding home information
- 4) Seek ways to help her child

The CT role is:

- 1) Give a realistic view of the child
- 2) Give P ideas to support the child
- 3) Be prepared for PM

4) Be supportive and open- 'I think it's a partnership'

The P does not want the child present at PM. She believes that the child may not behave and that the information may cause the child to worry/ be of a sensitive nature (P refers to bullying episode for her older child).

P satisfied with the time she was given on the belief that additional time would be given out with the PM if there was a 'big concern'/ sensitive issue. The timing was acceptable as PM1 lets P know if the child has settled: P felt that CT input showed good knowledge of the child at PM1. P identifies flaws in lack of privacy at PM. She would not discuss confidential matters in this open setting; she feels it may discourage parents from exploring what the CT is saying; and it may make PM briefer as P aware of other parents waiting. She cites a model of practice from her own childhood with individual meetings in the classroom with the parents having the opportunity to view the work. P would like more access to her child's work: the work she has viewed has been as a result of her presence in the school for other matters. She is aware of inconsistency between teachers. P refers to security procedures as the reason for limited access to classrooms. P sees access to work as an opportunity to make a timely intervention where a child needs support.

P raises issue of parents who do not attend PMs. She cannot understand this as she sees her role as proactive in gathering information to give timely support so that her children's education does not suffer. P considers whether lack of attendance is due to laziness or a lack of interest as children grow older.

The process of the research project has made P consider her satisfaction with the existing model.

**BURGH PARENT INTERVIEW BP1B 12/6/02**  
**Coding excerpt**

INTERVIEWER: It's just a chance, as I said, to discuss the recent visit you had to the

school to discuss how – how (child) was getting on with the teacher. Would you normally call it a parents' meeting or do you call it something like a parents' night or a parents' evening?

TERM-PN

BP1B: Probably parents' night, me and my friends say... even though it's usually in the afternoon, I don't know why we say parents' night then.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you feel this time that the parents' night had gone?

BP1B: Oh good. I think she summed him up very well (toddler picks up kitten and talks – parent responds).

INTERVIEWER: So you thought things had gone well. If I could maybe talk about your log. On a rating of 1 to 5, you said your satisfaction level was a 5.

BP1B: Ah ha.

INTERVIEWER: Do you still feel you were highly satisfied?

BP1B: Mm hm.

INTERVIEWER: Can you identify any particular aspects of the meeting that made you satisfied?

BP1B: She just in her talking (toddler talks – parent responds) talking about (child2), she knew him. I knew she'd really got to know him and I was pleased at that. She summed him up so well. She was very honest, ehm, and answered every question that I needed answered, anything I wasn't sure about the best way of dealing. He's having a wee bit of a problem with his confidence. She was fantastic and she just knew him and I came away from the meeting feeling, 'Oh, she's really summed him up right.' You know, I came away with a smirk on my face some of the... 'he's like a toad' things. Just she – I was pleased. She really did (toddler speaks) she's very honest. I like her. So, I was happy with it. Ah ha.

SATIS- quali  
of CT: know  
C, honest

SATIS: info

CONTENT: P  
seeks advice

INTERVIEWER: When you say she summed him up well (toddler speaks – parents responds). What was it that you felt about what she said that you felt that she knew your child very well?

BP1B: (child's) a character. He's very ,ehm, very – he's a lovely wee boy but he's a cheeky wee boy, sort of, if he can get away with it, he'll try .He just ... it would be easy to just sit there and tell me – it would be easy for me to sit with

SATIS: quali  
of CT – honest

rose-coloured glasses on. It'd be easy for the teacher to say - just pick-out all the good bits but she would tell me, which I knew myself, he can be moody he can feel that you're attacking him (parent talks to toddler) and, ehm, she described his whole personality. The things I can see at home when he can throw a wobbly, she – she was describing what I would describe in – in the same way I would describe it. She was very ... a good understanding of what made him tick, you know. She was, you know, just, ehm, at the point she was saying, 'I really, really, really like him. He's got that charm because, if I didn't, she said, 'I'd really hate him.' That was very honest because a lot of teachers, I think, would be frightened to say that but I don't know if I'm very honest back with her that she knows I know he's not an angel and I know he can be mischievous. He doesn't start anything, I was told, but he can't see it go by without having then to get in the middle of it all. She was very honest in telling me that. She didn't just skim past any of that. That makes – that's (child's) character. It brought a wee smile even though it might not be the thing you've to smile about. She's obviously – knows he's not a nasty child, you know, she'll say, like, 'Just as he thinks he's going to be Golden Child of the week, he did something and it's very frustrating' and you think, 'Right.' She'll describe what he's like and then she says he gets punished but there's that, you look back and you think, 'Oh, (child 2)', the face he's pulling or how upset, and how his consciousness is kicking-in now. She got : really good summing-up, I felt.

SATIS: P-CT  
agree

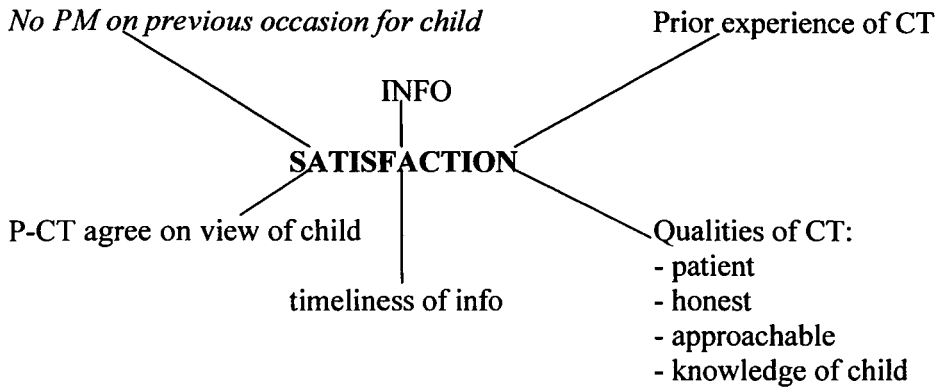
SATIS: quali  
of CT- know C

SATIS: quali  
of CT: honest

SATIS: P-CT  
agree

SATIS: quali  
of CT- honest,  
know C

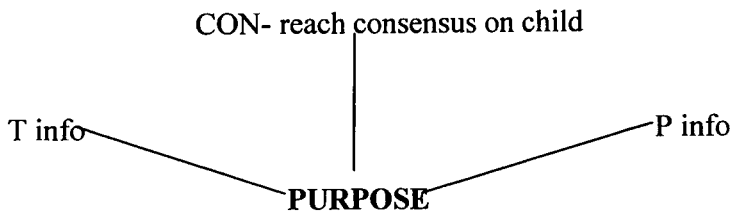
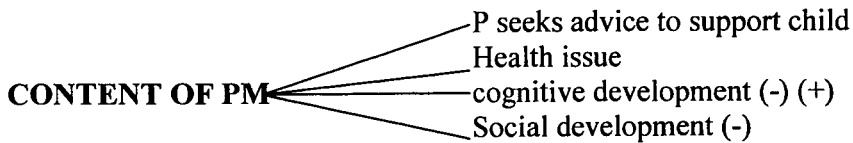
TERM: PN (not consistently applied)

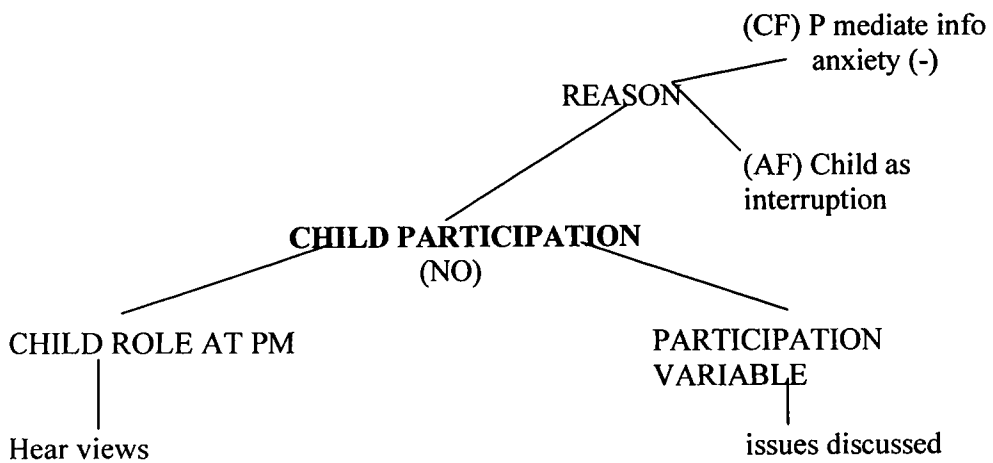
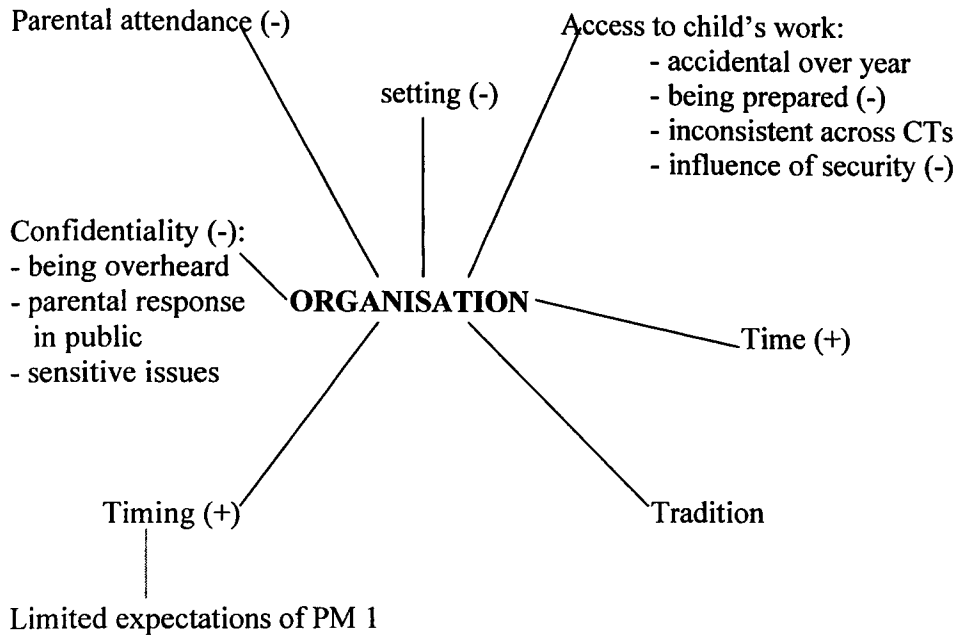


**P PREPARATION:**

- Report received beforehand
  - P own observation of child at home
- (related code of ORG: access to work (-) -> P PREP: C work (-)) added 17/10/02

**CT INPUT :** clear





**REFLECTION ON RESEARCH PROCESS: Y**

- Evaluate process (-) (access to work issue)
- Evaluate experiences (+) (school & CTs)

APPENDIX 16

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR PARENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

16/12/02

Dear Parent

I am a lecturer in the Department of Primary Education at Strathclyde University who has been working with *(name of school)* on a research project. I am writing to invite you to participate in this research study.

The purpose of the research is to examine the effectiveness of parents' meetings (also referred to as parents' evenings). I have completed interviews with a small group of parents, teachers and pupils at your school and I am asking you to complete a brief questionnaire based on some of this information.

The questionnaire requires one parent in the household to complete all the sections; this should take about 10-15 minutes. Your response will remain anonymous. The outcome of all the questionnaires will be reported in a doctoral thesis but neither the school, your child(ren) or yourself will be identified. This presents an opportunity for you to participate in a broader discussion about your experience of parents' meetings.

The questionnaire should be returned in the SAE by Monday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2003. You remain free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Permission has been granted from *(name of local education authority)* and the head teacher to research within your school. However, I can be contacted to answer any questions at 0141 950 3745 (work) or through my research supervisor, Donald Christie, Senior Lecturer ( 0141 950 3220).

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Inglis

APPENDIX 17

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE



### Parents' satisfaction with Parents' Meetings

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF PARENTS' MEETINGS

1.1 Rate how satisfied you were with your most recent parents' meeting ?

Dissatisfied ←————→ Satisfied

1            2            3            4            5

( Tick the number that describes your response )

1.2 What did you do to prepare for the evening ?

---

1.3 Select the qualities of a class teacher that are important to you in a parents' meeting :

( Tick appropriate boxes. Please add a second tick to the most important quality )

Honest	<input type="checkbox"/>	Knows your child well	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourages your input	<input type="checkbox"/>	Helpful	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approachable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sociable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Patient	<input type="checkbox"/>	Previously known to you	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other ( Please specify )	<input type="checkbox"/>		

---

1.4 What did **you** do at the parents' meeting ?

( Tick appropriate boxes )

Looked at my child's work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listened to the class teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asked questions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expressed my views on my child's progress	<input type="checkbox"/>
Found out how I could support my child	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expressed support for the school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided additional information on my child	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other ( Please specify )	<input type="checkbox"/>

---

1.5 What did the **class teacher** do at the parents' meeting ? ( Please tick appropriate boxes )

Referred to notes on my child's progress

Listened to my views

Provided information on my child's progress

Answered my specific questions

Provided advice on how I could support my child

Suggested ways that we could work together to support my child

Other

( Please specify )

---

1.6 Did you take any action after the parents' meeting ?

Yes

No

If 'yes' , please specify

---

1.7 NOW SOME OPINIONS ABOUT THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS

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The following statements are things parents have said about parents' meetings. For each statement say whether you strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree.

( Tick the appropriate box )

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
They told me everything I wanted to know					
We discussed any opinions that I put forward					
I felt they never had a good thing to say					
The teacher described what I would describe about my child					
Big issues are dealt with during the year but smaller ones can be pushed aside for parents' meetings					
I've really got a good idea what's coming					
I generally have my own agenda					
It was a bit of a rush					
It should be the teacher leading the conversation					
It's a really good way to get a personal attachment to the teacher					
I felt there could be a bit more privacy					
The timing of the meeting in the year was useful					

1.8 NOW SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT PUPILS ATTENDING PARENTS' MEETINGS

Choose one statement that describes your view on children participating at a parents' meeting

( Tick box )

- Children should attend all parents' meetings
- Children should attend part of the parents' meeting
- Children should attend parents' meetings as they get older
- Childrens' attendance at parents' meetings will depend on the issues being discussed
- Undecided
- Children should not attend parents' meetings

Please say why not

\_\_\_\_\_

1.9 Is there anything you would like to add about your views on parents' meetings ?

For Official use only

2.0 SOME FACTS ABOUT YOU

2.1 How many children do you have at these stages of school ?

P1 - 3

P4 - 5

P6 - 7

2.2 What is your occupation ?

---

**Thank you for your co - operation**

**Please check over the sections to ensure that all parts have been completed**

**Questionnaire should be returned to :**

**Gillian Inglis  
Department of Primary Education  
University of Strathclyde  
G13 1PP**

**By the 6th January 2003**

APPENDIX 18

HILL PARENT ATTENDANCE RECORD



APPENDIX 19  
MEETING CONTENT TABLES

CONTENTS OF PARENTS' MEETINGS (source – diary & interview)

**Burgh**

	MEETING 1	MEETING 2
Teacher BT1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Progress in reading (+)</li> <li>▪ National testing issue</li> <li>▪ Placing of twins</li> <li>▪ Next teacher enquiry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Effort</li> <li>▪ Behaviour(-)</li> <li>▪ Building confidence</li> <li>▪ Parent seeks advice</li> </ul>
Parent	BP1A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress</li> <li>▪ areas for improvement</li> <li>▪ behaviour</li> <li>▪ participation in group activities-twins issue</li> <li>▪ national test(-)</li> </ul>	BP1B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ behaviour</li> <li>▪ parents' observations</li> <li>▪ social development(-)</li> <li>▪ advice from teacher</li> <li>▪ strengths &amp; areas to develop in work</li> <li>▪ health issue</li> </ul>

	MEETING 1	MEETING 2
Teacher BT2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress in work</li> <li>▪ progress in confidence</li> <li>▪ parents' views on progress</li> <li>▪ placing of twins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ parent comments on report</li> <li>▪ behaviour issue(-)</li> <li>▪ progress in work(+)</li> </ul>
Parent	BP2A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress(+)</li> <li>▪ national tests</li> <li>▪ twins issue</li> </ul>	BP2B Non-participation

	MEETING 1	MEETING 2
Teacher BT3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ parent's response to school report (+)</li> <li>▪ aptitude areas</li> <li>▪ recent behaviour(-)</li> <li>▪ readiness for Sec school</li> <li>▪ sibling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ academic progress (+)</li> <li>▪ confidence (+)</li> <li>▪ French</li> <li>▪ Readiness for Sec school</li> <li>▪ Advice on counselling</li> </ul>
Parent	BP3A Non-participation	BP3B Non-participation

## CONTENTS OF PARENTS' MEETINGS

### Gateway

	MEETING 1	MEETING 2
Teacher GT1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved work</li> <li>▪ Maths &amp; language(+)</li> <li>▪ Maturity</li> <li>▪ Friendships(+)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Changes in friendships(-)</li> <li>▪ Stubborn behaviour</li> <li>▪ Work presentation(-)</li> <li>▪ Good content</li> <li>▪ Parents' views that child needs more challenge in work</li> </ul>
Parent	GP1A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Progress in work(+)</li> <li>▪ Maturity(+)</li> </ul>	GP1B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child's work</li> <li>▪ Need to improve presentation</li> <li>▪ Change in attitude(-)</li> <li>▪ Social skills</li> </ul>

	MEETING 1	MEETING 2
Teacher GT2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ attitude (+)</li> <li>▪ national test prediction</li> <li>▪ language &amp; maths groups</li> <li>▪ writing &amp; use of teaching materials(-)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ maths &amp; language progress</li> <li>▪ attitude to work(-)</li> <li>▪ presentation</li> <li>▪ homework</li> <li>▪ child not wearing glasses in class</li> </ul>
Parent	GP2A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ summary of progress</li> <li>▪ parent's questions on writing level &amp; national test(-)</li> </ul>	GP2B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress in work(+)</li> <li>▪ behaviour(+)</li> <li>▪ nature of child</li> <li>▪ wearing glasses</li> </ul>

	MEETING 1	MEETING 2
Teacher GT3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress across curriculum(+)- health</li> <li>▪ behaviour</li> <li>▪ spelling difficulty</li> <li>▪ incident with a child</li> <li>▪ Sec transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Progress(+)</li> <li>▪ School captain duties</li> <li>▪ Sec transition</li> <li>▪ Areas to improve</li> <li>▪ Social chat</li> </ul>
Parent	GP3A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Health-progress link</li> <li>▪ Spelling (-)</li> <li>▪ Peer problems (-)</li> <li>▪ Sec transition - French</li> </ul>	GP3B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Behaviour (+)</li> <li>▪ Progress(+)</li> <li>▪ Sec transition</li> <li>▪ School captain duties</li> </ul>

CONTENTS OF PARENTS' MEETINGS

**Hill**

	MEETING 1	MEETING 2
Teacher HT1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ child's progress(+)</li> <li>▪ parent raised discipline issue(-)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ increase in confidence</li> <li>▪ child's work(+)</li> </ul>
Parent	<b>HP1A</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress(+)</li> <li>▪ grouping</li> <li>▪ attentiveness</li> <li>▪ discipline issue(-)</li> </ul>	<b>HP1B</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ future work</li> <li>▪ lack of confidence</li> <li>▪ areas where child needs support</li> </ul>

	MEETING 1	MEETING 2
Teacher HT2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ child's progress in maths &amp; language</li> <li>▪ environmental studies interest</li> <li>▪ mum as SEN in class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ national testing (-)</li> <li>▪ progress</li> <li>▪ behaviour issue (-)</li> </ul>
Parent	<b>HP2A</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress(+)</li> <li>▪ national tests(-)</li> </ul>	<b>HP2B</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress(+)</li> <li>▪ national tests(-)</li> <li>▪ behaviour(+)</li> <li>▪ transition to next class</li> </ul>

	MEETING 1	MEETING 2
Teacher HT3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress in work(+)</li> <li>▪ behaviour (+)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ progress in work(+)</li> <li>▪ transition to Sec school</li> <li>▪ National test prediction</li> </ul>
Parent	<b>HP3A</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ National tests(+)</li> <li>▪ Sec transition</li> <li>▪ Behaviour(+)</li> <li>▪ Progress (+)</li> </ul>	<b>HP3B</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ National tests &amp; levels</li> <li>▪ Progress in work(+)</li> <li>▪ Behaviour (+)</li> <li>▪ Sec transition</li> </ul>