BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DECISION MAKING.

A CASE STUDY

by

School Admin. (Armidale CAE)

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION AS PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION AT THE NORTHERN TERRITORY UNIVERSITY

16 DECEMBER, 1993
I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge and belief that the work presented in this thesis is original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted in whole or in part, for a degree at this or at any other university.

J. W. LOKE
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## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOS</td>
<td>The Board of Studies of the Northern Territory Education Department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COGSO</td>
<td>NT Council of Government Schools Organisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>Education Advisory Council of the Northern Territory Education Department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTED</td>
<td>Northern Territory Education Department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CERI</td>
<td>Centre for Educational Research and Innovation</td>
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the concept of parent involvement in schools and school decision making. It is written in the first person following one of the acceptable procedures identified within case study method and as suggested by Fry in Zakaluk and Samuels (1988, pp.85) as being an acceptable procedure for scholarly writing.

The research context follows the volatile periods in education in the 60's and 70's when the notion of parent involvement in schools gained prominence and by the 80's had become an integral part of education systems in Australia, England and America. The theme of the research is 'barriers' to this involvement that inhibit the equity of the process. These barriers act to effectively exclude large sections of communities whose children attend government schools. The specific focus of the research is an exploration of one potential barrier - the writings produced by education department personnel, particularly those of the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia.

The contents of the thesis are set out in five chapters with the last three specifically covering the case study. General operational definitions are given in Chapter One with more context specific definitions given within the chapters. There is an outline of the predominant theories (psycho/social, economic and political) that underpin the concept of parent involvement and provide a grounding for this research. The concept is given its historical perspective in Chapter One which provides an understanding of the forms of involvement that have occurred over time and sets each form in relation to the other on a continuum. Evidence from the literature in Chapter Two, is employed to confirm general and widespread existence of barriers to parent and citizen involvement in schools and school decision making.
The research is reductionist in approach with a focus on one possible barrier that has received little attention in the literature. The research strategy used draws on aspects of hermeneutics, linguistics and content analysis to develop a case for the existence of a barrier being created by the writings of the education personnel. Chapter Three includes an explanation and illustration of the ideology underpinning the research design and methodology, as well as a list of the key research questions. The extracted data have been collated and presented ready for analysis in Chapter Four. Responses to the key questions and the research problem derived from the data base are presented in Chapter Five.

The research raises a number of questions that indicate the need for further research. It presents a number of recommendations for the nature of this research and for possible means of overcoming the barriers that have been identified (see pp.176-177).

The major findings of the case study are:

1. That mixed messages are being sent to parents about the nature of their allowed involvement through the 'texts' that are produced by the NTED (Northern Territory Education Department).

2. That parents could obtain perceptions from the texts about the writers' advocacy of the concept of parent involvement.

3. That the writing of the NTED personnel can be perceived as revealing their general value preference towards the concept of parent and community involvement (pp.174-175).

Thus 'texts' produced by the NTED, for parents to use, can act as a barrier that inhibits the involvement of large numbers of parents in any school community in the Northern Territory.
CHAPTER ONE

The Research Problem, its Social, Political and Historical Context

Overview

Coming into the 1970's in Australia parent involvement in schools and school decision making began to develop a new dimension. Victoria led the way in 1973 with legislation for school councils to govern schools, Canberra followed with governance by school boards in 1974 and by 1992 the Northern Territory (NT), Western Australia and South Australia had all followed suit. Queensland is to trial School Advisory Councils in 1994 and New South Wales is introducing School Councils but they will not be mandatory (Devolution and Accountability Project Report 1992). This means that in seven out of eight states and territories the government has mandated that parents and/or community members be involved in school decision making.

With new legislation there are no formal barriers to parent involvement in schools and school decision making. Thus it should not be technically possible for unrepresentative groups or classes of people to predominantly be those involved, as all have an equal opportunity to join. However numerous writers and researchers (detailed in chapter two) have found that there are definite groups that dominate the membership. This is also supported by my own experience of membership of School Councils in the Northern Territory (Loke, 1988). Having completed research in 1988 which included investigation into the involvement of parents with the school where I was teaching it became very clear that a lack of involvement was not necessarily due to the oft stated propositions - "they're too lazy", "they're too busy" or "they don't care". It was apparent in 1988 that there were "barriers" to the involvement of
parents at my school that had not been removed by the new legislation. It was this finding, coupled with the school's need to improve its community relations, in the light of declining enrolments and extremely negative community perceptions of the school, that established my conviction that further research into barriers to parent involvement in schools was needed.

Research for this thesis has shown that these "barriers" can be physical in terms of geographical location (D. Pettit, 1980) as well as demographic and social (Karmel, 1973), or they can be related to the nature of the community that 'feeds' the school (D. Pettit, 1980, Coleman, 1985). They can also stem from parents' perceptions of their own efficacy in the situation (Almond and Verba in Pateman, 1974, pp. 49) or their predisposition to the concept (McKenzie, 1979). Another barrier can stem from the parent's perceptions of how others, that is the "professionals", relate to the concept of parent involvement in schools (Andrews in D'Urso, 1988). Details of each of the identified 'barriers' is given in chapter two.

Even though some of these 'barriers' at times manifest as concrete, physical obstructions, their effect on the parent is more psychological than physical. The individual perceives that they have a problem with becoming involved, this problem is generated by one or more of the means mentioned above. The individual may not be able to identify what the problem is, only that they will feel uncomfortable, insecure, inept, and/or inadequate, should they become involved and thus refrain from doing so. In effect they are barred from joining by a means that they may have little understanding of and no control over. Thus these barriers act rather like a filtering device allowing some through and others not. Some are able to be involved in certain ways, others in any way the school offers and others not at all. The literature (chapter two) gives evidence that these 'barriers' can span all socio-economic groups. However the dominant groups to be affected are the socially and economically disadvantaged.
Introduction

The above statements illustrate that involvement of parents in schools is not a clear cut exercise that will follow the letter and perhaps the spirit of a supportive legislation. Barriers to involvement are dynamic and complex forces that operate against the protective provisions of the legislation. A search of the relevant literature identifies many of these barriers and demonstrates that many have been quite extensively explored (see chapter two). Thus to investigate all of these barriers is beyond the scope of this current research as each has the capacity to be the basis of individual research. This next section outlines my research into one barrier that currently has not received a great deal of attention, namely, the impact on parents of the writing (texts) of education personnel in connection with the whole concept and process of parent involvement in schools.

The Research Problem

The research problem, as stated below, refers to the specific case study research detailed in this thesis which covers an aspect integral to the parents' information base, that is the writings (texts) of education personnel which parents will be expected to read should they seek active involvement (participation) in schools and school decision making. Even if parents merely seek information to develop their understanding of their child's schooling there are many texts that they will need to read to facilitate their knowledge gain, which will in turn give them the option of participation on a variety of levels and some power in the education debate. This literature (texts) may also be the first to make the parent aware that the option for involvement actually exists. In a cross cultural setting this is important. Parents used to different education systems and/or with English as a second language, may find the notion of being involved in their child's school completely outside their experiences.
The range of texts referred to includes brochures, newsletters, departmental guidelines, bulletins, press releases, manuals and publications. The subject matter ranges from messages that seek to set the parameters for parent involvement, to guide involvement, or merely to encourage the involvement. These messages by different writers also provide a spectrum of mannerisms, giving an indication of whether the writers demonstrate advocacy for parental involvement or not. Through the texts it is possible for NTED officers to exercise the "need to know" principle and to create a situation where only certain information is accessible, thus limiting the parents abilities to make informed decisions. This is particularly important for a school council where the council may have to rely on the principal to 'translate' text that is written in a discourse and tenor too difficult for the members to readily comprehend. I have analysed a sample of these texts to explore three of a number of possibilities:

1. That mixed messages contained in the texts are being sent to parents about the nature of their allowed involvement.
2. That parents do obtain perceptions from the texts about the sender's advocacy of the concept of parent involvement.
3. That the writing of the Northern Territory Education Department (NTED) personnel may reveal their general value preference towards the concept of parent and community involvement.

Following this exploration, I have drawn inferences about the possibility that parents experiencing problems with the texts will find this a barrier to their involvement and to ascertain if this inferred barrier has the potential to affect parents in different ways. This research is in the form of a case study (Cavanagh, 1992 in Cavanagh and Rodwell), providing in depth and systematic analysis of the 'messages' contained in texts produced by Northern Territory Education Department (NTED) administrators that are accessible to parents and community members in the Darwin Region of the Northern Territory. This case study seeks to determine if the above possibilities actually exist in this Region. The results of the study allowed inferences
to be made in terms of whether these writings acted as a barrier to parents and community members becoming involved in their schools.

In common with much case study research I have taken an eclectic approach to the research, centred on the texts produced by the NTED, using a selective mix of methodologies to build a picture of the texts for the context of this debate. Through this means I have been able to build the validity of the results obtained (Denzin, 1989, pp.236-7). My approach has also allowed for the extraction of a broader range of information from the texts than would have been possible had I merely applied one methodology. The need for this approach is generated by the nature of the possibilities sought. The first seeks fairly concrete information which entails looking for contradictory messages amongst the texts. Determining the existence of the other two possibilities entails seeking inferences and perceptions, none of which are concrete nor can be illustrated by single textual information, thus a picture needs to be built that is created from a variety of information 'within' and 'of' the texts (see The nature of language in chapter 3).

As an integral part of the research I have explored the social, political and historical situations within which parent and community involvement has come to the fore front in education in Australia and overseas. This also involved an exploration of the theoretical bases for much of the increased parent and citizen involvement and a clarification of terms as they are used within the thesis. Thus the first two chapters are devoted to this aspect of the study. Chapter three details the research methodology and strategy and chapters four and five the analysis of data obtained. With Chapter five including conclusions plus recommendations for future action and study.

Clarification of terms

There are a number of terms that need definition to explain their use in this thesis:

- **Barriers** to involvement
Involvement as different from participation
Control
Community
Education as different from School
Parent
Centralisation as different from decentralisation
Devolution

**Barriers**

Information on page four indicates that the barriers referred to are parent or community focussed and that they act on the people to limit and sometimes deny the person access to the education system provided (refer chapter two for identification of specific barriers and their explanation).

**Involvement and participation**

Two key terms used, sometimes synonymously in the literature, are 'involve' and 'participate':

*Involve* - to include as a necessary circumstance or condition, or consequence; to include, contain, or comprehend within itself or its scope; to cause to be inextricably associated or concerned. Involvement: The state of being involved (Macquarie Dictionary) and:

*Participate* - To take or have a part or share in; share. Participation: The act or fact of participating. A taking part as in some action or attempt. (Macquarie Dictionary)

Blakers (1980, p.1) denotes involvement as being a term that encompasses both meanings, if one is involved with a school, then being inextricably associated or concerned, one will be participating. However even though involve appears to be a static term and participate to be active, (which is supported by the sense inferred in the dictionary), I have chosen to use involvement in the sense that Blakers uses it, as a generic term. The concept of parents and their relationship to education which can be both a passive or active relationship necessitates the use of a term that can incorporate both qualities and thus simplify the writing of certain sections of this thesis. However, 'participation' has been used when there is need for specific reference to parents actively taking part in the education system, such as decision making at the school level (Neal 1973 p.198).
**Control**

According to the Macquarie Dictionary, to control is "to exercise restraint or direction over; dominate; command". In the same dictionary control and power appear together, power is "the possession of control or command over others; dominion; authority; ascendancy or influence".

**Community**

To clarify the meaning of community Blakers (1980) draws heavily on the writings of Vanbergen in his report to "The Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education" (1977). Vanbergen identifies three different uses of this term. Community, used synonymously for society as a whole, community, as it refers to the sum of inhabitants of a particular geographical area and community, relating to people joined by, for example, a particular religious persuasion. The most relevant definition for this context relates to community in its geographical sense.

I have provided at this point a working definition of this term. In chapter two I explain the concept of community further, it's stereo-typical connotations and whether this concept with its connotations exists today.

**Education, school and parent**

According to Blakers (1980, pp. 2) the school is a compound of elements: buildings, principal, teachers, students, administrators, the system. More recently, she relates, parents are finding a place in this concept. She goes on to quote a 1978 CERI paper that defines the school as an:

> Institution set aside to form a particular function typical of human society - to educate. The central characteristic of the school is that it provides a protected environment in which a professionalised personnel guide a designated population, usually the younger age groups, through experiences ...
Thus the school is seen as the physical place within which the function of education generally occurs. Education however, if defined functionally as a process that is carried out, may occur in similar form across many schools even though each school may be different. In these terms then, parental involvement in schools can be taken to be the involvement of parents, of children at a particular school, with that school and the education process and function that occurs within it (Epstein, 1991, pp.339). "Parent" includes the person who has the actual custody of a child and the person with whom a child resides" (The NT Education Act, 1992, part 1 pp.2). I have not referred to parent involvement in system wide education or schooling matters in any detail (Kirner, 1982, pp.16), such as parents as members of Education Advisory Councils, as referred to in the Standard Devolution Package (Northern Territory Education Department -NTED - 1991 and Blakers, 1980, pp.17)

Centralisation and decentralisation

The clarification of these terms needs to be quite extensive as the associated terms 'political', 'administrative' and 'management' have significance for this research as they apply to NTED texts.

According to Walker (in D'Cruz & Shean Eds., 1978), Middleton (1982), and Angus (1992) the notion of decentralisation has two parts to it, decentralisation of governance - which Walker (1978) refers to as the political - and decentralisation of administration. As a corollary there are two forms of centralisation. To decentralise is to undo the centralisation of power (or alternately 'control', see definition pp.9) and to delegate this power across a broader base (Blakers 1980). This could involve transfer to the individual school or regions or to elected or appointed personnel (Walker, 1978, Middleton, 1982).
W.G. Walker developed a means of representing the different forms of decentralisation by referring to centralisation and decentralisation as being on the end points of two continua:

**Type A** - political (or governance), centralisation to decentralisation  
**Type B** - administrative centralisation to decentralisation.

These two continua form the basis of the model below (Fig: 1.1, pp.12).

- **Point X** represents the elected government legislature,  
  **Line XY** represents delegation of responsibility by the political dimension to other elected boards or officials.

According to Walker (1972, pp. 9), this line (XY) represents decision making being placed in the area of public debate and of partisan politics and involves citizen representation in policy making through the election of legislatures, boards and officials. At the time that Walker was writing there were few elected state, regional or local education officials or boards in Australia.

- **Line XZ** represents the delegation of responsibility by the legislature to its appointed officers.

The process of decision making therefore is carried out by administrative officers to whom responsibility is delegated by a school system. (Walker, 1972, pp.10).

On the model an attempt has been made to represent:

- **XAM** the traditional American State  
  **XBN** the traditional Australian state

Walker appears to use this idea of "traditional" to represent the average or perceived norm within the country. According to Walker, in America in the seventies, there was considerable delegation of decision making and involvement of the citizen in policy making through the election of boards and officials. However there was little decentralisation of administrative powers beyond that given to the
district boards. The principals appear to have had little power. In Australia and England the situation was reversed, the principals having significant administrative powers but little policy/decision making power.

He goes on to indicate that there were states in both Australia and the US at the time of his writing that were different from the "traditional" and tended towards greater centralisation - NSW (Australia) and Hawaii (America) or alternately decentralisation - Illinis (America), none were noted in this category for Australia. Not ignoring this difficulty with delineation, his diagram gives a means of illustrating how far legislatures have been prepared to 'let go' of control over their education systems and to indicate the nature of the concept of decentralisation.

This diagram, though useful to provide a picture of the nature of centralisation or decentralisation in an education system, does not specify where parents fit, other than as citizens, which may not mean parents at all, or may not mean parents of children attending the school in question. Considering the decade in which Walker developed his model it is quite illustrative of the perceptions of the education
community and the public about education and parents. This model is modified in the next section so that it fits more closely with the present situation (pp.15-18). The next section also provides the rationale for choosing Walker's model instead of others.

**Devolution**

Karmel (1973) writes in terms of *devolution of responsibility* - upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the pupils whom they teach and at senior levels with the students themselves (pp.10). Further, "as responsibility moves downward, the professionals in schools must expect to share planning and control with parents and interested citizens, safeguarded by limitations where professional expertise is involved" (pp.11).

In the summary of the Karmel Report (1973) a recommendation is made for: *devolution*, as far as practicable, of the making of decisions on those working in or with the schools - teachers, pupils, parents and the local community (pp.139). In *Towards the 90's* (NTED, 1987) the NTED explains that "*Devolution* in education is based on the assumption that the school is the focal point for the delivery of educational services to children and is therefore able to make the best decisions about the use of resources" (pp.18). In the forward to *The Standard Devolution Package*, (NTED, 1991) Spring, the then Secretary of the NTED, writes, "Educational decision making and school management has been devolved from head office and regional administration to schools and school councils..."(pp iii).

Consequently devolution cannot occur until decentralisation is accepted as the appropriate strategy for education management, as it involves decision making about school matters by other than the professionals. In other words a transfer or delegation of power or authority from one to another (Macquarie).
With modification to Walker’s model it is possible to illustrate the present state of devolution or what can be termed decentralisation. As McCarthy said at the 1993 National Australian Council of Education Administration (ACEA) Conference in Adelaide: "At its simplest 'devolution' can be understood as 'decentralisation'. What is 'decentralised' is essentially decision making". Her statement is supported by that of Sharpe when he refers to Caldwell's concept of "self managing schools (that is schools within a government system to which the central authorities have devolved a range of decision making powers previously held by the centre)" (Sharpe, 1993, pp. 6). Sharpe goes on to note that Caldwell sees self-management in terms of "administrative decentralisation" rather than "political decentralisation".

Administrative because decisions are made at the school level within a framework of local, state or national policies and guidelines. These decisions would not form part of the political platform for the ruling legislature though the policies and guidelines could be part of this platform. The school remains accountable to a central authority for the manner in which resources are allocated (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992, pp. 4). "Administrative decentralisation" [is seen to be] more easily reversible than "Political decentralisation" (Caldwell in Sharpe 1993, pp.6). For Caldwell (1992) "political decentralisation" would mean having the authority to make decisions about resources extra to the school level and at the policy making level. The substance of such decisions could be guided by a political platform.

In order to apply Walker's model to the current context of devolution (decentralisation) I have modified it to include Caldwell’s definitions of political decentralisation and administrative decentralisation rather than that used by Walker himself. The context described by Walker is becoming increasingly inapplicable to Australia as his model does not allow for the elected body (that is council or board) to take the administrative role from the appointed official (eg principal). His 1972 model differentiates between political functions that would be carried out by an elected group and administrative functions that would be carried out by an appointed
official. Thus Walker's model needs to be modified to make it useful for the present situation of school management in Australia.

Sharpe at the ACEA 1993 conference lent credence to Walker's use of the concept of a continuum to illustrate decentralisation (devolution):

"Devolution" is a process through which an agency of control (such as a government or a school system) deliberately relinquishes aspects of control over the organisations for which it is responsible, thus moving them along the continuum in the direction of total self-management. ...This continuum is by no means uni dimensional. It consists of many strands or variables.(pp.2)

Sharpe is one of the most recent writers to develop a model to illustrate the process of devolution. His model is quite different from Walker's as he endeavours to encompass all the possible strands or variables alluded to in the above quote (Sharpe, 1993, pp.2). For my purposes however an adapted version of Walker's model is more simple to apply as I am interested in the two strands only, those of administrative and political function each of which incorporates many of the strands to which Sharpe refers (Sharpe,1993, pp.3). In its modified form Walker's model gives the clearest visual impression of devolution, particularly when comparisons across education systems are to be made.

Thus Walker's model see Fig: 1.2 has been adjusted so that:

**Line XY** refers to political devolution/decentralisation of decision making about resources and

**Line XZ** refers to administrative devolution/decentralisation of decision making about resources.

Resources are variously categorised by Caldwell and Spinks and Sharpe. The categorisation as discussed by Sharpe (1993, pp9-12) is the most readily applicable for use in this thesis. His discussion covers:

- Financial (eg teaching resources and equipment)
- Utilities (eg telephones, electricity, water)
- School maintenance and minor capital works
- Replacement teachers and emergency relief teachers
- Professional development funds
- Ancillary staff and their payment
- Teacher salaries
- Election of Principals
- Election of other senior staff
- Major capital works
- Curriculum
- Assessment and accreditation.

According to Sharpe the processes of allocating these resources have been embodied in the establishment and strengthening of the role of school councils, which are generally made up of "a mix of parent/community, teacher and sometimes student membership, with the principal as executive member" i.e. Walker's elected body (1993, pp.11).

These resources need now to be looked at in terms of whether the school council has the ability to make decisions politically or administratively about them before further building Walker's model. This can be ascertained from Sharpe's canvassing of information from the different Australian States and Territories. Though Sharpe states that his collection of information was merely carried out by 'structured' phone calls and thus is not a rigorous piece of research, it does compare favourably with a report produced by the Directors General and Departmental Secretaries in 1992 following their discussions concerning Devolution (National Devolution Symposium report, 1992).

I have extracted information concerning two States, Victoria (VIC), considered to be heavily 'devolved' and Queensland (QLD), considered to be least devolved. Information concerning these states has been taken largely from the table presented by Sharpe as an appendix to his ACEA paper in 1993. That concerning curriculum, assessment and accreditation is taken from the main text of his paper and from the National Devolution symposium report (1992). The classification into a political or administrative category has been created from the explanation of those two terms given earlier. In other words where there is obviously no decision making allowed about the factor outside of the individual school and the factor could not be
considered as being part of a party political platform, then the classification has been administrative. Where the school is competing with others for a share of the resource and may need to be involved with decision making outside of the school, or be influenced in their decision by a political platform then the function has been classified as political.

The information discussed above has been converted into Table: 1.1, for easy reference. This information then needs to be converted into a form that can be used on Walker's modified model to indicate the degree of political or administrative decentralisation that each system allows. The simplest means of doing this is to allocate a notional score of one to each of the fourteen categories in Table: 1.1. This then means that there are a total of 14 points, seven of which are allotted to the political category and seven to the administrative (see Table: 1.1) Thus Victoria would receive a score of six out of seven for administrative and one out of seven for political. The line drawn beneath non teaching salaries designates those factors deemed to be administrative and those that are political.

Table: 1.1 The political or administrative nature of resources that may be devolved to schools, as illustrated by the situation in Victoria and Queensland. (After Sharpe, 1993, appendix 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management at School Level</th>
<th>P/A</th>
<th>QLD Y Y</th>
<th>VIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial (eg telephone, resources and equipment)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities (eg telephones, electricity, water)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School maintenance and minor capital works</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement teachers and salaries</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development funds</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of non-teaching staff</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-teaching salaries</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLITICAL FUNCTIONS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher salaries</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Principals</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of other senior staff</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of teachers</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major capital works</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* School based curriculum development without guidelines</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Assessment and accreditation YR 1 - YR10. e</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig: 1.2 Model to demonstrate the pattern of devolution according to political and administrative categories, after Walker's centralization-decentralization triangle (1972, pp.8).

To increase the ease with which Walker's adapted model Fig: 1.2 may be read I have added section breaks to each of the continua, thus dividing each of them into seven. The scores for Queensland and Victoria have been plotted on each continua according to their results in Table:1.1. Thus:

The triangle XMN represents the Victorian situation concerning the pattern of devolution in that state and

The triangle XAB represents the pattern of devolution in the state of Queensland.

This model illustrates that the administrative sides of the triangle for both Victoria (XM) and Queensland (XA) are much larger than the political sides (XB) and (XN) respectively. Thus both Victoria and Queensland are seen to have followed Caldwell's (1992, pp.4-5) administrative decentralisation path far more than the political path.
I intend to return to this model in later chapters, however at the present it is appropriate to move away from these operational definitions to explore the historical background to parent involvement in schools and school decision making.

**Historical Perspective of Parent Involvement in Schools**

Many of the readings for this and the next sections have been taken from the 60's, 70's and 80's, in order to give a clearer chronological impression, of the motives behind the demands for change, than appears in much of the current writing. This brief account shows that Australia was not alone in its move towards increasing parent and community involvement in schools. The literature below reveals that the motives were similar across America, England and Australia stemming from a deep dissatisfaction with the nature of parent involvement and the structures of the existing systems.

England and America have had a long history of some form of parental involvement in their school systems (Sellick, 1985, Beattie, 1978). However the more recent demands from citizens during the 60's and 70's were for involvement of a greater breadth and depth than already existed at the time. Most of the original structures either administered to more than one school, and/or were dominated by persons such as superintendents, inspectors, teachers, principals, local politicians and church leaders (Beare, 1985, Sellick, 1988).

In England the citizens' concerns were mainly of the administrative kind, relating to finance, grounds, services, buildings with very limited influence on staffing and curriculum matters (Fitzgerald, Musgrave, Pettit, 1974, pp. 9-11). In Australia the Parents and Citizens committees (P&C's), though composed of parents and staff of individual schools, did little more than raise money, help in the canteen and sometimes come in to hear reading (Allen, 1989, in Townsend and Caldwell pp.14).
Generally they had no say about curriculum or staffing matters in the schools. Information regarding these matters was handed down to the schools from a central state administration (Middleton, 1982, pp.70). In the USA the school boards generally administered to a group of schools with each group having their own Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A.). The school board had the power to administer staffing, curriculum and finances, the P.T.A. in an individual school dealt with concerns for the specific school and its students (Sellick, 1988, pp.57).

Until the 1970's the American system had moved the furthest towards decentralised administration and devolution of responsibilities, at least the Boards were answerable to smaller groups than the totally government administered systems of England (Sellick, 1988, pp.62) and Australia (Middleton, 1982, pp.70). However there is recognition that the middle-class dominated the public (state) School Boards to the detriment of the poor and the working class (Taylor, 1988, pp.38). The emphasis seems to have been on the kind of organisation for parents wanted by the educators, thereby expressing the latter's wishes for education and seeking endorsement from the parents, "educators find the P.T.A. a useful friend but not a very bothersome enemy" (Cunningham, 1976 in Sellick, 1988, pp.57). Sellick (1985) concluded his research with the comment:

That despite significant differences in the laws, the system of education, and the day to day styles of operation that pertain to England, France and the USA, the wishes of the vast majority of parents on the nature of those organisational systems, teaching styles, and curriculum contents remain unexpressed, unsolicited or ignored. (pp.62)

In 1972, according to D. Pettit (1980, pp.12), "ACSSO [Australian Council of Secondary Schools Organisation] was vitriolic about much existing [parental] 'involvement' which [was] characterised by much sporadic discussions, lawn mowing and 'the unwilling, inexpert involvement of local chambers of commerce".

This comment provides the Australian perspective to round out Sellick's conclusion. Though the sentiments as expressed by Sellick relate to America, and Britain, from
the evidence provided in this section it would appear that the quote from Sellick is equally true of the wishes of the members of the parent organisations in Australia during the 60's and 70's.

Much of the unrest in Australia was being bolstered by the research, writings and events occurring overseas. Walker writing in 1972 comments that:

Observers of Australia ... from the U.S.A. Britain and Canada ... have criticised the Australian Educational Systems for their emphasis upon efficiency rather than humanity, for their conformity rather than variety, for their mediocrity rather than excellence and for their lack of adaptability (pp.12).

Walker goes on to quote Jackson a researcher from the Department of Educational Research Toronto (1961) who wrote:

In the two largest states [of Australia], there are clear indications that the retention of the present system of inflexible central control, with little or no real delegation of responsibility and authority, will inevitably bring the whole administrative machinery grinding to a full stop (Jackson in Walker (1972), pp. 13).

Within Australia, public disquiet in the 60's and 70's about education, highlighted the isolation, rigidity, paternalism and lack of responsiveness to the needs of the individual and the community.

The above brief historical account and background information suggests that the Australian demands for change in education were not isolated. The disquiet was given weighting in Australia by the Karmel and Fitzgerald reports (see pp.27 and pp.28 respectively) and was popularised by overseas writers such as Illich and Knoffler (Middleton, 1982, Jones, 1984 and Pettit, 1980). The various State Governments responded with changes to the legislation and the structure of their education systems.
Australia since the mid 70's

During the early 70's in Victoria the State Government responded with changes to legislation, which was followed by other States in the later 70's and early 80's that allowed for the creation of structures to compel community members/citizens or parents to become involved in schools. These structures have varied in form from being advisory Boards or Committees for schools and/or State Departments, to full management Boards or Councils (Allen, 1989, pp.15), with significant degrees of devolved power and/or responsibility for the management of the individual schools.

At the National level, until 1991, there were two significant and influential programmes of the Commonwealth Schools Commission that targeted citizen involvement in their decision making, the Country Areas Programme and the Disadvantaged Schools Programme, which required cooperation between parents, teachers, and other community members. Their specific tasks were to develop school or community programmes to improve the learning outcomes for schools (Allen, 1988, pp.15). These programmes became the means by which schools that are State responsibility can obtain extra resources for special projects. Through the Schools Commission financial assistance has been provided for individual schools as they became registered with either of the two programmes and developed projects that met the guidelines. These programmes have been used to generate projects that impact on school curricula (used in its broadest sense), particularly to improve equity for disadvantaged groups. A third has recently been established to assist aboriginal students, the Commonwealth Aboriginal Education Programme (1991). All these programmes require parental involvement, in a 'political' sense, as advisers in the development stages, as members at State Committee level and also as members of project committees at the school level. In the Northern Territory of Australia it is usual for the parent representatives to be drawn from the Council of Government Schools Organisation (COGSO).
It is appropriate to finish this section by specifically referring to the NT situation. My case study research is focussed on the NT, thus the information here helps to place the case-study in its local context.

The situation in the Northern Territory since the mid 70's

The Northern Territory Department of Education (NTED) responded to the demands for change in the early 1980's in three main ways:

1. Publication of *NT Schools Directions for the Eighties* (1983) which outlined future policy for education, including provision for parent Governing Councils for each school.

2. Changes to The Education Act in 1983 to allow for the incorporation of School Councils and their function within the education system

3. Restructuring of the Education Department to cope with the transfer of functions to branches within the department. (1985 *Review of the Reorganisation of the Northern Territory Education Department*) "This restructuring was instigated in order to develop clearer line management and appropriate structures for the delegation of responsibilities to regions [and] to schools..."(1985 Review, pp.9)

Following release of *Towards the 90's, Excellence, Accountability and Devolution for the Future* (1987), full 'financial devolution' to councils as a concept was established and finally occurred in 1991. Further restructuring of the NTED with the loss of office-based administrative and clerical positions, coincided with the reports and recommendations made by the NT Government's Estimates Review Committee. The ensuing debate focussed on the non-educational issues and away from the happenings of the 60's and 70's. Thus the Territory has followed the pattern of the other states, and in some areas even moved further ahead, such as with the move towards devolution of Major Capital Works to the school level (in the context of system wide planning) (Sharpe, 1993, pp. 9). Therefore this could still be construed as administrative devolution.
Involvement of parents in schools was seen by the NTED as a positive means of improving parental attitudes towards school, particularly amongst the lower socio-economic groups.

The changes in the structure of education in Australia and the NT, having given recognition to the value of parental involvement, established legislation and new procedures to formalise this involvement. The creation of school councils or boards and the devolution of decision making and powers to the school level if introduced in isolation, may not bring about the kinds of student outcomes on the scale referred to by Sallis. This point was commented on by McCarthy at the ACEA National Conference in 1993 when she quoted from the OECD Trade Union Advisory Committee working group on education and training:

i. There is a lack of any evidence that Devolved School Based management produces greater system effectiveness.

ii. There is a lack of any evidence that Devolved School Based management produces greater system efficiency.

The literature (chapter 2) shows that the very parents whose children would benefit most from parental involvement will actually be most affected by barriers to their involvement and thus these moves to improve involvement may actually work against certain groups.

**Developmental background to the concept of parent involvement in schools and school decision making**

In the previous section I alluded to the nature of the disquiet amongst the community concerning education in Australia, placing this in its context in time and in relation to international systems. This section details the social and political context of changes to the nature of parent involvement in schools and school decision making. These details indicate the theoretical bases related to the moves for change.
The 1960's and 70's in Australia saw increasing frustration by citizens in the perceived alienation of the large bureaucratic government organisations developed to support the 'Super Ministries'. In 1967 Harman and Selby-Smith when writing of the proposed creation of the new Education system in Canberra described the atmosphere of the time, highlighting major areas of concern:

...there has been growing uneasiness about the education provided in Australian schools. Some critics have attacked what they see as the overly centralised State systems, their size and bureaucratic organisation being held to cause impersonality, conformity and inefficiency. Concern at the rising cost of formal education is general and there is frequently a suspicion that efficiency could be improved and that choice is inadequate. Others argue for more participation in decision-making by teachers, parents, students and community representatives (p. 2).

They go on to comment that "dissatisfaction among teachers, alienation among students, dismay in head office and concern by parents and responsible citizens are signs of a deep malaise..."(p. 2). Neville J. Barwick in his address "Learning Environments For The 80's", reflects similar concerns with his comments:

There is increasing disillusionment in the organisations and institutions set up during the age of technology, which promised so many opportunities for the good life ... there are few community services that do not suffer from a crisis of confidence. ...A significant reason for this lack of confidence lies in the enormous inertia of government structural arrangements; in the entrenchment of existing agencies and their relationships (Barwick, 1979, pp.63-65).

These sentiments are repeated in the writing of Blakers (1980) in her report for the parent organisation, ACSSO (Australian Council of Government Schools Organisation). "The centralisation of education, with time and size, inevitably produced rigidity of thinking, adherence to established practices and resistance to change. At the same time ... it discouraged community involvement in education except in the most limited fund-raising capacities" (p.4-5).

Dissatisfaction and lack of confidence was particularly felt by the more informed and articulate members of the public (D. Pettit, 1980, pp11). In Australia as well as America (Taylor, 1988, pp38.) and Britain (Sellick, 1985, PP51) this section of the public began to question whether more of the same was good, as D. Pettit (1974)
writes, "there was a hidden paternalism in [such centralised bureaucracies] since they were based on the idea that the professionals or other experts knew better than laymen or ordinary citizens what was good for them" (pp.4). He comments further that:

The first wave of reaction to this bureaucracy and paternalism arose when critics argued that the individual should be seen as being more important than the administration of the corporate group. ... The important goal for social action became ... the creation of conditions such that the individual could choose for himself without authoritarian interference. [And further there was a] growing number of demands for the participation in decision-making by members of various organisations. (pp. 5)

The demands referred to by Pettit above, were accompanied by equal demands from the general public (Connors, 1977, p.7). In America, Hatton (in Taylor, 1988, pp.38), contended that the failure of the education system at large, also led many blacks and lower-status minority parents to challenge the legitimacy of the professionals and bureaucrats and to demand a voice in the conduct of their children's schools. Within this framework of disquiet Governments in America, England and Australia commissioned a number of inquiries that were to give impetus for the changes (D. Pettit, 1980, Blakers, 1980, Bettington et al, 1984, Fitzgerald et al, 1976, Tomlinson in Craft 1984).

**Reports and Research Findings that impacted on parental involvement**

The post World War Two centralism of government institutions, their impersonality and separation from the public, the inherent paternalism contained in the concept that the professionals knew best led to general public frustration and unrest with bureaucratic administration (Harmon and Selby Smith, 1967, Barwick, 1979, Blakers, 1980, D. Pettit, 1980). At the same time in the education sphere students were staying at school longer with larger numbers from minority ethnic groups in school enrolments (Anderson, 1967, in Harmon and Selby Smith 1967). The schools were seen to be having difficulty coping with the increased numbers, in providing
adequate staffing levels and a curriculum responsive to the diverse needs. Governments in America, England and Australia instituted a number of inquiries that strongly influenced the changes that were to occur.

The social climate of America in the 1960's with the development of the Civil Rights Act led to national research being carried out covering 4,000 schools which culminated in the report by James S. Coleman et al, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* referred to as the "Coleman Report" (Berger 1991, pp. 19). In Britain public pressure led eventually to the commissioning of 'The Plowden Report' (1967), later followed in 1977 by The Committee of Inquiry for the Secretaries of State "A New Partnership For Our Schools", (England ) commonly referred to as the 'The Taylor Report'. The parent organisation ACSSO in Australia, decided to take political and media action (D. Pettit, 1980, pp11) to bring to the fore the parents' dissatisfaction with the state of education in Australia. At its 1970 conference ACSSO set out what it considered to be terms of reference for a national inquiry into education. This inquiry eventuated, after a change of government, in *Schools in Australia, Report of the Interim Committee of The Australian Schools Commission* referred to as 'The Karmel Report' (1973), commissioned by the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam (D. Pettit, 1980, pp.13).

The Coleman, Plowden, Karmel and Taylor Reports all accentuated the essential nature of "a closer partnership between the two parties to every child's education" (Plowden, pp. 37, Karmel, pp.10). Eugenia Berger (1991) in her book *Parents as Partners in Education* writes, that the research carried out for the Coleman Report showed the most important single factor affecting achievement [at school] to be family background. Important variables included the home's effective support of education, number of children in the family, and parents' education levels. These findings were equally reflected in the Plowden Report (Plowden, pp.461).
Research had shown (Plowden, 1972) that the difference between the performance of children varied according to the attitudes of the parents (pp.33). A willingness to follow up education matters at home, to show interest in what the children were doing, to visit the school all seemed to lead to improved outcomes for the children (pp.34-36). Sallis (1989, pp.42) comments that research since Plowden has demonstrated that:

"Even the poorest and least educated parents can, if encouraged and motivated, make a significant difference to their children's learning. Even more shattering ... is the recognition that such experience of success can change parent's perceptions of schools and schools' attitudes towards parents".

The information from Sallis implies a reaching out on behalf of the school to help parents, rather than just bringing the parents in to help the school.

Concurrently with the realisation of the significance of family background and childrens' success in education came the findings that the school systems were not catering equally for the socio-cultural spectrum of the population. Hatton commented in 1979 that the centralisation and professionalisation of urban school systems effectively disqualified the urban poor and minority groups from meaningful participation in the determination of either the goals or processes of the education of their children" (Hatton in Taylor 1988 pp. 38). In Australia the Report *Education and Poverty in Australia* by R.T. Fitzgerald (the Fitzgerald Report, 1979) found similar problems. In his book *Sleepers, Wake!* Barry Jones (1984, pp.156) quotes from this report:

Success in schools and the competition for rewarding careers is largely determined by such factors as social class, ethnic background and geographic location. The structural inequalities in our society are nowhere more evident than in our school systems. Far from being a way out for poor people, schools act as sorting, streaming mechanisms helping to maintain the existing distribution of status and power...

And further, "People who are poor and disadvantaged are victims of a societal confidence trick. ...schools reflect societies' intention to maintain the present unequal distribution of status and power. Because the myth of equal opportunity has
been so widely accepted by Australians, the nature of unequal outcomes has been largely ignored" (pp.156).

The four reports above plus the Fitzgerald Report, in corroborating each other, gave official recognition to the proposition that unequal outcomes for students exiting from the existing education systems stemmed not only from parental background, but also the Systems' inability to react to and accommodate the needs of the 'multifaceted' nature of its consumers. In these two contexts of social disadvantage and organisational inertia there was seen to be inequity needing to be redressed. Two approaches were concurrently being promoted to increase parental involvement. These views, though not entirely dissimilar were being promoted by both parents and academics. The next section identifies the views and relates the various Australian State Governments' responses.

The Dichotomy of Involvement

Pressure to create equity amongst those competing for the educational opportunities and to produce equity of outcomes was exerted in two ways. There was a 'bottom up' demand from the citizenry that the education systems "fix up their act" allowing citizens a continuing say and involvement in the system (D. Pettit. 1980). The education systems in contrast were saying that the problems also stemmed from the citizens themselves in the lower socio-cultural groups and that if these citizens were taught how to help their children, then their children could cope with the demands of the systems and be more successful (Sallis, 1989). This latter approach retained shadows of paternalism considering the literature overwhelmingly demonstrates that those experiencing the highest rates of success in the existing systems were the white middle-classes (Jones, 1984) - 'to do better', could also mean 'become more like us'!
Deprecatory comments aside, Berger(1991) - 20 years further on writes:

Research indicates that the home has an enormous impact on the developing child and that a partnership between home and schools is supportive of the developing child. Although all of the evidence is not yet gathered, the concept is supported by enough data to encourage educators to include parents as partners in the education process. This dictates that parents be active participants - real partners - in the process. It also requires that teachers know what children do at home and which special interests and talents they have.(p. 8)

In America, England and Australia the evidence suggests that attempts to bring schools and communities into closer congruence mainly followed two different paths which coincided with the directions from which the demands for change originated. One path was for school personnel to work closely with parents to improve the parent's understanding of their child's education. To show the parent how to encourage their child by working with the parent as well as the child. This concept was manifested in early intervention programmes such as "Head Start" in America (Berger, pp.19-20), Pre-Schools in Australia and America, and 'home help with learning schemes' trialed in England (Sallis, pp. 176 - 179). The expectation of these programmes is that they would have an immediate impact on the individual child and their family through intervention in the child's learning at a very early age.

The other path was for parents and members of the wider community to become involved in the management of their local school as well as in the education system as a whole. These citizens could be viewed as exercising political power by their participation in the operations of a government organisation within their community. Through this type of involvement it was thought that the school and system would become more responsive to and reflecting of community needs and aspirations. By bringing the community and the school closer together it was expected that outcomes for all students would be improved. A parent or community member, who became thus involved, was not working for just his/her child but for all the school's children as well as the wider community interests.
Programmes resulting from these two approaches have been fundamentally different in initiation and process and they required fundamentally different frames of reference to be driving the people involved in their initiation. As demonstrated in this next section the two paths also diverge in relation to their theoretical base.

**Theories that substantiate the value of parent involvement in schools and school decision making.**

Both of these approaches result in schools, parents and the communities working more closely together to achieve the overarching goals of improving, and bringing equity to, the outcomes for students. This is to occur even though the underlying theoretical grounds are different. The former path is linked closely to psycho-social theory related to the nurturing and development of the individual child and its interaction with the caregiver:

> The child, the caregiver and the environment intertwine in the child rearing process making every child's experiences unique ... Throughout childhood many caregivers - teachers, child care workers, doctors, administrators - are involved with the child and the family. Ideally they can provide a stable environment where each of the society's institutions contributes to the child's growth in an integrated and continuous approach (Berger, 1991, p. 1-2).

Berger has defined *continuity* here as a coherent whole or an uninterrupted succession of development (Berger, 1991, p. 2). In this sense the family and the school should not be separated. Berger writes that 'the professional' needs to understand the child's social system and to help the parent to understand that of the school. She also writes of the necessity for the school to encourage the parent to have a positive attitude towards education and to become involved. The locus of action is from within the school and the education system.

The second approach fits closely with political theory and more specifically that of participant democracy. Democracy is seen to be best achieved through increased participation by individuals in local communities and organisations (Gittell, 1991, pp.
249). A discussion of "participatory democracy" as developed by Rousseau and later Mill and Cole is presented by C. Pateman (1974) in Participation and Democratic Theory. Pateman states:

The theory of participatory democracy is built round the central assertion that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. The existence of representative institutions at national level is not sufficient for democracy; for maximum participation by all the people at that level of socialisation, or 'social training', for democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place through the process of participation itself. The major function of participation in participatory democracy is therefore an educative one, educative in the very widest sense, including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures (pp 42).

Through this participation not only does the person develop personal skills and a means to access the political system but they also have the chance to mould the organisation (in this case the school) to the form and function that best suits the community's needs (Gittell, 1991, pp. 246). In this sense the parent or community member is engaged in a political activity. The locus of action is from within the individual citizen. However neither Macpherson nor Gittell are clear as to whether they believe that involvement in decision making within Government prescribed policy is allowing for 'political activity'.

The evidence above provides the theoretical base for answering the questions 'what' and 'why' in terms of the change being called for. However when seeking to provide a theoretical base in order to understand the answer to 'how', Macpherson (1991, pp. 53) draws on five theories of state:

1. **Pluralist theories** locate power with citizens who vote, influence party politics and lobby through interest groups. Hence changing coalitions account for the variations and the multiple directions in the policies of public utilities.

2. **New Right Theories** also locate power with citizens, but insist that gross imperfections in public choice making, make it difficult for institutions of state, however demand responsive, to avoid creating unanticipated effects. Market mechanisms are favoured to ameliorate these imperfections.

3. **Elite Theories** assume that public services are controlled by socially or economically dominant elite. These elite are adept at manipulating the ostensibly liberal democratic process of policy making.
4. *Marxist Instrumental Theories* similarly locate power with an elite, but with a capitalist elite that seeks to integrate its purpose with those of governments in order to monopolise government public policy making.

5. *Neo-Pluralist Theories* which assumes that a dual polity operates. On the one hand public institutions offer multiple points of access to citizens, as well as horizontal and vertical policy articulation processes, while, on the other, these and other structures endow elites, epistemic and process privileges.

Macpherson has applied these theories to add to understanding of the 'how' behind the restructuring of the Australian State Education Departments from the 1970's onwards.

The call for change beginning in the sixties and the paths sought, can also fit within these theories. Where the action stems from the professionals within the administration (see pp.28-29), this has sentiments of point '3' above, as control of decision making and resource allocation are firmly with the existing elite. Where the action stems from the citizens (see pp. 29-30) and there is a call for participation in decision making and allocation of resources, this fits closely with the ideology expressed in point '1' above (Pateman, pp. 47). The actual restructuring of the education systems around Australia and internationally however is being linked more closely with point 5 (Macpherson pp.52). The process of devolving decision making and responsibility to the school level gives "multiple points of citizen access" and the retention of the central control concerning matters such as policy and curriculum, assessment and accreditation endows "elites, epistemic and process privileges".

The process expressed in point 5, is linked with the ideology of economic rationalism and the implementation of free-market principles. Pusey (as quoted by Angus in 1991, pp. 8) writes: "Of particular interest in the current context is the widespread belief that education's ills may be remedied through the dismantling of bureaucracy and the imposition of the discipline of the market". Angus goes on to write:

> An educational market, ... would facilitate increased parental choice amongst educational institutions; and the resulting competition and consumer pressure, it is argued, would lead directly to higher educational standards and an education that was more relevant to the needs of the closely integrated labour market. (1992, pp.8)
This line of thinking is given some credence by Macpherson who completed nine case studies of the Australian States and Territories as well as New Zealand, during which he examined their restructuring policies. He found that the:

Ministers and their executives ... were ... driven by a pragmatic and holistic appreciation of economic, political, managerial, and educational consequences. Most weighed up options and came to believe that self-managed school development ... would more directly serve clients' needs and accelerate professional development in a cost-efficient and politically noiseless fashion. (1991, pp.60).

This notion of economic rationalism which McCarthy (1993, pp. 2) refers to as "the doctrine that says that the market is the best means of answering human wants and the most rational means of co-ordinating a society's affairs", may be satisfactory if all have equal access to partake of the system and to be represented by it. The literature reviewed in chapter two reveals that this is not the case. However, before preceding to that section, an indication of the nature of parental involvement in schools and school decision making that has eventuated since the changes began in the 60's and 70's is warranted.

What forms of parent involvement have eventuated?

Evidence from the literature and from my own experience as an Assistant Principal in a high school suggests that parent involvement has developed into many forms and occurs at many levels along a continuum. According to Ochiltree (1983, pp13-14) this continuum begins with those who have minimal involvement to those who actively participate on School Councils. She is using the continuum to show changes in the nature of involvement, from involvement by invitation, to that of joint participation in decision making. The concept becomes more useful if involvement is referred to as being on either end of a continuum from personal involvement, through administrative participation, to political participation, see Fig: 1.3. Though I have illustrated the concept of parent involvement as being on a continuum this does not mean that a parent begins their involvement with a non-political function,
progressing through to a political function. It has been my experience that parents may step in and out of their involvement at any point on the continuum (Loke, 1992).

![Diagram of parent involvement and participation continuum]

Some parents may progress from one point on the continuum to the next as they gain confidence, skills and experience while others may only stay at one point for the duration of involvement. At the school where I was Assistant Principal, a number of parents who started at the level of non political involvement by attending parent teacher interviews and school initiated Parent Discussion Groups, over time progressed to full administrative involvement as elected members of the School Council (Loke, 1992, Pateman, 1974). However the evidence suggests that many parents never get beyond the first level of personal involvement and some will not even become involved. I have also experienced the situation where parents have come into their involvement at a point close to the political level and drop back to just personal involvement as the demands on their time and frustration's prove to be offputting.

On reflecting on my experience (Wise, 1979, pp.17-27) as an educator of over 20 years and as a participator in school councils for 10 years I have observed that only a small proportion of the parent population of schools regularly become involved with the school or School Council (Loke, 1988). At one high school where I taught, only 20 parents out of a student population of 350 would be expected to turn up at a parent teacher interview night. This school was two years old and in a new town subdivision. In another much larger and well established school of 1,100 students it was not unusual for relatives of parents to be contacted by phone and asked to attend so
that a quorum could be achieved, especially at school council A.G.M. In a school of 450 students in a rural location, parents who happened to be at the school for another association meeting, were asked to sign the register at the School Council AGM, so that a quorum could be reached. At both of these latter schools, a 50% attendance by parents at parent teacher nights was considered a very good response, even though these meetings were extensively publicised in the school newsletters, the press and on television. The above reflects McKenzie's findings about citizen participation in public affairs.

**Summary**

Throughout Australia it is now mandatory for some parental involvement with schools and school decision making. The evidence suggests that this involvement is for administrative matters and not necessarily along the lines generated by the original demands for change to the education systems. Writers such as Angus and Macpherson suggest that the final response by governments has not been generated from either theoretical base, the political or the psycho-social, but rather is a response determined by the need to yield to economic pressures. Whichever proves to be finally the case, once the process progresses further towards its target, one constant factor is that there must be parents who are prepared to be actively, and preferably administratively, involved with their child's school.

The following chapter provides a review of the literature about parental involvement in schools and school decision making and demonstrates the difficulty of achieving involvement truly representative of a community that access a particular government school. The chapter also develops the concept of barriers to parent involvement through an exploration of literature from Education, Politics, Social Science and Psychology.
CHAPTER TWO

Barriers to Involvement

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the barriers to parent involvement in schools and school decision making as they can be gleaned from the literature. The search of the literature has extended beyond that presented by educationists as aspects of other disciplines such as psychology, politics and social science are relevant to this topic when they deal with the notion of citizen participation in decision making. Thus this chapter takes an inter-disciplinary approach at times in an attempt to draw out relevant information that could explain parent or citizen behaviour.

Overview

In many states of Australia recent legislation was set down to remove any legal barriers to parental involvement in schools and school decision making and, as mentioned, to create structures to force participation. However this legislation does not overcome the problems inherent in the barriers outlined in chapter one. These barriers are not of substance but rather of attitude and behaviour (Jowett and Baginsky, 1991) of psychological predisposition (McKenzie, 1979) and circumstance (D. Pettit, D., 1974, 1980, Coleman, 1985). The key barriers that can be gleaned from the literature are:

- The psychological predisposition of parents (Mckenzie, 1979).


Sections of The Education Act and how it is interpreted (NT Guidelines to School Councils and the Standard Devolution Package).

The first four above can be analysed as though they are separate entities, for the sake of presenting this case, however significant interlinking of a number of these barriers does occur which means their separation is more for convenience of explanation than reality. The latter two will be analysed together as they are fundamentally linked. One of the primary barriers is that identified by McKenzie. The variables identified by McKenzie appear as influencing factors in many of the other barriers identified.

The psychological predisposition of parents

McKenzie (1979) explores which factors motivate people toward participation in the making of decisions that are expected to be of concern to them. He defines citizen participation as a class of voluntary behaviour engaged in by an individual with the ostensible aim of influencing decisions likely to affect him as a member of a community. An assumption behind his research was that if participation is an ingrained norm of, say, a particular socio-economic group, this will be evidenced by trans-situational consistencies in behaviour and attitudes, or traits. Though he was referring to citizen participation as a broad concept he chose as his subjects members and non-members of school committees within a middle to upper-middle class region of Melbourne, Victoria. The subjects were exclusively male, as women of the time were found to have significantly different patterns than the men. Key features of his findings were:

1. Participators were found to have much higher past and current levels of participation in similar activities and had thus developed skill and confidence in the process.
2. Participators were found to have much higher leisure time activity with formal bodies than non-participators and a much higher level of activities overall in their spare-time.

3. A larger proportion was in technical/professional/managerial jobs (characteristic of the middle-class) (Macquarie) and a much larger proportion had to supervise others at work.

4. He found that parents who had affiliations with others connected with the schools and were thus able to create a social atmosphere and possibly more chance to make friends, tended to be the greater participators.

5. Participators had a larger number of friends in their neighbourhood than non-participators.

He concluded from his study that parents who possessed the above behaviours, attitudes or traits possessed the significant predispositional factors to motivate them to participate in school decision-making.

Though McKenzie excluded parents who were women as well as all those who had difficulties related to language and poverty, his findings are born out by the experience and research of others, referred to below. When combined with the research of others, some of McKenzie's findings can be generalised to the lower socio-economic class, specifically - points 1 and 3. Lack of opportunity at work and lack of activity with other formal bodies (as consistent with non-managerial, non-supervisory and non-professional jobs generally associated with people in this class) means that these parents, possibly in a greater number than middle-class parents reported in McKenzie's study, would lack the opportunity to develop the attitudes traits and behaviour consistent with points 1 and 3. Points 4 and 5 could be generalised to women, as exemplified later on this page.

When teaching in a rural school Loke (1988) found that, over a three year period (1986-1988), 25 of the total of 33 School Council parents (75 percent) were drawn from what she categorises as the professional and managerial classes. This class made up 13 percent of the total parent population. A further four of the remainder of school council parent members were employed at the school in the canteen or as office assistants. As a rural school the feeder area covers approximately 900 sq
kms, 94 percent of the Council members were found to reside in approximately 17.6 percent of the area, with most being grouped along the main arterial roads feeding through the subdivisions. This amounted to a small wedge of subdivisions extending 15 kms north west of the school. They comprised the most developed, most exclusive residential blocks from which most of the residents commute to town for work. This group fits the characteristics to lead one to believe that they would possess the attitudes, behaviours and traits to fit McKenzie's points 1, 3, 4, and 5 - neighbourhood friends (5), affiliations (4), like job categories (3), and through these, the predispositions for participation (1). In addition this rural school has other factors, particularly distance and rural roads, that preclude parents from being involved. However, there is prima facie evidence to suggest that McKenzie's predispositional factors would play a part in exclusion.

In an Australian study Cleary (in Bettington et al, 1979) found that mothers who were shy and lacking in feelings of self-esteem tended to visit their children's schools less frequently than mothers who saw themselves as confident and competent. Though this does not mean that these mothers were participators in decision-making their perceptions of their own confidence and competence (rather like McKenzie's point 1) could have predisposed them towards attending the school.

Wells (1977, in Bettington et al, pp160) in a study of five NSW primary schools, indicated that high social status mothers, mothers of long term residence in the locality, mothers of children in infants classes and mothers with more community memberships were all found to have more frequent contacts with the school than mothers without these attributes. These attributes would all fit with McKenzie's points 4 and 5 and lead to the development of the confidence and skills mentioned in point 1.
The nature of McKenzie's research is most relevant when thought of in the deficit sense, that is, parents who lack the behaviour, attitudes and traits referred to, will find it difficult to attend the school let alone participate in its functions. When the findings of this research are coupled with information concerning the social class of parents a perceived stronger barrier is created as discussed next.

The socio-economic status of parents


Davies (1979) writes: "Our research confirms the results of other studies: Class and income are the major factors in determining which citizens participate, which citizens and which groups have influence" (pp.53). An oft repeated statement in the literature is: "the culture of the school is different from that of the home for many underclass children". (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, Plowden, 1967, Karmel, 1973, Sallis, 1989, and many others).

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) writes that the separation referred to above has self perpetuating consequences:

Ethnically diverse families living in poor socio-economic conditions often face sustained isolation from the school culture, which can lead to miscommunication between parents and school. Systematic isolation of families and groups from participation in the mainstream culture only leads to resentment apathy and eventual alienation of those affected (pp.21).
This concept of alienation amongst the lower socio-economic class is added to by Sallis (1989) when she comments - with overtones of McKenzie's findings when she uses the word confidence:

I know from talking to thousands of teachers that they feel intense frustration about being unable to reach such parents ... Open doors are indeed a great privilege to those who have the confidence to come in, but often these are the ones whose children have many educational privileges. Those for whom one door after another has closed all their lives may find it hard to believe that it will ever be different (pp.60).

Further comment comes from Fitzgerald (in D’Urso et al 1981), of particular importance is his comment that they 'lack the academic background', placing them in McKenzie's group of people who do not have the 'affiliations', nor 'similar experiences' as those they have to deal with:

Once you get into their homes talking about their kids, they often reveal a high degree of interest, but they feel powerless to help their kids get on better at school. They may have the interest but they lack the academic background to do anything about it, and this in turn is often interpreted by the schools as apathy... "They just don't know how to have an impact on the school" ... "They are suspicious of the school, they don't really think the school is genuine about trying to involve them" (pp.48).

Wells (1977, in Bettington et al pp161) found that the majority of parents from the lower socio-economic group had few social links with the school. These parents were characterised as not having social status, as possibly being transient and as being non joiners. Again this can be connected with McKenzie's findings.

These quotes indicate that those in the lower socio-economic groups are isolated from the schools, not only as a result of their own school experience but through frequent locational moves, which would severely limit their ability to create affiliations for support and to gain the predispositional skills and traits McKenzie refers to. These parents have little effective communication with schools and feel powerless to change this situation. The characteristics mentioned serve to create apathy and suspicion and to deepen the isolation into alienation from schools. We find comments then from teachers of these children: "it's never the parents you want to see who come to the school"; "they don't care about what's happening to their kids".
Yet the comments quoted from the Fitzgerald report above (in D'Urso, 1981) indicate that when visiting these parents away from the school in the security of home or amongst friends, a high degree of concern is shown for their children's schooling. A similar occurrence was encountered by Sallis when disseminating information about the Taylor report (Sallis, 1989) in England.

Other researchers have found that regardless of socio-economic level, children whose parents showed high levels of interest and association with the schools actually could move ahead of other students - including those with greater initial ability (Bettington et al, 1985, Jowett et al 1991, D. Pettit, 1980). However it is quite apparent that moves for participation to create associations with the schools would rarely, voluntarily, come from parents in the lower socio-economic groups. Davis (1979) states that:

> When lower-class people seek to organise, to participate, to share power, they typically must use the only major resources they have: numbers... quantities of people - and they often use styles and tactics which the rest of us don't like. The result is reaction by the haves to assure that the distribution of power and resources remains largely unchanged (pp.53).

Though this sounds rather extreme, it highlights the importance of affiliations, friends and contacts and how these add to a person's confidence and ability to participate. By increasing the numbers who are supportive it is possible to make up for deficits in other areas, such as feelings of inadequacy in an unfamiliar situation. Problems for these parents in building the affiliations and contacts that assist development of predispositions to participate are exacerbated by situations found in the modern urban community.

The nature of the modern community

This barrier relates to the concept of community and the links between members of the community and the organisations within it, such as schools. In chapter one, a
working definition of community was given. When exploring this concept in terms of a barrier, further explanation is needed concerning the stereo-typical assumptions, as alluded to in chapter one, that are attached to this term. Bettington and Groundwater-Smith provide some useful discussion in relation to this when they quote from Tretheway (1973): "the term 'community' itself, carrying as it does connotations of a supportive group of people with common interests and concerns, may not be applicable to a modern urban neighbourhood" (pp.14).

D. Pettit (1980) proposes that there is considerable ambiguity contained in the idea of community and further that the nature of the modern mobile and pluralist society hardly possesses a symbolic essence of closeness, mutuality and interdependence that comes to mind when we visualise a community. He refers to the thinking of Barnes, who developed the concept of 'social network':

"...a set of points some of which are joined by lines. [The points], are people or sometimes groups [the actors], and the lines indicate which people interact with each other. ...A network ... ramifies in every direction, and for all practical purposes stretches out indefinitely" (pp.29).

D. Pettit (1974, pp.29) expands on this model as an analytical tool for 'community' when he writes:

the traditional notion of community seems not to be a viable tool for analysis since the reality upon which it was based has largely disappeared ... for this reason relationships with the environment around a school can probably best be seen as a series of networks ... members of a network need have no ... agreed values and any one actor can be a member of several networks, each of which has very different value systems. Any one individual may be related to a school through a single-stranded relationship, for instance as a parent or through a multiple-stranded relationship, if he is, for example, a parent, a representative of the local council, on a school association and a supplier to the local school.

An interesting adjunct to D. Pettit's analysis is provided by Coleman (1985) with work that he completed in America. He has developed the concept of the functional community which he says builds around such functions as kinship, residence, church, and work. He expresses this further in terms of: "A child's friends and
associates in school [being] sons and daughters of friends and associates of the child's parents" (see Fig: 2.1 (a) pp.45).

(a) Coleman's concept of a closed, functional community

![Diagram of a closed, functional community](image)

(b) Coleman's concept of an open, non-functional community

![Diagram of an open, non-functional community](image)

Fig: 2.1. Coleman's concept of the closed functional community (a) and open non-functional community (b) (from Coleman, J.S. 1985, Schools and the Communities They Serve. Phi Delta Kappan, April 1985, pp.529)

With the kind of closure in the social structure as demonstrated by Fig 2.1(a) Coleman asserts that, if parents have a problem they have the necessary affiliates to discuss the problem with, to sound out the alternatives, and to build support to attend the school. The parent with an open social structure as demonstrated in Fig: 2.1(b) is lacking the affiliation and thus the support when problems arise. As Coleman says she would have been forced to rely on her individual resources, and for most parents these are not sufficiently strong to impel the parent to action. He asserts that: "In school settings not embedded in functional communities, the social structure of the community fails to exhibit such closure, thus cutting off the information flow that strengthens and supports parents in their school related activities" (pp.530). (Though Coleman writes of his parent as female there is no
indication in his paper that he believes that his concept applies only to women as he frequently refers to 'parents', plural).

The idea that Coleman has developed fits well with D. Pettit's (1974) use of the network concept. Interaction between parents can occur in any direction and at any distance from the school in a linear fashion. However for the network to operate in any functional sense there has to be cross-links between parents. These cross-links are generally based on another function other than the common one of the school.

A factor that compounds the problem of communities that serve schools is that they tend to be artificially delineated by the responsible education administrators who locate the school in the first place. There is usually no correlation between the geographically bounded area and any social interaction or relationships that may pre-date the imposed artificial boundary (D. Pettit, 1974, pp.28.). This delineation is superimposed over the mobile and pluralist modern society where there is also an increasing likelihood that parents will work outside the communities where their children attend school. The overall result is that functional communities are seriously weakened and may not even generate (Coleman, 1985, pp.531). In locations where no artificial delineation of school communities is created and where schools may compete to attract students, such as in the Northern Territory, it is a fallacy to think of a school community as existing in any stereo-typical sense. Consequently, when broadly used with reference to schools, 'community' can realistically only designate the pupils and families served by the school. This latter statement could be worded: "the sphere of the community may be extended to encompass all those who have an interest in, or concern with, a particular school or group of schools" (D. Pettit, in Bettington and Groundwater-Smith, 1984, pp.14). Thus the only 'communal' factor for this group of people may be the school. It would be very difficult for these people to develop the relationships that create a functional community.
McKenzie demonstrated that predispositional barriers to parental involvement in decision making could be reduced if affiliative groups existed amongst the parents to provide support for each other. In the stereo-typical sense and in Coleman's functional sense of community (Fig 2.1 (a) and (b)), these groups would exist. However in the sense that Pettit (1978) describes, the 'community' does not readily provide a basis for such groups to develop around a school. Consequently, support in school matters that might encourage involvement, will be difficult to develop.

The first three barriers described, emanate from the parents and their attitudes behaviours and traits. This barrier however is a reflection of the social condition of the school and its personnel and the kinds of perceptions about the school and its staff that these conditions build in the parents.

The covert boundaries of schools

The overt, or visible boundary of a school is usually the edge of the school grounds as delineated by the edge of the grass verge, or maybe a fence line. In contrast, the degree of openness towards non education personnel, particularly parents and community members, that a school administration and staff possess, I have termed the covert, or hidden boundary. That is, the extent to which the school personnel will be open and outreaching enough to draw people in (D. Pettit, 1974, Bettington & Groundwater-Smith, 1985, Berger, 1991, Powell, 1991.).

Australian public schools, as D. Pettit (1974, pp. 24-26) comments, are probably best viewed as complex organisations, they are social systems in which the goals of those in charge may or may not be held by all members. As alluded to earlier, parents tend not to feature significantly as part of the organisation. Prior to D. Pettit's time of writing, once the members of the school - staff and students - had entered the grounds, very few others were attracted in or allowed to play a part and
rarely did those from the school venture out until close of business (Young and McGeeney in D. Pettit 1974 pp34). The organisation as a result was frequently bounded from its environment physically (overtly) and/or metaphysically (covertly).

The notion of a covert boundary encompassing schools is given further substance by Powell (1991) who contends that considerable social distance generally exists between schools and families. This is corroborated by the information in the previous section relating to the effects of social-class. Powell adds another dimension to this concept however when he asserts that one of the primary reasons for social distance between schools and families is a desire on the part of schools to protect the autonomy of the school and its paid personnel. This distance and desire for autonomy also translates into and supports the belief, expressed by D. Pettit (1974), that the head teacher (principal) and teachers generally, control access to the school thus creating the potential for a covert boundary to exist.

This attitudinal boundary developed by school staff is illustrated in the literature by the following statements made by some teachers and principals as responses to the concept of parent involvement:

1. The teacher must be allowed to get on with their job free from the interference of outsiders (Sallis 1989);
2. How can we be accountable if we don't have control? (Middleton, 1982);
3. Minority pressure groups will play a major role; (Bettington, 1985, Kimer, 1982);
4. Participation will serve only to increase inequality in society, by involving the middle class at the expense of less affluent and competent community members (Bettington 1985, Beare, 1985);
5. Many parents will hinder educational progress through their ultra conservative attitudes (Bettington 1985, Beare, 1985);
6. Teachers are the experts and education should be left to those who are trained (Kimer, 1982).

In schools where attitudes such as these are held, little attempt will be made to encourage parents to become involved (Bettington, 1985). Teachers and
administrators who are not convinced of the educational value of community involvement and participation may resent, as a tiresome extra duty, having to make extra efforts to collaborate with or accommodate the demands of parents. For the school to exhibit a welcoming climate for parents this must be reflected in its management processes and procedures.

Bettington and Groundwater-Smith (1985) write of three levels of openness, sequential in nature, that have to be established in a school to maximise the possibilities of involvement of parents:

- internal openness - those in the school have to have a part in informing decision making;
- openness to the communities viewpoint;
- trust established for the process to be interactive with initiatives being taken by both parties (pp.163).

When these democratic processes are active in the school then the covert boundary will be open. For these processes to be effected requires a willingness to share information and power and an ability amongst principal and staff to communicate freely. Through these processes and the inherent openness created, the school can extend its educational influence. The obligation on teachers to explain to parents procedures developed through expert knowledge, can only benefit all concerned (Karmel, 1973 pp.14).

The less schools reach out to parents (Berger, 1991) the closer the covert boundary will be around the school. Even if parents do penetrate the boundary, as D. Pettit (1978) states, they can still be warded off, starved of information and made to feel like intruders. The atmosphere denoted by a closed boundary creates an almost impenetrable barrier to parents who may already feel inadequate when facing the "experts", particularly if their own school experiences were not successful or pleasant.
I should note here that the literature points to many parents agreeing with points 1, 4, and 6 listed on pp. 48, seeing these as good reasons for not being involved in the school (Bettington et al, 1985 and Sallis, 1988). A comment from a parent (D. Pettit, 1978, pp82) highlights this: "I'm a plumber and wouldn't expect a teacher to tell me how to do my job. I'm not going to tell him how to do his. Anyway, after a hard day's work I'm not willing to go up to the school at night to take part in committee meetings."

The plumber's sentiments about committee meetings reflect the lack of interest felt by many parents in the formal life of the school. For parents, their relationship with the school is a highly personal one "the most important thing about the school is THEIR CHILD and HIS EDUCATION, NOT the school. The teacher is the closest person to the child and the most important in the school context and affects him accordingly" (Bell in Thomas and Meyenn, 1986 pp.42). The very nature of a school committee, in the plumber's case, separate from his personal interest and conflicting with his belief, is a factor that keeps him from the school. His statement could also be a 'cover up' of his own perception that he would be unable to have an effective input into the 'formal' educational activities that he deems the teachers are qualified for, that is, parents are not teachers. His unwillingness to give up a night to attend a school meeting presupposes that the meeting will be a taxing, sacrificial time rather than a social evening to be with friends. However too often we assume that all parents who stay away from involvement, do so because of the reasons outwardly expressed by the plumber, thus disguising the fact that if changes were made to the school climate to make it more receptive to input, greater input would be forthcoming.

There is evidence also, to indicate that it is not only school based education personnel, but also departmental officers and factors that surround them that exhibit or create a similar closed atmosphere to the involvement of parents.
The Statutory Acts and the attitudes of senior administration personnel

The Statutory Acts and accompanying Regulations are instruments of government to set the legal parameters for the delivery of education services in the States and Territories. Education administrators determine the degree of responsibility and power that will be devolved to parents within the provisions covered by such legislation. Thus the parameters of involvement are departmentally determined.

The attitudes of senior administrators in education are referred to as a barrier to parent involvement by many writers (Fitzgerald, Musgrave, D. Pettit, 1974, pp34-37, Middleton, 1982, pp.79, Beare, 1985, Bell, 1986, Harold, 1989, p.5). I believe that these attitudes cannot be separated from the legislation, as many of the most senior personnel will have provided advice for the drafting of the legislation. Because of this perceived connection I have dealt with these two barriers together.

In the Northern Territory one of the key roles for recent legislation, has been to incorporate parameters within which devolution may operate through the provisions covering the functions of school councils. The legislation and its regulations have been amended several times since 1983 to incorporate these features. Of relevance to this discussion is the question asked by Angus (1992 pp.8) "What actually is devolved to schools? He responds:

> Basically the answer is they get responsibility for a range of management tasks and control of their budget. Local decisions about the best and most appropriate form of educational delivery are secondary to, and need to be subordinated to, budget considerations.(pp.8).

The comments made by Angus are not inconsistent with those of Caldwell, Spinks and Sharpe, related in chapter one. It is apparent though, that Angus does not share the same sentiments about devolution that are shared by these other academics, they write far more favourably of the process and less suspiciously than Angus.
Walker's adapted model (see chapter one, pp18) can now be used to illustrate the actual nature of devolved decision making in the rest of the states in Australia. Victoria and Queensland have already been looked at in chapter one whilst demonstrating Walker's model. The information for this analysis is again mostly taken from Sharpe's data (Sharpe, 1993, pp21-22) and has been added to Table: 1.1 (pp.17) to create Table: 2.1. Again in this table the areas of parental involvement/decision making are broadly consolidated into 14 areas or headings (see table 2.1), these are then segregated into two groups - Administrative Issues and Political Issues.

Table: 2.1. The political or administrative nature of resources that may be devolved to schools, in the Australian States and Territories (After Sharpe, 1993, appendix 1).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management at School Level</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>AUST.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADMINISTRATIVE FACTORS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial (eg resources and equipment)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School maintenance and minor capital works</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>8 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities (eg telephones, electricity, water)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N 4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement teachers, salaries, relief teachers</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development funds</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>8 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of non-teaching staff</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>5 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-teaching salaries</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N 75</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>8 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLITICAL FACTORS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher salaries</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>8 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Principals</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>5 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of other senior staff</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of teachers</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>8 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major capital works</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*School based curriculum development without guidelines.</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>8 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Assessment and accreditation YR 1 - YR 10. 9</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Y 6</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y 6</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y 6</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Y 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: P = political. A = administrative. Y = devolved to schools. N = not devolved. m = moderation. 1. QLD is trialing this. 2. Employed by council. 3. Trialing in 1993.

In all States purchases of resources and equipment and replacement of teacher short term vacancies (administrative issues) are considered to be totally school

**Australian States and Territories**

QLD = Queensland
VIC = Victoria
NSW = New South Wales
SA = South Australia
WA = Western Australia
TAS = Tasmania
NT = Northern Territory
ACT = Australian Capital Territory
based responsibilities. Control of teacher salaries and selection and capital works (political issues) are fully in the hands of the central bureaucracies.

The information in Table 2.1 simplified into numerics to show the percentage of administrative and political devolution that occurs in each state and Territory before it can be illustrated by Walker's modified model, this is represented by Table 2.2, below.

Table: 2.2. Percentage of administrative and political devolution issues actually devolved to schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of devolution to school level</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>AUST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>administrative devolution percentage</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political devolution percentage</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: 2.2 indicates:

(i) Most States are comfortable with devolving administrative issues to the school level, ranging from 86% to 14%

(ii) Most states are not comfortable with devolving political issues to the school level, devolution ranging from 57% to 14%.

(iii) The Australian average shows that the national tendency to devolve administrative issues to schools is more than twice that of political issues.

Whilst the process of devolution is still in a state of flux, it is not possible to be exact about these proportions. This state of flux is confirmed by both Sharpe (1993) and the report from the Director Generals' Conference in 1992, which has been referred to above and in chapter one.

The information from Table: 2.2 can now be visualised by Walker's modified model (see Fig: 1.1 Chapter one, for the original). I have represented this by two diagrams in order to reduce the 'clutter' that would occur with one. The simplest means to do this was to total the Y's for administrative issues and the Y's for political issues in each State and Territory and to place these totals in their respective positions on the administrative and political continua of the model. In Fig: 2.2(a), the triangle Xab demonstrates that the ACT has little devolution in terms of either category, political
or administrative as defined in this thesis and when compared with the other States and Territories. The triangles $X_{cd}$ and $X_{ef}$ for South Australia and New South
Wales respectively illustrate greater administrative devolution in these States but still not a great deal in the political category.

In Fig:2.2(b) the triangles $Xgh$ and $Xij$ illustrate that Western Australia and Tasmania have quite significant administrative devolution but again very little political. The Northern Territory, triangle $Xkl$, illustrates that within these definitions, the NT has the greatest degree of political devolution to schools when compared with the other States. However it should be pointed out that for factors such as Major Capital Works the school may advise only, and for selection of Principal, the Council chairperson is one member of a selection panel of three. The other two members being employed education personnel. If these are taken into account then the political aspect for the NT would be reduced.

Not all States and Territories are the same in terms of to whom or to what the functions are devolved. In some cases, devolution is to a school council, board or management group, in others it appears to be to the school administration. In the Northern Territory at the time when full devolution was to occur the NTED stated that the functions that a school council did not adopt had to be taken up by the principal. The diagram below (fig: 2.4) illustrates which states actually have school boards or councils in operation across the state and which are still voluntary. The percentages in the diagram refer to the percentage of schools in the State or Territory that have councils or 'Decision Making Groups' as they are known in Western Australia. This figure (2.4) also needs to be read in conjunction with Tables: 2.1 and 2.2 and figure 2.2 (a) and (b) which creates a clearer picture of the nature of the autonomy and responsibility that is actually devolved.
Fig: 2.4. The proportion of schools with school councils in each State and Territory as at October 1993 (Information derived from Devolution and accountability project report, Conference of the Directors General, 1992 April and Sharpe, 1993 pp.23).

The above information is important for analysis when it is compared with the rhetoric of departmental officers as they publicise devolution and the importance of school councils. Of further interest is a comparison of this information with the wishes of parents and the community. I have concentrated on the Northern Territory to provide the information for this section giving a general, brief account from the literature of how it is possible for the legislation and attitudes of departmental officers to act as barriers to parent involvement in schools and school decision making. The account here is brief as this is part of the aspect that I intend to pursue further in my case-study. Thus aspects of the information presented here have been developed further in chapters 4 and 5.

An examination of the Northern Territory of Australia Education Act of 1985 (the Act), which comprises a number of sections relating to school councils, provides an insight into what actually eventuates as autonomy and responsibility (keeping in mind the nature of devolution in the Territory as shown by Walker's model). The wording in the Act is not exactly that used by Sharpe and the writers of the Directors General report as used for Tables: 2.1 and 2.2, but the two can be blended. Section 71 (c) (1983) itemises the functions of School Councils. There are five sub-sections, with 14 parts to sub-section 1, broadly relating to the 14 areas of parental involvement listed in Table 2.1.
I have classified six of these functions as administrative according to the definitions given earlier:

- Use of moneys allocated by the department,
- Use of school buildings,
- Maintenance of buildings and grounds,
- The rendering of prescribed services,
- The conditions and terms of employment of other persons,
- Fundraising.

These functions all fit Table 2.1 except for the last (fund raising) does not appear as a separate item. The operative terms for these functions are action terms: Determine, Expend, Conduct, Control, Employ, Raise. The amount of money referred to in the first function above is determined by the Education Department. The Council is then able to budget that money and control its expenditure (Devolution Package, 1991). The councils have no means of input into determining the quantity of money to be allocated to the schools.

I have classed six of these parts as political functions according to the definitions given earlier:

- Implementation of Territory educational policies
- Identification of educational needs of community
- Initiatives to develop links with the community and community education
- Job description of the principal
- Job descriptions of the teaching and ancillary staff
- Major Capital works

The operative term for each of the functions in this list is to Advise either the principal/head teacher, the Secretary of the department, and/or the Minister. The rules and regulations relating to School Councils are worded in the same vein.
Councils are to be mindful of the Government's educational policies, to facilitate implementation, to be concerned with social aspects of the school, to encourage other parents to be involved in school life. The thirteenth function is to carry out other functions according to the Minister's direction.

In the foreward to the Devolution Package (1991), G.J. Spring, Secretary of the NT Education Department, writes:

> At the school level, legislation and policy have provided school councils with educational and administrative powers greater than those of other school systems. School councils in the NT are better equipped than any in Australia to make school level decisions which reflect the wishes of their community. More and more areas of educational decision-making and school management have been devolved from head office...to allow for]...councils and the community to have greater input to, and control of, the educational programmes of their children.

How do Spring's (1991) comments compare with the actual situation? At face value the Territory could be said to have greater Devolution than other states, see Fig 2.2(b), however the information on pp.52 indicates that the actual situation is disguised. At least two of the political functions are limited by being advisory or as observers in panels weighted by education officers. Control only occurs in relation to administrative functions and within the framework of guidelines and allocated amounts. In terms of educational programmes these also can only be determined within guidelines set by the NTED. Should a council wish alternative curriculum then it must apply to the Secretary of Education for this to occur.

Spring's statements create an illusion that the council is in a position above the principal and outside of the education department in terms of its power over some functions. This illusion contradicts the statements made (later) by Dr Payne the then Director of Curriculum and Assessment (NTED). According to Payne, parent power and decision making (autonomy and responsibility) equates to management on the lower end of a line from head office, not as intimated by Spring. Payne in his Monograph Number One, The Principal a Matter of Balance (1989) adds further weight to this conclusion:
Viewed hierarchically, there are the staff, students and parents below [the principal]... Above or laterally there is the school council and other community influences. Above there is the superintendent and the department and minister (pp.22).

Payne also makes comment in the same monograph about the autonomy of school councils and their relationship to education policy:

The balance in the relationship of the three parties [the school council, the Principal and the Superintendent] should... have the major objective of ensuring the best possible education for the students of the school... But who determines what that 'best possible education' is? The argument here is that the government has that right and sets broad policies for the department to implement... In effect policy is established through a pyramidal structure. At the top is the Government which gives broad aims, objectives and policy. Each layer in the system progressively spells out this policy, translating it into practical terms at its level and using discretion allowed from above to make adaptations in implementation which are necessary for its particular context. Not all policy is written - probably most. Much of it is held in the heads of those who make decisions (pp.22).

Payne's view that education policies should be in the hands of the Government, which means the bureaucracy, infers that councils have no role to play. Payne's statement further discourages parent involvement by undermining the belief that Government services are delivered equitably and consistently because policies and procedures are written down and thus not impacted on when personnel change.

Payne's writing is rather reminiscent of the neo-pluralist ideology related in chapter one (pp.33), which refers to an "elite, endowed [with] epistemic and process privileges". (Macpherson, 1991, pp.53). In reality however, council members are elected by the people (under the Act) and report direct to the Minister. Council must in effect be considered as outside the bureaucratic hierarchy and not layered to the base of a pyramid as implied by Payne. The Act places the council in the situation as illustrated by D. Pettit (1982, pp. 5).
Further into Payne's paper he continues to imply that information should not be readily available to councils, Payne writes:

...the principal is the gatekeeper who largely decides just what will or will not have an effect on the school. The principal advises the council on all aspects of its operations. This follows from the principals expertise and control of information (pp.3).

Payne, a senior administrator who participates at the policy development level, assumes existence of a comprehensive set of guidelines and literature which councils can effectively use:

Thus local control of schools does not mean unrestricted autonomy. Rather, it means freedom to operate within defined areas and boundaries or the freedom to exercise assigned powers and perform defined functions according to guidelines (pp.2).

The degree of such established constraints implied by Payne is not apparent in comments made by Spring. The need to gatekeep and filter information to council makes it very difficult for principals to play a proper and pivotal role. Being incorporated bodies, council's dealings with commercial entities are subject to normal market practices and laws. Payne's reliance upon the expertise of principals to control the dissemination of information to council therefore provides a shift of the burden of accountability from the council back to the NTED.
Such conflicting information from Spring and Payne has the capacity to create disbelief and confusion amongst parents and begs the question "is involvement worthwhile"?

To be a council member of an NT school, parents need skills in managing contracts, employment, budgeting, accounting, building inspection and fundraising to name a few. All of these functions (except fundraising) have been formalised in the *Handbook for School Governing Councils, Northern Territory Department of Education* (1985) and *Standard Devolution Package, A practical Guide to Education Decision Making*, Northern Territory Education Department (1991). These are the Guidelines given legal status under The Act. The effect of this formalisation is ultimately that, even though the functions will occur in many different schools, there will be uniformity in the procedures followed and the reporting of them. Heavy formalisation, however reduces flexibility of an organisation to respond to needs emanating from its environment and to cope with change (Mintzberg, 1989. pp.317-320) as illustrated by the parents comment - f) (pp. 63 below). These functions have little impact on the educational outcomes of students, but rather keep those parents who do become involved very busy and deflected from questioning the educational policies, procedures and processes that occur at their school. Further, the functionalisation counteracts responsiveness to parent needs. It also confirms earlier outcries that a large part of council's role is to replace the many clerical positions abolished at head office.

Macpherson (1991) in his paper the "Restructuring of Administrative Policies in Australian and New Zealand State School Education Systems: Implications for Practice Theory and Research" goes so far as to suggest that one of the reasons for the formation of councils is to create a focus (shift the blame) from the government to the council, thus taking the government out of the spotlight, he writes:
[A] common feature [of restructuring in education] is that the devolution of accountabilities in line management structures appears to owe a great deal to two concerns; the strategic use of structural distance for damage control purposes, while providing a corridor for the occasional use of ministerial reserve powers (pp. 55).

Macpherson summarises this as being a means for governments to "control political noise" (1991, pp. 56).

With reference back to Angus' comment (pp.51), "What is devolved to Councils?" It appears that in the NT, education matters are not just subordinated to budget matters, rather they are replaced by them. Very little else is available for councils to be involved in. This sentiment is reflected in the comments of parents: a), b) and d) on pp. 63 below (Devolution Symposium 1992).

It is quite possible that the nature of the involvement that is legislated for repels many parents who in McKenzie's context would not possess the skills and confidence to predispose them to be involved, particularly considering the nature of the tasks that members must perform. The kinds of tasks involved are consistent with the nature of the jobs predominantly occupied by the middle-class. Some may even feel that they are being cheated in the partnership alluded to in the foreward to the Standard Devolution Package "The education of NT students is now very much in the hands of schools, parents and school communities" (Spring) when they come up against attitudes of the administration as expressed in the Payne monograph. Inferences such as these force the concept of parent involvement into the narrow channels of discharging clerical duties. The spirit of devolution from a parent's perspective is the solicitation of broader parental aspirations of the educational needs for their children and with the assistance of the professional expertise of teachers, principals and departmental officers, to translate and transform such ideas into practical educational outcomes. This is reflected in the parent comments a) and d) pp,63 below (Devolution Symposium 1992).
A number of comments from parents that emanate from the 1992 Devolution Symposium indicate their concerns, frustrations and even suspicions, adding foundation to the problems expressed:

**Devolution Symposium Darwin 1992.**

a) "If the process of devolution is serious about effecting improved Educational outcomes for our children and not just making the machine and administration work better, it must inevitably involve true local decision making about issues of curriculum & pedagogy" (pp.2).

b) "What can schools not do any longer in order to now focus on educational outcomes? (pp.4).

c) "Central authorities will not be supported if they hang on to power" (pp.25).

d) "Parents want to be involved in matters concerning their own children. There's no obligation on parents to be involved in administrative matters - these are the role of the school administration" (pp.1).

e) "Some school communities are able to cope better because of the expertise and skills base of the Council and Principal" (pp.2).

f) "What can be done to overcome the "outside" pressures which keep most schools fundamentally having identical structures?" (pp.4).

g) "I understand that the ERC cuts / devolution have unsettled many officers and they seem to be groping their way using the old system's checks and balances." Example: Books audited - legality of our one-line budget. Now being directed to supply information which directly contradicts the one - line budget principles and throws up heaps of suspicions by Councils and school staff" (pp.18).

The problems depicted above also surface in the literature. The problem written about is not that devolution occurs, but the form that it generally takes, coupled with reluctance to let go of control by the administrators. Recognition of the reluctance to let go of control is demonstrated by parent comments - c) and g) above. The administrators perceive that letting go of control to Councils or groups of parents will lead to loss of accountability and an increase in tension when facing possibly new and unfamiliar situations (Middleton, 1982 pp.75). A means of counteracting these problems for the education personnel is seen to be to formalise procedures and to retain as a central function, control of such aspects as curriculum (Harold, 1989, Middleton, 1982, D. Pettit, 1974) and other political functions. Control is maintained by limiting the powers and scope of those parents or community members prepared
to become involved (see parent comments a), d) and g) pp. 62) and to push further into the background, those parents who for any of the reasons given earlier, have difficulty in approaching schools.

Beare (1985) writes:

"It is simply not healthy to have parents or teachers or an education department with majority control over schools. [Further that ] Partnership ... expresses something fundamental about the relationship necessary for the best possible education of children. Teachers and parents must feel on equal terms with each other...(pp.9).

Summary

Government schools are legislated to provide equity of access to education services by everyone, that means the absence of barriers to all involved. However differences in both educational opportunity and outcomes between the middle to upper socio-economic class and the lower class were demonstrated to exist by the Plowden, Karmel, Taylor, and Fitzgerald reports. Each of these reports strongly promotes the need for a recognition that parents and schools need to be brought closer together. A greater congruence between the cultures of both was seen as one means of improving the outcomes of children of the lower class, thus giving them increased opportunities in life. We have seen the recommendations of these reports translated into basically two types of parental involvement. Parents can be elected to become involved in the formal processes, that is as a part of the School Council, and be committed to the school through this means. Alternately parents can be involved in a less formal manner and keep their commitment to matters that specifically concern their child (see parent comment (d) pp.63).

With the school council type of involvement, the parents hope to be able to influence the way the school functions and to be informed of the school's policies and programmes. The parents hope to ensure the best education for their child by making sure that the school runs in a manner that satisfies them (Bell, 1986, and
Allen, 1989). The second type of involvement is very personal, it generally occurs on a one to one basis between a parent and some select members of the school. The parent is concerned only with the outcomes for his/her child (Sallis, 1989).

However, overwhelmingly, the evidence points to the fact that it is the middle-class parents who seek involvement of either kind. For either of these two types of involvement to occur, the accepted situation is for the parent to feel free to come to the school. The parent who is able to get through the 'barriers' will be the one who appears at the school and is able to become involved.

Achievement of success in these two forms of involvement is distinguished by the possession of personality traits and attitudes consistent with the different requirements of each type. In the latter case, to achieve involvement successfully, requires that a parent overcomes the barriers to attending the school. These can emanate from: their own predispositions; the prior experiences consistent with their social class; whether, for them, the community in which they reside is functional in terms of their school and/or whether the school is welcoming towards them - the covert boundaries are open. With this type of involvement they do not have to perform in front of other parents nor to feel that they have to be able to understand anything about the system. They do not have to confront more than one 'expert' at the time. They do not have to make a commitment to be available on a regular basis for meetings. If they are having problems in overcoming a basic fear of the school, they can bring 'a friend' for support, a desire reminiscent of Davies comments concerning strength in numbers.

With involvement of the type connected with membership of school councils, not only does the parent have to possess the confidence to overcome the barriers noted above, they also have to possess the confidence in themselves to 'perform' in front of others. They need to be prepared for all that the other form of involvement does
not require and more. To actively participate on school councils or boards requires some understanding of the processes of group decision making and an ability to articulate a point of view clearly and succinctly, skills that the literature states are developed through work and affiliated activities. The composition and size of the council also inhibits the bringing of 'a friend' to provide support. A large proportion of the aforementioned abilities must be present even if the parent does not possess those noted previously. The Education Act with its legalising and formalising of the official parent involvement process ensures that this is the case. The development of these types of skills, the literature shows is consistent with the work and life experiences of the middle-class (see pp.41-43).

In the Territory, the NTED has given recognition to the formal process of involvement and has provided the manuals, training and staff to encourage its success. If schools wish to develop the informal process this must be done from existing resources or, if they are skilled in submission writing, by obtaining a Commonwealth grant to provide additional resources. In this manner little encouragement, for example in the form of time, personnel or resources, is given to schools with an already busy workload, to develop programmes to reach out to the 'missing' parents.

A situation arises then that some are enfranchised, through who and what they are, to influence (however small) the operation of their school and others are not. Payne (1989) writes of this:

The school council is sometimes construed as not being representative of the local community but a case might be made that those involved are councillors through normal democratic processes and are the best expressions of school community opinion that we have (p. 1).

However, if the barriers detailed in this chapter affect people in the manner expressed here, then the council members are only the members of the community who are best equipped to overcome the barriers. If actions are not taken to seek out and encourage other membership then the opinion that has been sought is not
necessarily the best that could be obtained. Certainly the opinions are not representative of a large proportion of the parents, generally those in the lower socio-economic class. Just as the culture of this class differs from the culture of the school so does it differ from the culture of the middle-class. If schools are not seen to be coping well with the needs of this class, why should middle-class parents be any more successful at being empathetic with their needs or wishes? The parents' comments reflect the possible dangers when creating a situation in which a non-representative group has the power. When "push comes to shove" the concerns of the volunteer's child (that is the council members child) will be paramount. This leaves us then with the situation as described by Fitzgerald seventeen years ago and already referred to pp.28 of this thesis:

People who are poor and disadvantaged are victims of a societal confidence trick. ...schools reflect societies' intention to maintain the present unequal distribution of status and power. Because the myth of equal opportunity has been so widely accepted by Australians, the nature of unequal outcomes has been largely ignored. Thus failure to succeed in the competition is generally viewed as being the fault of the individual rather than as the inevitable result of the way our society is structured.

Having viewed the literature to develop the extent and nature of the barriers to parent involvement, the next chapter details the specific case study research concerning the writing of NTED personnel and how this may become a factor that operates as another barrier to parental involvement. This barrier fits closely with the concept of the covert boundary of a school or education department.
CHAPTER THREE

The Investigation

Introduction

- There are three broad sections in this chapter: (1) The theoretical and conceptual basis of my research, (2) The research design, and (3) The research method.

To pursue my research, which involves deriving meaning and inference from the written text, I sought substantiation of the method from the fields of Hermeneutics, Linguistics, and Content Analysis. The ideologies that underpin both hermeneutics and functional linguistics are similar. In both, language is seen as conveying more than mere literal meaning. Thus both theories have the capacity to give validity to the method used. A Content Analysis approach provides the structure and control for the research method.

Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of The Research

The nature of language

A long held view of language sees it as a medium of description and to a considerable degree reflecting what the world was like (Wittengenstein as quoted by Keeves, 1990, pp.23). However more recently this view has changed:

Language is all the things you do with language. ... the written text and the spoken word have no essence of their own. They can only be interpreted within the context of the practical actions involved where language is a form of social activity (Keeves, 1990, pp. 24).

Understanding ... shows the universality of human linguisticality as a limitless medium that carries everything, not only the culture that has been handed down through language, but
The above quotations indicate that this view of language is quite different. It is seen as the key to understanding as the medium through which society and culture are maintained and explored, not just described. According to Keeves:

... the written text and the spoken word have no essence of their own. They can only be interpreted in the context of the practical actions involved where language is a form of social activity. ... Day to day actions are taken through a form of language that presumes a great deal more than is actually said (Keeves, 1990, pp.24).

This current and broader view of the nature of language is the view used by hermeneutists whose task is to unravel meaning from text through the theory and practice of interpretation and understanding in the different social contexts in which human beings live and work. Michael Halliday in the text Language Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social Semiotic Perspective (Halliday and Hasan 1990) presents a similar view:

The tendency in much of the western intellectual tradition has been to dissociate language and experience, in such a way that language is seen as rather neutral, merely serving to carry the fruits of experience. Whereas in this view [the social semiotic] language is seen as a kind of 'conduit' subservient to experience in various ways,... language is itself not only a part of experience, but intimately involved in the manner in which we construct and organise experience. As such, it is never neutral but deeply implicated in building meaning (Halliday & Hasan, 1990, pp.v).

The ideology expressed here from both the hermeneutist and the linguist, substantiating that text can reveal more than just literal meaning, is highly relevant to and forms a basis of this research.

**Meaning, interpretation and understanding**

My research is grounded in the belief that the written word, as stated by Keeves (1990, pp.67), can be interpreted to determine literal meaning and to disclose hidden and underlying meanings, and the meaning that the author intended. When writing this, Keeves was referring to the ideology behind hermeneutics and the
purpose of such study. Odman when writing of the same topic presents us with eight different lines of thought, the most interesting being, for the purpose of this research, that hermeneutics can be:

1. Systems of interpretation, used by human beings to reach the meaning behind myths, symbols, and actions;
2. Theories of the process and validity of interpretation;
3. Empirically oriented schools of hermeneutics, studying people in a social context (Odman in Keeves, 1990 pp. 63).

The research reported here could fit within each of these lines of thought, however, for this particular study, point 2 is most relevant as it justifies my approach and suggests validity can be found in the application of interpretation of text as the means to explore the research problem.

Keeves explains further:

Moreover, this approach [Hermeneutics] recognises that in order to obtain meaning as to how and why humans act it is necessary for an investigator to enter into dialogue with the human agents. Furthermore the changing view of language extends the hermeneutic inquiry to include the use of language in daily life at the tacit level as well as at the discursive level. (Keeves, 1990, pp. 25).

According to Keeves, Holsti and Odman (in Keeves, 1990 pp. 65), understanding then becomes more than just the literal. The act of understanding (Verstehen) must build on prior understanding, it always relates to a context, in terms of which its elements can be understood and which in turn make their context intelligible.

Odman (Ibid pp.65) in referring to Schleiermacher indicates that 'interpretation' can also go beyond the literal. He states that Schleiermacher writes of both grammatical and psychological interpretations. The former being according to linguistic principles, the latter "concerning the thoughts and feelings of the author through identification with or transformation into the other person" (pp.65).
Holsti (ibid, pp.32-33) who is quoted extensively by Bailey (1987), and Roberts (in Helle, 1991) and has a section of his text reproduced in Lindzey and Aronson (vol. 2, 1968) provides a further dimension to understanding and interpretation of text when he writes of the debate between the representational and instrumental models of communication:

In the former, words are taken to "represent" accurately the author's inner feelings; thus there are constant, though probabilistic, relationships between the content of communication and underlying motives of their authors. The latter argue that it is not the face meaning of the message, but what it conveys given its context and circumstance that is important (Pool, 1959, p. 3; cf George, 1959b; Mahl, 1959). In this [latter] view communication is seen as an instrument of influence; hence the content of messages may be shaped by the communicators intent to manipulate his audience in certain directions.

Though Holsti, when writing in 1969, chose to align his thinking to that of the instrumental school, both models are now incorporated within the hermeneutic ideology and this now allows the interpreter the broadest scope from which to derive understanding from the text being interpreted.

The concept of the instrumental and representational models, the quote from Schleiermacher above as well as Keeve's comment that "the investigator [must] enter into dialogue with the human agents", - the contact with the human agents being through their text, all link to create a process for the interpreter. In this light the interpreter must carry out a mental discourse or a unipersonal debate, to explore the holistic world of the text and thus to place the text in its social context. Always remembering that the interpretation of the text will be altered by the contextual experiences and value preferences of the interpreter (Keeves,1990, pp. 21). This holding a dialogue with the text is rather like the concept of reflection employed by Wise as a tool for curriculum deliberation (Wise, 1979, pp.25).
Text and context

It is appropriate at this point to say something about the nature of text and context and the relationship between the two. The hermeneutists see the two as inseparable and my case study analysis requires reflection on the context surrounding the texts that I analyse, in order to understand the factors influencing the writers at the time. Keeves (1988), writing of text as viewed by the hermeneutist, states:

...a text not only refers to itself. Considered as written discourse not only as language, it refers to a certain situation in a way that is reminiscent of the situation of oral discourse, with all its nonverbal signs, which all refer to a world both within and outside the world itself (Keeves, 1988, pp.67).

Halliday (1990) presents a very clear explanation of text and context that complements the hermeneutic. In its simplest form text is seen as language that is functional. Text can be either spoken or written or any other medium of expression that we like to think of (Halliday and Hasan, 1990, pp.10). (For my purposes the text I use for analysis is written, mostly in the form of official publications and correspondence). Halliday qualifies written text as being more than just words and sentences but rather as being "really made of meanings" (1990, pp.10). Text is seen as a 'process' an interactive event, a social exchange of meanings. As well as this, text is seen as a product that can be studied, have value in its own right (eg. a poem), and which has a certain construction (pp.10).

Halliday sees both text and context as being inseparable:

The terms CONTEXT and TEXT, put together like this, serve as a reminder that these are aspects of the same process. There is text and there is other text that accompanies it: Text that is 'with', namely the con-text. This notion of what is 'with the text' however, goes beyond what is said and written: it includes other non-verbal goings-on - the total environment in which the text unfolds. So it serves to make a bridge between the text and the situation in which texts actually occur (Halliday and Hasan, 1990, pp.5).

For the purposes of this research the context surrounding the writing of the documents and that surrounding the writers must be considered, particularly as the
analysis is aimed at bringing forward perceptions and inferences that may be derived from latent messages in the text.

Generally hermeneutists deal with archival texts rather than contemporary texts, however, according to Outhwaite (1987, pp.62), Hans-Georg Gadamer writes of hermeneutics as being 'universal' because understanding is the fundamental way in which human beings participate in the world. In being universal, application must be able to be made to the contemporary.

Thus hermeneutics and linguistics provides the theory to substantiate the manner in which text is treated in this research. It places language as a form of social action not just as a descriptive tool. Text is seen as containing literal, hidden and inferred meanings that can be drawn from it by the interpreter, however this process of interpretation will always be coloured by the interpreters' predispositions and prior understanding that is their value preference (Cavanagh, 1992, pp.151). To extract meaning from the text, the interpreter must 'enter into dialogue' with the text thus enabling the text to be interpreted as part of the author's and the interpreter's different social contexts. In carrying out this process the interpreter needs to consider the social context and circumstance surrounding the writing of the text.

Research Strategy

The research strategy reported here is in the form of a case study. The research carried out is reductionist in terms of a study into barriers to parent and citizen involvement in schools and school decision making, as I have dealt with only one factor that could prove to be a barrier; - the messages contained in the writings of Northern Territory Education Department (NTED) personnel. The study is exploratory in nature, to ascertain if the written communications from NTED personnel, that are accessible to parents, could influence their receptiveness to
being involved in schools and school decision making, and actually act as a barrier to their involvement. Because of this explicit context and narrow focus a case study approach was felt to be most appropriate.

This research is not positivist in strategy. Dealing with analysis of the written word and drawing inferences about the nature of reactions to it, would be too restricted if controls and contrived experiments or quantifiable repetitive behaviours were part of the research design. In dealing with a practical rather than a theoretical problem, the following of rules or guidelines such as appear in positivist research would again restrict the researchers' actions (Shaw in Cavanagh, 1992, pp. 149). The research is not ethnographic as I have not acted as a participant observer or mere observer. The context of the texts studied is quite individual and its features differ from that of any other context in education (Eisner, 1984, pp.209). Thus what I set out to do does not fit within research strategies where the research design and methodology follow preconceived patterns. Shaw's statement, "There are no laws in the natural science sense of the term to be found here" is very apt (in Cavanagh, 1992, pp.149).

To borrow from Schwab (1969, pp. 20-21), the method does not seek a generalisation or explanation, but rather a decision about the existence of a phenomenon - mixed messages pertaining to parent and community involvement in schools - contained in education personnel communications. Some of these communications have already been referred to in chapter two where this type of occurrence is suggested as a barrier to parent involvement. Thus the method used is not inductive however it has been deductive (differing from Schwab), following the establishment of the case, as inferences have been drawn about advocacy and value preferences from the data obtained.

To return to Schwab, his explanation of the use of "deliberation" closely satisfied the needs of this research:
[Deliberation] ... treats both ends and means and must treat them as mutually determining one another. It must try to identify with respect to both, what facts may be relevant. It must try to ascertain the relevant facts in the concrete case. It must try to identify the desiderata in the case. It must generate alternative solutions... It must ... weigh alternatives and their costs and consequences against one another and choose, not the right alternative, for there is no such thing, but the best one (Schwab, 1969, pp.21-21).

In this case study, deliberation is appropriate to be used as a process in the method of analysing the text, particularly when viewing the text's context. In terms of this study, the notion of "entering into a dialogue with the author" requires reflecting on the atmosphere of the education context at the time of the writing and on the dominant attitude towards parent and community involvement in schools when the writer received their training and first employment in education. In tandem with this reflection the interpreter needed to deliberate about the effects that the context and circumstance might have had on the author's 'value preference' in terms of their relationship to the concept of parent and community involvement in schools and school decision making. Deliberation also proved invaluable for development of the research questions and variables.

A word of caution is introduced here by Holsti (1969, pp. 32) when he quotes Lasswell, Lerner and Poole: "There is yet no good theory of symbolic communication by which to predict how given values, attitudes, or ideologies will be expressed in manifest symbols". The developments noted above from Keeves' writings have had broad acceptance in the last twenty years in hermeneutic studies. However, I believe that Holsti's caution is well founded and thus any conclusions drawn regarding tacit meaning and value preference of the authors as well as transferred effect on the receiver of the messages, have only been stated as inferences in this thesis.

The case study research is reductionist and specific to the context of Darwin the capital city in the Northern Territory of Australia. The research seeks to show the existence of a phenomenon and is thus exploratory. There are no preconceived sets of laws that could act to delimit this study such as exist in positivistic research, thus
deliberation and reflection have been included as integral processes in this research strategy of seeking meaning from data contained in the texts. A combination of method that brings together aspects of case study, hermeneutics, linguistics and content analysis are employed. However it is important in this form of study to be well acquainted with the caution proposed by Holsti and to endeavour to ensure that there is sufficient corroboration of findings from a wide selection of written material.

The Research Design

Introduction

The above discussion of interpretation of text and meaning of text has a double application in relation to this research. When applied to the parent or community member they can be thought of as analogous to the hermeneutist who deals with archival text. In both cases the readers will not have personal contact with the author of the text that they are exposed to and will thus have to glean understanding (Verstehen) of the messages contained in the text from the text alone. The reader retrieves the text's messages, both latent and manifest (Holsti, 1969 pp.173), through the context of their own predispositions and thus derives meaning both literal and latent. When this thinking was applied to my activities as I analysed the text there was a dual analogy, first to the hermeneutist because I chose not to interview the writers, though this would have been possible, and second to the parent or community member as I attempted to read the text as they would. However, considering my own predispositions and prior learning as a teacher and teacher administrator, I had to take into consideration that these predispositions could have caused bias within my interpretation and could have altered my interpretation from that which the parent or community member might have made. Keeves in referring to Gadamer explains this problem; "the interpreter must not therefore take possession of the thing being interpreted he or she must let it reveal its own world" (Keeves, 1990 pp. 66).
Research context

The context of the research is that described in chapter one in the section headed "The Situation in the Northern Territory since the 70's". While the changes so described were occurring to the structure of the NTED there were numerous personnel changes as well. These changes involved those who would be communicating with parents and community members including the Minister for Education and the departmental Secretary. Because of the amount of change as well as to retain anonymity for the writers, few names of individual writers have been used, the main use of reference, where needed, has been to a position. An identifying name has only been used where the quoted text has been published for general public distribution.

The relevant texts to be analysed were selected from the period between 1987 - 1993, which was a period when the most extensive demands were placed on parents and the community for involvement in schools. During this time significant evaluation of and changes to the Junior and Senior school curriculum occurred, full devolution was proposed and implemented, the NTED was restructured and in 1993 the Darwin junior secondary schools were targeted for restructuring back to full comprehensive schools, to begin in semester one, 1994.

The texts for analysis that I looked for were those communications that a parent or community member would have access to. Thus I sought to place myself in the position of parents or community members who had to make up their minds about whether to be involved or to continue involvement, from the information they had in front of them. However I have not assumed that the only means employed by parents is that of the written word. In chapter two there is significant evidence to demonstrate that informal discussion and other communications play a very important role as well as the predispositions of the individual towards the concept.
The text to be analysed

The nature of the text I sought has been classified into four groups:

1. General correspondence to and from the NTED (including COGSO (see below), school councils and individuals).

2. Official publications of COGSO, (guidelines for function, booklets and brochures of information). targeting parents, the community and school councils.

3. Official publications of the NTED (guidelines for function, booklets and brochures of information, reports and plans) targeting parents, the community and school councils.

4. The record of parents questions from the NT Devolution Symposium in 1992 and the NTED responses to these.

In order to obtain texts in these categories I approached the Northern Territory Council of Government Schools Organisation (COGSO) for access to their files. Access was granted with the statement that "the COGSO files are open, they are there for parent and community use and not only for the organisation. The only files that might be sensitive are the ones dealing with staffing matters" (COGSO president). An undertaking was given that no person or school would be identifiable from the information presented in this thesis and that any copies of information that I removed from the office would be returned to COGSO for their records. Thus for future reference, should a person wish to pursue my research further, they would need to approach COGSO for the information required (see appendix 1 for address).

I chose COGSO because it is recognised by the NTED as the peak parent body in the Northern Territory. The organisation provided me with a list of 140 Territory schools of which 78 were paid members during 1993. This 78 includes all Darwin urban schools except for one of the smaller high schools. The schools that have not joined are, in the main, remote aboriginal schools of less than 100 pupils.

In its booklet of information for school council members, the following is stated about the role and function of NT COGSO:
Northern Territory COGSO is a body of parents involved in improving education for their children.

Schools send delegates (according to their school enrolments) to regional and Territory meetings on educational issues. The Council meets twice yearly and conducts regular information and educational parent seminars.

NT COGSO affiliates with the national organisation, Australian Council of State School Organisations.

NT COGSO has direct access to the Minister for Education, has members on education review committees, Board of Studies and the Education Advisory Council.

NT COGSO reflects the views of participating parents and councils (NT COGSO, 1992, pp.20).

With this kind of representation and role I believed that COGSO would have a large collection of written information relevant to Northern Territory parents and the NTED and that much of this had the potential to reflect the nature of the relationship between the parties. A preliminary view of the files proved this to be the case, with correspondence and publications covering two decades and crossing all aspects of the education system in the NT. The documents include the purely informative, requests for action, complaints, questionnaires and responses, media releases and news clippings and minutes of meetings. They emanate from parents, school councils, community members, the NTED, the Minister for Education, and COGSO.

From the extensive collection of files I selected five on the grounds that they would contain information that would be of concern to a wide range of parents and schools and which covered the time period from 1987 to 1993. The files chosen from which to seek text for analysis were:

1. Devolution
2. Secondary School Restructuring
3. Economic Review Committee
4. Curriculum
5. General correspondence from the NTED
The nature of the specific material chosen from these files is described following the discussion of my research questions.

Research questions

As indicated earlier the potential for the existence of a barrier to be created operates in two ways. First the literature indicates that 'mixed messages' about parent involvement do emanate from the same source (see ch. 2). It is this confusion possibly generated by the lack of congruence, that is seen to act as the barrier. Second, should the communications give the impression of a lack of advocacy for the concept on the part of the writers, this also can be seen to act as 'off putting' for parents and a barrier to their involvement.

Before approaching the material to be analysed I developed preliminary questions deduced from the literature discussed in chapter one and chapter two. These preliminary questions guided my search and meant that I was approaching the material from an informed perspective. This enabled me to reduce the research time needed by focussing my search. The questions are listed below:

1. What is the dominant message given by the Northern Territory Education Act and Regulations in terms of allowing political, administrative or personal involvement by parents?

2. What are the literal messages contained in the interpretive documents produced by the NTED in terms of political, administrative or personal involvement, as a response to the Act and Regulations?

3. Are these literal messages in congruence with each other?

4. Are the literal messages in congruence with the Act and Regulations?

5. Are the messages in congruence with the desires of the parent and community members as expressed at the Devolution Symposium?

6. How might the messages affect the receivers?

7. What level of advocacy is found in the messages?

8. Do the messages reflect the value preferences of the authors?
Holsti (1967) and Kerlinger (1973) when discussing techniques of content analysis and Miles and Huberman (1984) when discussing qualitative analysis each emphasise that it is a good idea to develop categories and codes before entering the field. They suggest that modification to the initial codes and categories will occur once field work is being carried out. I followed their suggestion extending it to include the reworking of my research questions. I finally arrived at a grouping of five key questions with nine sub-questions of different wording and to a degree, intent from the preliminary eight. My final text analysis has been an exploration of these new questions.

The terms 'literal', 'manifest' and 'latent' used in the questions are applied in the same sense as that used by Holsti (1967), Keeves (1990) and Odman (in Keeves 1990). Literal and manifest being used synonymously to refer to the stated meaning and latent to mean that which is hidden or beneath the surface of the literal intent.

*Key Question 1:*

Are mixed messages about parent involvement in schools and school decision making manifest in the documents produced by the NTED that are presented to parents?

*Sub-questions:*

a. Are the 'literal' messages in the documents in congruence with the definitions as set by The Act?
   i. Is there evidence of incongruence amongst the 'literal' messages in terms of the scope of parent involvement allowed?
   ii. Is there evidence of incongruence amongst the 'literal' messages in terms of the functions allowed parents?
Key Question 2:

Do documents from the NTED contain latent messages which contradict their manifest advocacy for parent involvement in schools and school decision making?

Sub-questions:

b. Do the documents from the NTED in response to parents' requests, reflect that the intent of the request has been 'heard'?

c. When the NTED seeks response to new proposals or evaluations of existing programmes do they allow sufficient time for parents to carry out the task?

d. Is there a demonstrated effort to write documents at a readability level suitable for parents with between 7 to 10 years of schooling? (These figures are explained below.)

Key Question 3:

Do documents from COGSO provide a manifest and latent advocacy for parent involvement in schools and school decision making?

Sub-questions:

e. Is there a demonstrated effort to write documents at a readability level suitable for parents with between 7 to 10 years of schooling? (These figures are explained below.)

f. Is there evidence of greater use of the terms parent or pronouns that take the place of the word parent in the COGSO documents compared with their use in documents produced by the NTED?

g. Is there evidence that messages written by COGSO are congruent with each other and that allowed for in The Act?

Key Question 4:

Is the linguistic pattern adopted by the NTED, in its documents produced for parents, in a discoursive form that inhibits parents' involvement?

Sub-questions:

h. Is there evidence from the type of discourse used by the NTED that 'power' remains with the department?

i. Is there evidence that the linguistics of the messages from the NTED changes according to the type of parent audience?
Key Question 5:

Do the results to Key Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 allow for positive inferences to be made about the value preferences of the authors of the NTED documents?

The questions that evolved seek existence of phenomena and thus strongly support the nature of this research as exploratory. This lends substance to the research being a case study because the evidence of these phenomena has been sought within a particular context and as such is not readily generalisable to other contexts whose place, substance, characters, events and time would inevitably be different from those under investigation. COGSO files have been extensively used to obtain text for analysis and to provide a grounding for the final research questions.

Research Method

Introduction

The method employed to research the text material is content analysis. Holsti (1969, pp. 25) provides a schematic representation of content analysis and the communication process see fig: 3.1 below. When applied to this research it is the message in the text (the what? and how?) that is analysed to make inferences concerning the senders (the who?) and the effect on the receivers (the whom)?
Content analysis is any technique...

for making inferences...

by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages

SOURCE

ENCODING PROCESS

CHANNEL

MESSAGE

DECODING PROCESS

RECIPIENT

WHO?

WHY?

HOW?

WHAT?

HOW?

WITH WHAT EFFECT?

TO WHOM?

Fig:3.1, Content analysis and the communication paradigm. (After Holsti, 1969, pp. 25)

Triangulation

As demonstrated earlier, there is a degree of subjectivity in the text interpretation otherwise recognition is not being given to the nature of interpretation and understanding, the action of which includes the value preference and prior-understanding of the interpreter. Thus in terms of this research, complete objectivity is difficult. However various procedures for triangulation have been incorporated into the study to minimise its subjective nature. These involve the use of texts from three different sources - the NTED, COGSO, parents (Report from the Devolution Symposium for schools and school council members held in Darwin 1992) - this provides a triangulation of data, or the use of dissimilar comparison groups (Denzin 1989, pp.237). "Each represents significantly different data areas within which the same generic event ... occurs" (pp.237). In addition I have used four different means of interrogating the data - readability, analysis of discourse, word frequency counts, and looking for congruence amongst the messages in the texts - which again according to Denzin proves to be a form of data triangulation.
Nature of the text

The texts to be analysed have been categorised into 4 main text or document groups:

The first category is called Document group 1, that is code D1:

D1, comprises the NT Education Act and Regulations. These establish the legality behind the function and scope of parent involvement and set the parameters in terms of the involvement being political, administrative or personal. Thus persons writing of parent involvement should be in congruence with the meaning and conditions as set down in The Act and Regulations.

The second category is called Document group 2, that is code D2:

D2, comprises miscellaneous NTED publications such as guidelines, pamphlets, brochures, forewords to reports and policy documents, the main text of the policy documents and the NTED response to the parent's questions raised at the Devolution Symposium for school council members and education personnel held in Darwin in 1992. These are aimed at staff, (office and school, parent organisations and individuals).

The third category is called Document group 3, that is code D3;

D3, comprises material produced by COGSO, including the COGSO handbook as well as interpretative material that responds to or adds to Code D2 texts for members and individuals, such as guidelines for parents and individuals, as well as newsletters and letters.

The fourth category is called Document group 4, that is code D4:

D4, comprises the record of the parent and community council member's views, questions and concerns, that is, outcomes from the Devolution Symposium (Darwin 1992) attended by NTED officers, COGSO representatives, school council members and individuals.

Within all of these document groups there are a large number of texts (a complete list is found in appendix two). In chapter four, where I have presented the data base, I found the need to further categorise D2 according to the purpose the texts served for the NTED (see pp. 97-98 ch. 4).

Deduction of the variables

Briefly the investigation to this point began with viewing of the literature, which led to the establishment of the two main concepts to find evidence of, advocacy for parent
involvement, and type of involvement allowed to parents (political, administrative or personal). This was followed by development of preliminary questions to determine the nature of the documents that were to be sought and to establish the factors of the texts that could be used as demonstrations of the above concepts. During the search for the texts and their preliminary reading, a number of common factors were deduced that I began to look for in the texts to provide me with suitable text information to use. I formalised these factors into variables that I compared across the texts, to provide information about the preliminary questions. I began with four variables:

- Scope of parent involvement
- Function of parent involvement
- Advocacy for parent involvement
- Space allotted to each part or section in text

Fig: 3.2. The original four variables.

However I found, once I had read the linguistic literature and began to read the texts in detail to make comparisons between them, that the variable 'advocacy' was not a single factor but rather comprised of a number of factors that gave indication of advocacy. Thus I removed advocacy as a variable and put in its place the factors that I had further deduced. This gave me my final list of eight variables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>CODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope of parent involvement</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function of parent involvement</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space allotted to each part or section in text</td>
<td>sp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of intent of question</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time allowed for response</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readability</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word use frequency</td>
<td>w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the discourse</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig: 3.3. The eight variables used in the text analysis
Explanation of variable (s), (f) and (sp)

The literature indicated that there was frequently a difference between what parents 'wanted' to be able to do as members of school councils and what they were actually 'allowed' to do. However on some occasions the literature demonstrated that the 'wishing' and the 'allowed' appeared to be congruent. I found that the actual scope and function of involvement allowed parents, sometimes appeared to be confused in the texts and thus I used this notion of scope and function of involvement as a means of demonstrating congruence or lack of it between messages. The amount of space in the texts given to different parts of the text was used as a means of finding which parts could be construed as most important or deserving of the most detail.

Explanation of variables, (i), (t), (r), (w), and (d)

The variables that could comprise a standard of advocacy were arrived at following preliminary reading of the texts for study. This led me to deliberating about and searching the literature for, possible factors that demonstrate advocacy, for a particular occurrence, to another person. However I was unable to find, in the literature, the kinds of clear cut measures of advocacy, to build the variables, that I needed. The task was further complicated because the texts that I analysed are written in favour of parent involvement, thus the actual rhetoric is positive about this concept (as I expected). In light of this I searched for a means, other than solely the rhetoric of the texts, that might give clues to expressions of latent meaning about advocacy in the text. As Kerlinger (1964) writes in relation to carrying out content analysis as a means of measuring educational values in texts: "One of the main difficulties for the investigator is to cut his way through the morass of pious sentiments to the hard core of the value matter." (pp.534) Dane (1990) adds to Kerlinger's comments when he cautions that:

"because coding latent content involves making inferences about the manifest content of an archive, latent content is generally less reliable than manifest content. On the other hand, latent content may be the only way to operationalize some concepts. Advertisers are
not likely, for example, to come out and straightforwardly say 'women are inferior decision makers' in their commercials. They may, however, show women deciding to buy a car because of its colour and show men basing their decisions on gas mileage or investment values."(pp.177)

During the initial reading of the texts I did not find evidence of the kind of latent content as referred to by Dane. However just as the advertiser is not likely to come out and state that women are inferior decision makers neither is the NTED officer likely to openly write that parent involvement is not looked on favourably or that they do not fully approve of the concept.

With the above methodological problems of using latent content in mind, I chose to explore factors 'of' the text as well as 'within' the text. Factors 'of' the text are those that do not deal with content, these are factors such as 'readability' (r) and 'nature of the discourse'(d). Factors 'within' the text are those such, as 'time allowed parents for response' (t), 'demonstration that the intent of parents requests have been recognised' (i), and 'frequency of the use of the word parent' or alternately the use of such terms as 'you' or 'we' (w), because they deal with the content expressed by the text. These factors I have called the variables of advocacy (these variables are listed in full below as well as in brief above). This coupling of content variables and linguistic variables was chosen to lessen the unreliability of the analysis (Dane, 1990, pp170) and to try to do more than just provide face value evidence of advocacy, or lack of it.

For an author to have considered all the variables listed below and to have adjusted their text accordingly, would mean that the author had the intent of sharing information equally with the reader through consideration of the reader's skill and knowledge, through being considerate of the readers commitments of time and through drawing the reader into the text by allowing them to relate to it.

- Time allowed for response (meaning the time given by the NTED requesting parents responses to various items, eg. NT curriculum review)
- Recognition of intent of questions (referring to the manner in which the NTED responded to parents requests that arose at COGSO meetings or at the Devolution Symposium).

- Frequency of word use (particularly the frequency with which words such as, 'parents', 'you' - meaning parents, 'we' - are used in texts)

- Readability of text.

- The nature of the discourse (whether the text has been adapted to be conducive for parents to understand readily)

The latter three have been grouped under the general category 'linguisticality of the text', which is used in some of the tables in chapter five.

After arriving at the variables I found that I needed to reduce the amount of comparison that incurred by constantly having to refer back to the body of some of the texts that had become 'blue prints' to compare other texts against. With this in mind I developed what I called 'standards' against which other texts were compared. These were derived from certain of the texts and from the literature.

**The standards**

A means of demonstrating the 'allowed' forms of parent involvement was arrived at by categorising it according to what was stated in the NT Education Act in terms of (s)cope of involvement of parents and (f)unction of involvement of parents. These then formed

- Standard 1: The function of parent involvement allowed under the Act - code S1
- Standard 2: The scope of parent involvement allowed under the Act - Code S2

Messages in the other texts from groups D2, D3, and D4 below, have been compared against these standards

- the NTED - D(ocuments)2,
- COGSO - D(ocuments)3 and
- Devolution Symposium - D(ocuments)4, - expressions of parent wishes.
Standards 1 and 2 are explained and detailed in chapter four as part of the data base. One other standard was feasible to create, the standard for readability. This was derived from the literature and the readability analysis carried out on the texts. This became:

Standard 3: The syntactic requirements of a text that allows it to be easily read - Code S3

These requirements are also explained in detail in chapter four, closer to the readability analysis.

I endeavoured to find a fourth standard, that of advocacy. However this proved to be very difficult, as I found that none of the producers of texts conformed consistently to appropriate levels of the variables used to measure advocacy.

Research matrix

Once the variables were decided upon I then needed to determine if each of the research questions was addressed by combinations of comparisons of these variables. This led to the development of two matrices illustrating the relationship of each set of document groups to the other in terms of comparison of the variables and also in terms of the research questions. I have drawn heavily on the work of Holsti (1967, pp.24-41) to establish my research matrix. His work supplied me with a means of representing the design diagrammatically, in other words of mapping my method.

In the first matrix, Table: 3.1 each variable, as it relates to the texts in each document group, is assigned a code, a Roman numeral, to show the relationship of it to the document. Thus variable, (s) in the Act and Regulations becomes - i - in Table: 3.1. When looked at in terms of the NTED documents, variable (s) is referred to as - ii -, in Table: 3.1.
A second matrix Table 3.2, was then created to illustrate which comparisons occur. The codes assigned in the first matrix are used, to show the comparisons that allow incongruence to be sought and inferences to be drawn about advocacy and value preference. This second matrix now incorporates the standards (S1, S2 & S3) that comparisons are also made against. For example variable (f) in D2 in Table: 3.1 which has the code - vi - is compared with S2.

To find answers to key question 1 (pp.81) and its sub-questions, the variables, of scope, function and space, as represented by the coding in Table 3.1, have been compared against each other and S1 and S2, in the manner shown in column one of Table: 3.2. The comparisons shown in the next five columns were used to answer the other four key questions. Thus the Roman numerals refer to the information relevant to a particular variable as found in an individual text in a document group. This means that each variable has a different Roman numeral according to the document being referred to and expressed in Table: 3.1. The matrix has been used to bring together the information that is relevant for each of the key questions and sub questions.
Table: 3.2. Number codes allocated in Table 3.1 used here to illustrate the procedures for comparisons which occur and the inferences to be derived from these comparisons.

Note:

1. These comparisons look for mixed messages across the texts to find information to respond to question one.

2. These comparisons demonstrate if documents from the NTED contain latent messages which contradict their manifest advocacy for parent involvement, that is in response to key question two.

3. These comparisons will be used to demonstrate if documents from COGSO provide a manifest and latent advocacy for parent involvement, that is in response to key question three.

4. These comparisons demonstrate if the linguistic pattern adopted by the NTED inhibit parent involvement, that is in response to key question 4.

5. In terms of the comparisons of (1), (2), (3) & (4) above, can positive inferences be made about the value preferences of the authors of the NTED documents, that is in response to key question 5.

However I first had to extract this information or data from individual texts before creating the standards or making the comparisons. This data is presented in chapter four. The matrix of comparisons is most relevant to the discussion in chapter five. Some preliminary analysis, such as the development of the standards has been made in chapter four in order to present the data in a form ready for use in chapter five.
It is beyond the scope of this research to perform further investigation about the actual effect of the communications on the receivers or to question the authors as to their real feelings and beliefs. Both of these investigations would be large enough in themselves to provide a basis for further research. However in another sense, the questioning of the authors has been quite deliberately left out of this research. The concept of parent and community involvement in schools is strongly promoted by the government and legislated for. Thus it would be unlikely that NTED personnel who produced the NTED texts would openly give of their true feelings in interview, particularly if they were negatively inclined towards the concept (Holsti, pp.16).

Summary

The method has proved to be both deductive and inductive, with finalising of the texts to use, the categories, variables and research questions not being completed until after preliminary reading of the possible text material. Triangulation has been achieved by choosing texts from a variety of sources and by using a number of methods to interrogate the texts. In this sense, if congruence of results across methods occurs, then inferences made should be quite valid. The use of the COGSO files has been invaluable, as frequently there were documents available from three sources (COGSO, School Councils and the NTED) relating to the one concern. Even with the above checks in place it must be re emphasised that, as with other case studies, this research is context specific and the results will not be generalisable beyond Darwin in any more than the most limited manner.
CHAPTER FOUR

Building The Data Base

Introduction

Chapter three identified the nature of the documents that form the texts to be analysed and established the patterns of comparison to be employed when answering the research questions. Five key questions with nine sub-questions have been identified that form in Kerlinger’s terms “the Universe of content that is to be analysed” (1973, pp.528). These key questions 'spell out' the research problem in terms of 'mixed messages in the texts', 'advocacy for involvement', 'discoursive nature of the text' and 'value preference of the authors'. Eight variables have been derived from the texts, that is, the Education Act and the public texts of the 'participants' in the study and the literature search, to become the variables about which data has been extracted in chapter four. These are analysed and compared in chapter five to respond to the key questions and the research problem. However, I have found it appropriate and more meaningful to analyse and comment on some aspects as they appear in chapter four rather than chapter five, and thus repetition by further detailed analysis in chapter five has been limited. The variables have been partitioned into two, those that reflect the messages within the texts and those that reflect the linguisticality of the texts.

Overview

There are two steps to the data analysis for this case study. First, information had to be extracted from the texts to form a data base, that is the "assumed ... fact, the basis of reasoning or calculation, ... [the] assumption or premise from which inferences are drawn" (Greater Oxford Dictionary). Erickson (1986) adds depth to
this definition when he asserts that the researcher is actually looking for key-linkages among various items of data in order to demonstrate the plausibility of their assertions, not specifically to prove the assertions. This data is usually presented in descriptive form, but ... may be tabulated, graphed, charted or diagrammed. In other words it is this extrapolated "data" that is made "the basis of reasoning ... the premise from which inferences are drawn" (Erickson, 1986). Thus the first step is the data extraction, which I have presented in this chapter: the building of the data base. The second step is the analysis of the data base in order to draw inferences and assertions, which I have presented in chapter five, that is: answers to the specific research questions and response to the research problem. hence the literature base for chapter five is provided in chapter four.

I do not claim that the results are anything more than an indication of:

1) The ease at which a parent might be able to read the texts produced for them by the NTED and others.
2) The perceptions that parents could build about the scope and function of their involvement.
3) The perceptions that parents could build about the advocacy of the NTED personnel about parent involvement.
4) The value preference of NTED personnel towards parent involvement.

The data provides a variety of material, that builds a picture of the texts that parents are confronted with should they wish to become involved with their child's school. These texts may actually provide the first information to a parent that they are encouraged to become involved in their child's school and that there is, in effect, opportunity for their involvement within the running of the school.

This chapter, the data base, provides the information from which inferences about advocacy and value preference have been drawn and inferences about the
possibility of a barrier to parent involvement existing as a result of the nature of the texts.

**The relationship of the texts to the variables**

Information about the variables identified in chapter three forms the basis of the data obtained. The variables and the codes for each are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>CODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Scope of parent involvement</td>
<td>(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Function of parent involvement</td>
<td>(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Space allotted to each part or section in text</td>
<td>(sp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognition of intent of question</td>
<td>(l)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Time allowed for response</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Readability</td>
<td>(r)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Word use frequency</td>
<td>(w)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nature of the discourse</td>
<td>(d)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig: 4.1. List of variables as they appear in chapter three.

The data base developed in this chapter provides the information from which S1, S2 and S3 have been determined (see below). The standards have been used for comparative purposes against which specific texts have been judged for congruence and/or consistency of information. The standards are:

- **Standard 1**: The scope of parent involvement allowed for by the Act.
- **Standard 2**: The function of parent involvement allowed for by the Act.
- **Standard 3**: The syntactic requirements of a text that allows it to be easily read - Code S3

Fig: 4.2. List of standards (from chapter three).

The texts, (see Fig: 4.3) from which data has been extracted for this chapter, include publications from the NTED and COGSO, and the Act and its accompanying Regulations. Papers produced from the NT Devolution Symposium have been included as they give evidence of parents wishes in the matter of parent involvement in schools and devolution. Certain circulars and letters from the NTED have also been included, specifically those that accompanied reports and requests for
information from parents, as these give an indication of whether a suitable time frame for parent action has been allowed by the NTED. In other words that consideration for the parent's difficulties in attending to matters quickly has been taken into account. I have also included responses to COGSO from the NTED concerning the action requested by COGSO following their half yearly conferences. These responses indicate whether the NTED has recognised the intent of the parent request and is prepared to take the action requested or alternately have provided reasons for not taking action. Included in this latter set of papers is the NTED response to the matters raised at the NT Devolution Symposium. These papers provide an indication of the recognition of the intent of the parents request.

Single item letters and correspondence have not been analysed for this chapter. These single page documents are too specific to individual incidents, too brief, and too readily identifiable to be used for detailed analysis. However aspects of them do supplement the data extracted from the larger publications and are used in chapter five to support the evidence presented there in answer to the research questions. Appendix two provides a complete list of all texts that have been analysed for readability. Those that have also been analysed in relation to the variables are indicated with an asterisk.

The texts from appendix two that have been searched for information pertinent to variables other than readability have been listed below to indicate which texts are categorised into the various document groups identified in chapter three. Documents categorised as D2 are further sub-categorised as shown below

Fig: 4.3. The sub-categories of D2 and the specific texts associated with all the document groups.

- D2-G texts that are legal guidelines for parents under the act.
- D2-P(1) texts that are promotional material.
- D2-P(2) texts that provide information.
- D2-C texts that are circulars and letters from the NTED.
• D2-F texts that are forewords to larger documents.

Texts from the NTED:

D1
The NT Education Act (The Act).
The NT Education (School Councils) Regulations.

D2-G

D2-P1
Towards the 90's, Excellence, Accountability and Devolution in Education (1987 and 1989).
You, Your School and Devolution, an Introduction (a brochure, 1992).

D2-P2
Parent and Community Involvement in School Curriculum, NT Board of Studies (1993).

D2-C
Replies from the NTED to COGSO's requests for action following their Half Yearly Meeting.
NTED circulars and letters to school councils.

D4
Devolution Symposium (Reports from Committees of Participants, Darwin High School Nov.1992).
Devolution Symposium (Reply to Parents Questions from the NTED, March 1993).

From COGSO:

D3

Forewords to NTED documents from the offices of the Minister of Education and Training and the Secretary of the NTED:

D2-F
Towards the 90's. The Minister for Education.
The Standard Devolution Package. The Secretary of the NTED.
You Your School and Devolution. The Minister for Education.
School Improvement Plans. The Minister for Education.

Many of the published documents have forewords accompanying them. I have chosen to deal with these separately from the main document as they are frequently written by someone other than the main author and/or because they do not contribute to the main argument but rather explain/promote its purpose or occasion (AGPS style Manual, 1992, pp.247).
Visual representation of data extraction: Flow Charts

The process of extracting data from the texts and the nature of the data provided by specific texts, as related to the variables, is illustrated by the following flow charts.

Fig: 4.4. Flow charts to illustrate the processes of obtaining and presenting the data.

These flow charts show the process of arriving at the data base extracted from the texts. They also indicate the mode of presentation of the data. The information within this data base forms the basis for the comparisons shown in the matrices in chapter three. Inferences about latent content in terms of advocacy, and value preference are not drawn at this stage, this occurs in chapter five.
The flow charts are thought to be necessary to clarify the various ways in which the data base has been derived, presented and processed. Thus flow chart one (Fig: 4.4) shows that the texts in document group - D1 have been searched to find content related to the variables, (s), (f) and (sp). This information is presented in the form of tables, pie charts, and text. From this information S1 and S2 have been deduced.

I have not carried out an itemised analysis of each text, nor has each text been analysed in exactly the same manner. I have sought the existence of certain phenomena in the texts of the NTED and to gain perceptions about the authors, not to finely analyse the content of the text in itself. Thus some of the texts such as individual letters or brochures are only pertinent to individual research questions (as indicated earlier).

Because of the private nature of some of the text information from them should not be made public, only those texts that are widely available in published form have been identified and referenced. Texts in the form of letters, either to or from individuals or councils, have only been used to substantiate and/or illustrate a point in the analysis and have only be referred to as being located in one of the specific COGSO files. Letters of instruction or information that accompanied widely distributed published material have been referenced by name.

The next section begins the presentation of the data base. The relevant flow chart is presented as a focus at the beginning of the section.
Development Of The Data Base

Deduction of the Standards S1 and S2

This section presents the data obtained from the *Education Act (the Act)* and *Education (School Council and BOS) Regulations (the Regulations)*. These texts are the legal determinants of the nature and scope of parent involvement and as such need to be analysed in detail. These texts are frequently referred to in the texts of the other document groups with recommendations that parents read them to find out their legal situation as members of school councils. Other texts from D2-G such as the *Practical Guide for School Councils (1987-89)* (the PGSC) and *The Standard Devolution Package (1991)* (the SDP) actually contain copies of the D1 texts for easy reference.

I have treated these documents in two parts, the composition of the Act and Regulations which gives information related to the variable (sp) and secondly the variables (s) and (f) allowed for under the Act.

**Composition of the Act**

In reviewing the composition of the Act and it's Regulations I have sought to determined the relative amount of space, in terms of lines of text, that are given over to the different parts of the act as well as the different parental functions.
There are eleven parts in the Act with 108 sections divided amongst the parts.

Seven of the eleven parts specifically concern parents and their children or make reference to parents as part of a membership.

- Part I: Preliminary with definitions.
- Part IIA: NT Board of Studies.
- Part II: Advisory Councils.
- Part IV: Compulsory Attendance at School.
- Part V: Handicapped Children.
- Part VIII: Courses of Instruction.
- Part IX: School Councils.
- Part X: Miscellaneous.

*Part one*

This part is important in that it provides the definition of parent that I have used in this thesis. However this is the only reference to parents made in this part.

*Part IIA*

This part of the Act states that the NT Board of Studies (BOS) has been established to "consider and make recommendations to the Secretary of Education relating to the provision of a continuum of education from pre-school to and including the last year of compulsory schooling", (The Act part IIA, section 10j(a)(1)). The BOS develops procedures for accreditation, assessment and certification at junior and senior secondary level as well as coordinating the work of the subject area committees (SAC's).

The membership of the BOS makes allowance for one "school" parent member out of the 20 members of The BOS. Of the 205 lines in The Act given to the BOS (see Chart:4.1 pp.105) the word 'parent' does not appear, however the statement of membership, that is, that one member must be "a member from the Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations", (The Act part IIA, section 10B, 1(c)(iv)) does refer to parents. The regulations indicate that the prescribed relevant organisations referred to in The Act include "The Isolated Children's Parents Association ... and the Independent Schools Parents Council" (The
Regulations, section 3), thus there is more scope for parents to be represented on the BOS than initially appears to be the case.

*Part III*

This part refers to the Education Advisory Council (EAC) which reports to the Minister for Education. Its function is to "consider such matters relating to the provision of education services in the Northern Territory as the Council determines or as the Education Minister refers to it for consideration or advice" (The Act Part III, section 13 (a)). Again, of the 105 lines dealing with the EAC (see Chart: 4.1 pp.105), only one and a half lines are given to parents, the same two that appear in the BOS information. There is allowance for one 'school' parent member of a minimum membership of 14.

The Act specifies that the parent members of both bodies must be members or representatives of COGSO. Additional to this formal membership there is scope for both to include other 'school' parents in an indirect manner because a representative of another body may also be a parent.

The nominees have to be acceptable to the Secretary of the Education Department (through the Administrator of the Northern Territory) and the Minister of Education respectively. The chairmen of the EAC is appointed by the Administrator and the deputy Chair is appointed by the Minister. The Secretary of Education or his nominee automatically Chairs the BOS with the deputy chair being elected by the members. The scope of both bodies is predominantly advisory, except for the accreditation and assessment procedures that the BOS develops.

*Part IV*

This part of the Act covers attendance of a child at school and the circumstances surrounding this. There are 183 lines in this part (see Chart: 4.1) of which 15
contain the word parent. The paragraphs containing the references to parents include the parents roles in:

1) ensuring attendance occurs or,
2) providing an alternative education,
3) accounting for student absence,
4) conscientious objection to subjects,
5) suspension and expulsion.

Part V
This part of the Act deals with children with special learning needs, it has 88 lines of which 8 lines contain the word parent (see Chart: 4.1).

Part VI
This part refers to colleges. These are for students of post compulsory school age with 533 lines detailing their operations (see chart: 4.1).

Part VII
This part of the Act details the operations of non-government schools and their legality under the Act. This section covers 149 lines.(see Chart: 4.1)

Part IX
This part of the Act refers to the establishment, power, membership and function of school councils and school management groups. There are 260 lines (see Chart: 4.1) 6 of which contain the words either citizen and/or community, the word parent is not mentioned. However almost every paragraph does mention the term school council. In the Regulations it states that officers or employees within the meaning of the Teaching Service Act cannot make up more than one third of the total council numbers. With the assumption being that the other members as citizens or of the community may also be parents, then this part outlines the only other form of parent involvement allowed under the act. However the details are given in terms of 'council members.'
The council may perform 13 functions under the act, six of them being advisory to either the Minister for Education, the Secretary for Education or the head teacher, and six where the council actually carries out the action. The 13th is to perform other functions as the Minister for Education confers on the council.

**Part X**

This 'miscellaneous' part of the Act covers such aspects as medical and dental inspections, religious instructions, within which the word parent appears twice, and offences and regulations (included with others in Chart 4.1).

The various proportions of the parts of the act are illustrated in the following pie chart (chart: 4.1). This enables visualisation of the proportions within the act and how each part relates to other parts in terms of space (number of lines) of the text. This chart illustrates all parts in the Act.

**Chart: 4.1.** Shows the proportion of each section in the Act in terms of the number of lines of text per section.

- **Compulsory attendance** 183 lines
- **BOS&EAC** 288 lines
- **Special needs** 88 lines
- **Colleges** 533 lines
- **Non-government schools** 149 lines
- **School councils** 260 lines

(Other refers to preliminary information, administration, courses of instruction and 'miscellaneous').

More than 40% of the Act is given over to information that makes no mention of parents, i.e., colleges and non-government schools. Information related to school councils comprises only 14% of the composition of the Act. Fifteen percent relates
to personal involvement, 10% of this being taken up by details concerning compulsory attendance and the sanctions for non compliance.

**Summary**

Of the 1,800 lines in the Act, 1,523 lines (85%) of the Act specifically refers to parent involvement, that is the term 'parent' is an integral part of the Act. However the word parent is only frequently referred to in the sections of compulsory attendance and students with special needs. The section pertaining to school councils, in which I expected to find many uses of the term parent only made reference in an indirect manner, ie. the parent is subsumed under the corporate heading of school council or the neutral term citizen. In total, School Councils, Students With Special Needs and Compulsory Attendance, comprise 30 percent of the Act

**Composition of the Regulations**

The Regulations are separate from the Act, they serve to clarify aspects of the Act and to explain important parts of the Act in more detail.

Chart: 4.2. Shows the proportions of each section of the Regulations in terms of number of lines of text.

(Chart not provided in text)

(Chart, refers to introductory definitions and miscellaneous. The BOS regulations are set down separately from the School Council Regulations)
Part I
This introductory part of the Regulations includes definitions. There are 24 lines of which one contains the word parent (see Chart: 4.2, pp.106).

Part II
This part of the Regulations deals with councils for primary and secondary schools. It details a model constitution, terms of office, vacancies and meetings. There are 97 lines of which 4 contain the word parent. The majority of the text refers to 'the council' as being the one to carry out processes or to have action done to it (see Chart: 4.2 pp.106).

Part IIA
This part of the regulations refers to councils for post-school institutions. There are 130 lines, none of which contain reference to parents (see Chart: 4.2).

Part III
This part of the Regulations outlines the procedures for keeping the accounts of school councils. There are 98 lines (see Chart: 4.2), none of which mention the word parent.

Part IV
This part of the Regulations, miscellaneous, defines the term 'prescribed services', in two lines, as it pertains to the Act, again the term parent does not appear.

Summary
The Regulations contain procedural information and an outline of a constitution for school councils. Any occurrence of the word parent is scarce. Frequently, references to parents are subsumed under the term 'school council'. The 27 percent that describes accounts of school councils pertains to both post school and 'school' councils. However the part headed constitution, refers purely to 'school' councils.
I was unable to find in the Act or Regulations any reference to parents assisting in classrooms, or around the school, visiting the school, attending meetings (other than Council) or any other of the personal ways in which a parent may be involved with the school outside of those outlined above.

**Scope and function of parent involvement allowed under the Act and Regulations**

- Under the Act parents may have either personal involvement, concerning their own children, or become part of a school council and work for the school as a whole.

The Act (1992, section 71C (1) ) contains a very important precursor to the list of the functions of school councils - "The school council may, in respect of the Government school for which it is established"... What this means is, that according to the Act, it is not imperative that the councils adopt any of the functions listed. However if they do this must be carried out within the parameters set down in the Act, Regulations and Guidelines.

I have delineated the parameters into two classifications of a council's activity (these relate to the classifications used in chapter two with Walker's model): The council's scope (extent or range of action) is listed in two forms:

- **Action**, where the councils are given the right to determine the details of a function and then are given the power to carry out the function and
- **Advisory**, where the councils perform an information gathering role following which they advise either the Principal, the Secretary of Education or the Minister of Education, who are the only ones to have the power to see that these actions are carried out.

The council's functions (the kind/nature of action or activity) are listed in two forms:

- **Political**, where the council has a deciding say in the distribution of resources to the school from the central body (the NTED), this means that councils can take action concerning the division of resources that are distributed to all schools, including their own. The nature of the resources and their distribution could form part of a political platform.
Administrative, where the council takes action over the resources that they receive from the central body or that they raise themselves and determine how they are to be used, controlled and distributed within the individual school. The nature of the action is specific to the individual school (see chapter: 2, pp.14).

I have illustrated the breakdown of the legalised scope of parent involvement and the functions that they can perform in Tables: 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3. The use of the terms 'political' and 'administrative' are as expressed above and in chapter two.

From Table: 4.1 it can be seen that the councils have no controlling ability or power over political functions, for these functions their scope is to advise, for example:

- examine the manner in which the educational policies of the Territory are to be implemented at that School and, to this end, to advise the head teacher accordingly;
- Inquire into the particular educational needs of the community served by that Government school and advise the secretary of those needs; (The Act, 1992, section 71C (1) (a) & (b))

If parents wish to have some power in these areas then they need to be elected to the BOS or the EAC through COGSO.

Table: 4.1 Summary of the 'political' function and scope of parent involvement allowed under the Act and Regulations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Act and Regulations</th>
<th>Function: the kind/nature of action or activity.</th>
<th>Scope: extent or range of action.</th>
<th>Action to be carried out by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a member of a School Council</td>
<td>Implementation of Government Education policy</td>
<td>Examine and advise</td>
<td>The head teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community educational needs</td>
<td>Inquire into, identify, then advise</td>
<td>The Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improving links with community and parents.</td>
<td>Consider and advise</td>
<td>The head teacher and The Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needs of buildings, facilities equipment, students, teachers and staff.</td>
<td>Assess and recommend</td>
<td>The Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job description for head teacher.</td>
<td>Advise</td>
<td>The Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job description of other teaching and ancillary staff</td>
<td>Advise</td>
<td>The head teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The functions as listed in Tables: 4.1 and 4.2 are worded slightly differently than those taken from Sharpe (1993) that I have used in Table: 2.1, chapter 2. As Sharpe
indicates, his information was obtained verbally according to his preset categories, whereas my information, in this chapter, is taken directly from the wording of the Act. There appear to be differences in that the Act includes interaction with the community as part of the council’s function. The Act also only refers to the council having powers to advise on the job description of the principal and senior staff. Whereas Sharpe writes as if informed that the council had the capacity to select the principal.

In terms of administrative functions within the schools the council has (see Table: 4.2) more power, relating to the management and expenditure of school funds, the use of the schools buildings, employment of ancillary staff and emergency relief teachers, for example:

- within the scope allowed by the functions and powers conferred or imposed upon it, determine the purposes for which moneys allocated by the department of Education to that Government school are to be expended and to expend those funds accordingly;
- control the manner in which prescribed services are being rendered for that Government school; (The Act, 1992, section 71C (1) (e) & (h))

Table: 4.2 Summary of the 'administrative' function and scope of parent involvement allowed under the Act and Regulations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Act and Regulations</th>
<th>Function: the kind/nature of action or activity. ADMINISTRATIVE</th>
<th>Scope: extent or range of action.</th>
<th>Action to be carried out by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a member of a School Council</td>
<td>Community use of that school's buildings or grounds</td>
<td>Determine and regulate</td>
<td>The Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>work carried out on buildings and grounds.</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>The Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manner of prescribed services.</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>The Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persons as agreed to by the Secretary</td>
<td>Employ</td>
<td>The Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funds granted and funds raised.</td>
<td>Carry out and expend</td>
<td>The Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other functions conferred by the minister.</td>
<td>Perform</td>
<td>The Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parts four and five in the Act indicate the nature of personal function legislated for (see pp.103-104). As already commented on page 108, I was unable to find reference to any of the activities that involve parents in the class room or around the
school generally. Thus Table: 4.3 represents the functions taken from parts four and five. The action allowed parents is similar to advisory except for the part where they must ensure that a child does not attend if he or she has been suspended or expelled from the school.

Table: 4.3 Summary of the 'personal' function and scope of parent involvement allowed under the Act and Regulations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Act and Regulations.</th>
<th>Function: the kind/nature of action or activity.</th>
<th>Scope: extent or range of action.</th>
<th>Action to be carried out by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a parent of a child at school</td>
<td>Non attendance of student after expulsion or suspension.</td>
<td>Must ensure</td>
<td>The parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exemption of child from classes or attendance at school on conscientious objectors grounds.</td>
<td>May request</td>
<td>The head teacher, the Minister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To make special arrangements for a child with special needs.</td>
<td>May request</td>
<td>The minister</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information in Tables: 4.1 and 4.2 has been converted into pie chart: 4.3. This chart uses the number of lines of text given to each function to illustrate the relative proportions of space given to each of the functions in the text. The chart demonstrates that there is a large proportion of space given to processes and procedures that deal with the administrative function of school councils and that little space is given over to providing information in relation to the advisory or personal function.

Chart: 4.3 Shows the proportions (number of lines of text) of the school councils section of the Act in terms of that devoted to processes, procedures and functions.
The segment labelled Guidelines, shown in Chart: 4.3 above, refers to the guidelines produced by the NTED to accompany and explain the information in the Act and the Regulations. These guidelines, as stated in section 71A (1) (c) of the Act, "...shall be adopted by the school council..." and only the Minister is able to exempt a school council from the requirements of this sub-section. I will make reference to these guidelines later in this chapter and the next as they form part of D2-G.

The Standards for Involvement

In terms of the legislated scope and function of involvement a parent may participate in the administration of their child's school only if they are an elected member of the school council or co-opted by the council to membership. The scope and function on a personal level is to ensure that a child either does or does not attend school, to request special needs assistance, or to request exemption from a subject on conscientious objection grounds. To effect input into the education system or to the nature of studies a parent must be selected to be a member of the EAC or the BOS, through being a member or representative of COGSO. The scope of involvement is again advisory accept in terms of assessment, accreditation and certification.

Standard, S1 - Scope of involvement

The scope is to actively control, expend, regulate and determine matters relating to functions that are purely administrative and effect the individual school only.

The scope is either to advise or recommend results of inquiries, considerations or examinations to the minister or head teacher concerning matters that can be considered political and could have effect beyond the individual school level.
Standard, S2 - Function of Involvement

The functions concerning physical structures, grounds, non teaching staff and finances that are allocated or granted to the school, or raised by the school may be actioned by the school council, that is the administrative functions.

The functions dealing with teaching staff, government policy, community needs, and new capital works may only be taken in an advisory capacity by the school council, that is the political functions.

Readability Analysis of Texts

Before presenting the actual data for this section it is necessary to provide a general explanation of readability, and its limitations for use. Readability is generally a measure of the semantic and syntactic difficulty of texts (Zakaluk and Samuels, eds., 1988). The formulae for calculations do not measure a person's ability to comprehend the text. The simplest calculations are based on sentence length, word counts per sentence and number of syllables per word (for example see Table: 4.6).

I chose to use the Flesch formula for calculation of readability (see appendix three for the actual formula) because it is recognised as being the most reliable and valid for use with adult text and is one of the best known and widely used of the formulae (Harrison 1984, pp.56-79). The grammar check included with Microsoft Word for Windows 3.1 includes the Flesch analysis as part of its statistics showing readability of text produced. This programme produces a table of statistics (see Table: 4.6) that
illustrates the most commonly used readability factors. Harrison (1984, pp. 57) points out that:

most computer programmes that estimate the number of syllables in words do in fact make a few errors per 1,000 words, but these are not all in the same direction and tend to cancel each other out. In contrast human raters can be embarrassingly inaccurate, usually in overestimating the number of syllables in words, and can produce as a result highly unreadable scores.

Readability formulae use calculations based on number of words per sentence, and the number of syllables per 100 words. Standard writing, according to Flesch, averages approximately 17 words per sentence and 147 syllables per 100 words, this would give an American school grade level of approximately seven - eight or a reading grade level of eight - nine. Thus a person would need seven to eight years at school to be able to read the text easily.

This is an American formula and the grade readings refer to American grades. When Flesch created his original formula he was interested in assessing adult reading material, thus he chose a difficulty index unrelated to grades. He created a notional comprehension score out of 100. Thus a difficult passage would yield a score of below 50, while a simple child's book would approach a score of 100 (Harrison, 1984, pp.77). The Flesch reading ease chart is represented by Table: 4.4. The results of all the readability calculations such as those in Table 4.6 should be read in conjunction with this table to obtain a clearer picture of the relative readability of the texts analysed.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flesch Reading Ease</th>
<th>Average sentence Length</th>
<th>Flesch School Grade Level</th>
<th>Estimated Reading Grade</th>
<th>Description of Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 - 100</td>
<td>8 or less</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>very easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 - 90</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 - 80</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fairly easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 - 70</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7 - 8</td>
<td>8 &amp; 9</td>
<td>Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 60</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9 - 10</td>
<td>10 - 12</td>
<td>Fairly difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11 - 14</td>
<td>13 - 16 college</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 30</td>
<td>29 or more</td>
<td>15 - 16</td>
<td>college graduate</td>
<td>Very difficult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My data collection (see Table: 4.6) includes the percentage of the sentences that are in the passive voice as another measure of difficulty of text. Harrison (1984, pp.23, 143-144) notes that the passive voice is found to be more difficult to comprehend and to recall once read. Kress (1985) also refers to the passive as difficult to read, however neither state what proportion of a text in the passive voice would really affect the texts readability and in this case, its comprehension. According to Kress it is a common factor in bureaucratic text. With this in mind it is reasonable to assume that a text with more than 25% in the passive would be difficult for someone with a Flesch reading grade level of between 7 - 10 years. The readers closer to the 7 grade level could lose 25% of the text through lack of comprehension which would make their total comprehension difficult.

From the above information a text that would be comfortably read by a wide range of the population would have the following characteristics:

The standard for readability - S1:

- A Flesch grade level of 7 - 10 years.
- A Flesch reading ease score of 50 -70
- An average sentence length of 17 - 21 words
- No more than 25% of the text in the passive.

Because this is largely based on American formulae and a conversion for Australian standards has not been made, I have not only analysed the texts of interest to me as part of the research but also analysed others from the NT News (the NT daily newspaper) as a means of comparing my results with text that must have the capacity to be read and understood by a very wide audience because of its place in the community as the main daily newspaper on sale (see Table:4.6).
I also carried out a limited set of calculations using the Dale-Chall (1948) formula (again American). This formula uses a word list of 3,000 common words to base the calculations upon and thus gives a different approach to readability than that of Flesch. This formula, according to Harrison (1984), is the most reliable of those based on word recognition, however it is tedious to calculate. Because I was using it as a cross checking mechanism and did not have a computer programme to assist, I have not analysed all texts. (The results of the Dale Chall formula must have 5 added to them to bring them into line with British standards, I have provided the unadjusted calculation as part of Table: 4.16, pp.153, (Harrison pp.75)). Table: 4.5 should be read in conjunction with the Dale-Chall statistics to give an understanding of the relative readability of the text. I have added the Dale Chall figures that have been calculated to the linguisticality table, pp.154.

Table: 4.5. The Corrected Dale-Chall Readability Table (Harrison, 1984, pp.75)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dale-Chall formula score</th>
<th>Corrected age levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.9 and below</td>
<td>9 and below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0 - 5.9</td>
<td>10 - 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0 - 6.9</td>
<td>12 - 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.0 - 7.9</td>
<td>14 - 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.0 - 8.9</td>
<td>16 - 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.0 - 9.9</td>
<td>college graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.0 and above</td>
<td>college graduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sections that I chose from the texts for all the readability analyses, were chosen on the basis that they had at least 100 words of text that was not cluttered with names of people, places or figures and that could be looked at by anyone on council such as sections from the Act dealing with canteens and employment. With some of the smaller texts such as the Forewords the whole of the text was analysed. Each text was scanned using an Apple Macintosh Flat Bed Optical scanner and Microsoft’s Omni-Page Pro as the programme to convert the picture to text. The text was then converted for use with Word for Windows 3.1 and a grammar check carried out to give the readability results. I then graphed the Flesch Grade levels to compare them with the average according to Flesch. (Full details of all texts used are listed in appendix two).
The tables and graphs that follow, are an attempt to indicate the ease with which a parent might be able to read the texts produced for them by the NTED and others. I have begun the readability analysis with the texts from the NT News.

Table: 4.6. Articles from NT News (1993) about education - 1 - 3, sport - 4 and current affairs 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTS:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COUNTS:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>1817</td>
<td>1449</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraphs</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVERAGES:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences per/para</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words per sentence</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters per word</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READABILITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive sentences %</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch reading ease</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch grade level</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing these results with Table 4.5, the Flesch reading ease and grade level chart, texts 1 and 3 are classed as having difficult style, requiring a person to have been at school for at least 11 - 14 years. Texts 2, 4 and 5 fit in the 'fairly difficult' category, requiring between nine to ten years of school. In discussions with colleagues about the readability of text and in particular efforts to simplify subject specific text, it was pointed out that frequently the need for use of technical or subject specific language would make texts difficult to read. With the use of the Flesch Formula this would only impact on the readability if the terms were multi syllabic, as the formula takes no account of word recognition or meaning. However as subject specific or technical language tends to be lengthy, this could have been a factor that contributed to the education articles generally having a higher reading grade level. For documents 2, 3 and 4, the use of the passive voice is very low. Texts 2, 3 and 4, also have a shorter sentence length than the other two texts.

According to Flesch and Harrison (1984) this would contribute to the text having
greater readability. The following tables and graphs relate to the texts in the Document groups. I have analysed a sample of texts to give an impression of the readability. All the texts that have been analysed for the other variables have been included in the readability.

Table: 4.7 Readability of extracts from the Education Act.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COUNTS:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>1734</td>
<td>1412</td>
<td>1162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraphs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVERAGES:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences per paragraph</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words per sentence</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters per word</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READABILITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive sentences %</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch reading ease</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch grade level</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Flesch the texts in Table: 4.7 are placed in the difficult to very difficult style being most easily read by a person with between 15 - 17 years of school, or who is a college graduate. A third to one half of each text is written in the passive voice adding to the comprehension difficulty. These texts are categorised as well above the Flesch average difficulty of 7 years and also above the standard of 7 to 10 years that I stipulated earlier. The sentence length is above the standard as is the use of the passive.

The texts in Table: 4.8 are from the offices of the Minister and the secretary of the NTED. They are introductory texts for major publications such as the PGSC (NTED, 1987) as well as for promotional material related to Devolution, such as 'You, Your
Table: 4.8 Text from the offices of the Minister for Education and the Secretary of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>3570</td>
<td>1433</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>1556</td>
<td>1345</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraphs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AVERAGES:

| Sentences per para | 1.6 | 3.1 | 0.9 | 1.3 | 0.8 | 1.1 | 2.2 | 1.7 |
| Words per sentence  | 18.6| 15.4| 18.6| 22.3| 31.8| 27.7| 22.7| 23.1|
| Characters per word | 5.2 | 4.9 | 5.5 | 5.1 | 5.4 | 5.6 | 5.4 | 5.4 |

REACHABILITY

| Passive sentences % | 12  | 34  | 28  | 43  | 75  | 20  | 54  | 33  |
| Flesch reading ease | 41.7| 56.1| 45.4| 47.9| 27.1| 29.5| 28.5| 24.5|
| Flesch grade level  | 14.2| 11.2| 13.7| 13.3| 17.0| 17.0| 17.0| 17.0|

School and Devolution' (NTED, 1992). The last four of these texts are in the very difficult style requiring college level education, according to Flesch (Table: 4.5).

The first four are more readable even though they still fit in the difficult style. Only document two fits in the fairly difficult class and close to the standard as recognised as suiting a broad spectrum of parents, that is seven to ten years of schooling. The percentage of passive sentences varies quite a lot between the texts, with at least
three of the four most difficult texts having medium to high readings of passive sentences. The number of words per sentence is also quite high for these latter four texts, the standard being between 17 - 21 for a readable text. The first three texts are much closer to this score.

The following table illustrates the readability of texts produced by the NT Board of Studies. These texts range from the Junior Secondary Studies Certificate brochure, Text 1, that is sent home to all parents to explain their child's government issued school certificate, received at the end of year 10, to a brochure produced to explain to parents how they may become involved in curriculum matters, Text 2.

Table: 4.9 Text produced by the NT Board of Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COUNTS:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>2377</td>
<td>2428</td>
<td>2340</td>
<td>1215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraphs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVERAGES:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences per para</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words per sentence</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters per word</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READABILITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive sentences %</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch reading ease</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch grade level</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of these texts approach the standard, all falling within the very difficult style (table: 4.5) with parents needing more than 16 years of school to read the text with ease, according to Flesch. Sentence length for Texts 1-3 is above that recommended for ease of readability. The percentage of passive sentences is fairly low except in the text with the easiest level of readability, which could negate its
measure of readability ease as these passive sentences would increase the difficulty of comprehending the text.

The next group of readability figures concern the texts produced by the NTED. Extracts have been taken form the 'Practical Guide for School Councils' PGSC (NTED, 1987) and guidelines for developing a 'School Improvement Plan' SIP (NTED, 1993), shown as 'SIP' on the graph.

Table: 4.10. Text from the NTED, such as A Practical Guide for School Councils, booklets and brochures concerning Devolution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COUNTS:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>540</td>
<td>1663</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>190</td>
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<td>850</td>
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<td>1906</td>
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<td>2361</td>
</tr>
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<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences per para</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words per sentence</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters per word</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READABILITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive sentences</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flesch reading ease</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch grade level</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph: 4.5 Flesch Grade level of texts produced by the NTED as compared with the average according to Flesch. Note: Y - Axis = Grade Level X - Axis = Text
Also illustrated are extracts from promotional brochures and booklets, specifically prepared for parents and community members to read such as, 'You Your School and Devolution' (brochure, NTED, 1993), shown as 'You, Your (general)' on the graph, meaning general text concerning devolution, and 'You, Your (curriculum),' on the graph meaning the text in the same brochure specifically concerning curriculum matters and devolution.

As with the other texts these have readability levels generally well above the average according to Flesch (Table 4.5) as well as being above the standard set for the thesis. All texts, except for number 8, are either very difficult or on the border between difficult and very difficult, thus requiring a grade level of beyond 16 years of schooling. Two of the texts, 5 and 6, were taken from the same document. Text 6, concerns general matters about parents and devolution. Text 5, concerns matters about parents and school curriculum and the limited devolution of this aspect to school councils. There is a 2.6 variation in the Grade level between these two sections. I will return to this in Chapter five.

The texts 3, 7 and 8 analysed here come from 'PGSC" that is legislated for in the Act. The function of this Guide is to set down the processes and procedures for operations of school councils, their role and function within the school. School council members are recommended to read this guide in order to understand their duties better. This Guide in some sections has registered a grade level the same as the Act, that of 17, however in other sections the readability is as low as 12.4 - Text 8, which has the lowest readability recorded from this guide. The content of Text 8 specifically deals with functions of school councils,. The use of the passive in these texts is quite high which could counteract their comparative reading ease.

The final readability table (4.11) deals with the text from COGSO. These texts have been extracted from the 'COGSO Handbook', COGSO newsletters called "Parent"
and a small booklet that COGSO produces to aid school council members in their function. I analysed a large number of these texts to see if there was any significant difference between the readability of COGSO texts and that of the NTED. A sample only is represented here.

Table: 4.11. COGSO, Newsletter articles, editorials, Handbook and Booklet of guidelines for parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COUNTS:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td>485</td>
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<td>332</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>692</td>
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<td>425</td>
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<td>Characters</td>
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<td>1608</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>2128</td>
<td>3259</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>2299</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences per para</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Words per sentence</td>
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<td>25.4</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>28.3</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive sentences %</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch reading ease</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch grade level</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph: 4.6 Flesch Grade level of texts produced by COGSO as compared with the average according to Flesch.  
Note: Y - Axis = Grade Level  
X - Axis = Text Number
The readability of the texts ranges from 8.1 to 17.0 however the majority are between 12.4 and 15.9. The lower readability scores are found in the News Letter (NL) articles and some of the NL Editorials. In the main, the scores fall in the fairly difficult category with one however, registering at the Flesch standard (Table: 4.5). With five of the texts 1, 2, 5, 8, and 9 the use of the passive is quite high and could negate their readability ease scores. All have fairly long sentences though they are fairly consistent in their length and not too far above the standard.

Summary

The readability scores range from fairly difficult to very difficult, only one score registered within the standard range of 7 - 10, and only one close to the Flesch standard of 7 (Table: 4.5). The two groups of texts that had scores more consistently at the lower grade level were the articles from the NT News and COGSO. When I was at the COGSO office collecting information, comments were made that the writers of the newsletter endeavoured to produce the articles with a low readability grade level, because they were aware of needing to reach a wide and varied audience, that is they wished their publications to reach all parents. The NT News, as stated before, also has to be careful that the content of the general articles is produced at a level that a broad range of the population can read easily. The COGSO editorials were already recognised as generally being more difficult to read. This was explained as being unavoidable because of the nature of the topical information in these editorials which set out to explain to parents current issues in education in the Territory and nationally.

In relation to the NTED texts the more difficult to read were those associated with curriculum or Board of Studies information, the Act and some sections of extracts from the legislated for guidelines. Sentence length in the majority of extracts tended to be well above that recommended for ease of reading, with the highest being above 35 words per sentence when the standard I chose was 17 - 21. Readability
level is an unusual factor to be overlooked by these professionals charged with publishing D2 documents. In chapter 5, I have referred to this readability information for further analysis and its possible relationship to advocacy.

In the next section I have analysed the texts in the document group D2 in order to determine what is written in them about the scope and function of parent involvement in schools and to find out the proportion of space within the documents given over to the different sections in the texts. Not all of the texts in D2 have been analysed in this section. Some of the texts (D2-P(2)) are specific for certain functions only and do not have the broad application of texts such as those that comprise D2-G (see Fig: 4.3), - the 'Standard Devolution Package' (SDP), the 'Practical Guide for School Councils' (PGSC) and the 'School Improvement Plan' (SIP) draft guidelines which have been looked at in detail. The individual texts that comprise D2-F are single page texts and thus have been used to supplement information in chapter five as they are too small to be analysed here in the same fashion as D2-G.

**Variables: scope, function and space in documents D2-G and D3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flow Chart No.</th>
<th>Texts Used</th>
<th>Primary Analysis Process</th>
<th>Variables Concerned</th>
<th>Mode of Data Presentation</th>
<th>Secondary Analysis Process</th>
<th>End Product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THREE</td>
<td>Selections from D2-G and D3</td>
<td>Extraction of Literal information concerning ...</td>
<td>Scope (s) Function (f) Space (sp)</td>
<td>Tables Pie Charts Texts</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The guides are important to analyse because of their role in determining the processes and procedures for councils and further defining the parameters of scope and function. These publications were sent to all schools for school council and school use. I have first analysed PGSC which was originally published by the NTED in 1987, and updated in 1989, in 1991 it was largely superseded by the SDP (NTED, 1991). Having read both of these texts with the same interest as the Act and Regulations, I decided, apart from looking for what is written about the variables
scope and function of involvement, to analyse only one section in terms of lines and
number of times the word 'parent', 'you', 'your', 'we' had been used. The frequency
of use in the other sections was so little that the result would have been negligible.
Thus the bulk of these documents, in terms of the variable (sp)ace have been
viewed in terms of pages allotted to each section.

*Documents D2-G*

The following table has been taken directly from the index of the PGSC, the column
headed 'pages', indicates the number of pages in the publication taken up by each
section.

Table: 4.12. Sections of the Practical Guidelines for School Councils, in terms of
pages allocated to each section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTIONS IN THE TEXT</th>
<th>PAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Establishing a school council</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Rules relating to school councils</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Conduct of school council meetings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Resources</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Financial operations</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Works and services</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Employment</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Input into staff selection</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) School canteen</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Extracts of The Act</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Education (school council) Regulations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Ministerial guidelines</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Form letters and duty statements</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) NTED Information statements</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information (excluding appendices) in Table: 4.12 has been charted (Chart: 4.4)
to provide a visual impression of the proportions within the text taken up by each
section.

The section dealing with financial operations is clearly the largest taking up 54
percent of the space. Information devoted to administrative function takes up 82
percent of the space. The one political function 'Input into staff selection' referring to
teaching staff takes up only 2 percent of the space. The other 'Establishing a school council' sets down the procedures for beginning the council.

Chart: 4.4 The proportion of each section of the Practical Guidelines for School Councils in terms of Pages of text.

The PGSC reminds the reader that "the school Council decides which function they wish to exercise" (pp.4). The functions are listed directly as they appear in the act but are categorised into 'advisory functions' and 'action functions'. However if a council decides to adopt a particular function then there are procedures associated with the function that must be followed, these are set out in the PGSC. The majority of the procedures listed refer to the action functions. There is only one procedure in the PGSC to assist councils with advisory functions, this deals with input into staff selection. This procedure advises the council about how to develop the job description of the principal and takes up 36 lines of text or just over 1 page of printed text, taking up 2 pages in the publication. The 'onus' is on the council to take up this option.

There are five pages of text devoted to how to run council meetings in terms of creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere, meeting procedure, quorum, speaking rights, decision making and debate. There are 14 pages devoted to 'school budget',
11 to purchasing, 9 to accounting, making up some of the parts of the financial section.

I have not gone into detail about these parts because the SDP produced in 1991 replaced these aspects of the PGSC. Table: 4.13 illustrates the breakdown of this SDP guidelines in terms of pages taken by the sections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTIONS IN THE TEXT</th>
<th>PAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Establishing a School Council Under The Act</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Resources</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Departmental Allocation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Financial Operations</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Canteen</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Property Management</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Employment</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Extracts of the Act</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Regulations (School Councils)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Ministerial Guidelines</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Model Constitution</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Sample Letter Seeking Incorporation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Secretarial Approvals to Councils</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) General Duty Statements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Funding Procedures for Provision of Building Grants</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Abbreviations and Acronyms used in Education</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Action Plan for School Improvement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information in Table: 4.13 has also been charted to illustrate the relative proportions of each section in the publication, (see pp.129).

In the 'SDP' the only section that is not purely administrative is that concerning 'Establishment of a School Council'. This section, similar to that in the 'PGSC' provides advice and information to the proposed convenors of the council. There is no longer any mention of selection of school staff or establishment of the job description of the principal. Sections (1), (2), and (3) from the 'PGSC' are joined into section (1) for the 'SDP', also Departmental Allocation and Property Management have been separated from the financial section.
It is clear from the 'SDP' that the council is not merely expected to rubber stamp the school administration's decisions concerning the 'action functions', for example the council is expected to set the budget for the school. There are 14 pages of content about procedures for the council to follow in the process of setting the budget. These kinds of procedures significantly expand on the individual function to which they refer. The extent to which these procedures add to a council's duties is pointed out in the analysis of the COGSO texts (see pp.131-133) below.

The 'Devolution Package' introduces a new procedure that deals with forward planning in the school, that is, the development, implementation, and regular reviewing of the 'Action Plan for School Improvement' (SDP appendix 10):

Each school community will formulate an Action Plan for School Improvement.

The Action Plan will address within Departmental policies, and Board of studies Curriculum requirements, the priorities identified by the school community - parents, teachers and community.

The Plan therefore belongs to the school community (Devolution Package, 1991 appendix 10, pp.3).
An Action Plan for School Improvement (APSI) is an operational plan set up for three years but to be reviewed annually. In 1993 the section dealing with this procedure was removed from the 'SDP', as separate guidelines were established. These new guidelines are referred to as the *School Improvement Plan, Action Plan for School Improvement* (I was only able to obtain a copy of Draft 4 (NTED, 1993) as the document was in the process of being published) referred to as SIP and APSI. In this new guideline the SIP is referred to as "a clear public statement of a schools major themes for improvement". The APSI is now the operational plan to give the strategies for achieving the objectives in the three year SIP. This new guideline for procedures covers aspects of both the advisory, political functions and the action, administrative functions. Prior to 1993 these guidelines stated that the school community was responsible for the establishment of the APSI and for its implementation and review, this has continued under the new guidelines. I have not analysed this guideline in the same manner as the PGSC and SDP because it does not cover the range of functions that the others do. However I will return to this guideline in the section about discourse and in chapter 5, pp.143-145.

*Documents D3*

The text examined from COGSO in this section is the booklet *You Are On A School Council... Now What? Some Basic Information For School Council members* (COGSO, 1992) (referred to as the COGSO Booklet). The text has been analysed in a similar manner to D2-G texts, however being much smaller it has not been feasible to chart the information.

The booklet is not a legal document and unlike the Act and Regulations and the guidelines, is not bound by formality in its presentation. However the document is produced for parents to help them to function in the unfamiliar setting of a school council and to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities. The COGSO
Booklet is for school council members and therefore does not cover personal involvement of parents, which for COGSO purposes, is covered by their Handbook, also detailing policy and their constitution.

In relation to the scope and function of parents' involvement as members of school councils, the COGSO Booklet is divided into two categories. Parents 'must' carry out some and 'may' carry out other functions:

Table: 4.14. Functions that a school council 'must' carry out according to COGSO. (from the COGSO Booklet "You're on a School Council..." 1993, pp.8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCOPE</th>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
<th>ACTION TO BE CARRIED OUT BY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) inquire and identify</td>
<td>educational needs of its community</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) consider and plan</td>
<td>for extensions/improvements to buildings/grounds</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) take part in</td>
<td>selection of teaching staff for promotional vacancies through a local selection advisory panel</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) conduct and report</td>
<td>an AGM before March 15 and report to community</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) hold</td>
<td>a certain number of meetings each year</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) present</td>
<td>an audited financial statement annually</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) encourage</td>
<td>parental and community involvement in school</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) arrange and administer</td>
<td>cleaning and grounds maintenance contracts</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) ensure</td>
<td>facilities and equipment kept in good state of repair</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) draw up</td>
<td>an annual financial budget of proposed expenditure</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) oversee</td>
<td>the organisation of urgent minor repairs and minor repairs</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) develop, implement and review</td>
<td>an Action Plan for School Improvement</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) purchase</td>
<td>goods and equipment..</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These have been reproduced directly from the COGSO Booklet. They were not sequenced into any order, such as advisory or action function. The term 'must' is a little misleading until this is checked against the scope stated for the function. The scope for a number of these functions is still 'inactive' or in this sense here, better termed as 'passive'. The fact that the council must inquire into and identify the educational needs of the community does not mean that the council implements any kinds of action as a result of the inquiry. The action functions are rightly listed as the administrative ones such as 'purchase equipment', 'arrange and administer cleaning and grounds maintenance contracts'.
The significant factor in this table and the next is that the number of functions listed as being done by council have more than doubled. This is not in accordance with the contents of the Act and Regulations but entirely in accord with the PGSC and SDP manuals. These extra compulsory factors are found in pages of reference material that detail the functions from the Act should a council choose to accept the functions as part of its duties. These are not factors that can be ignored, as stated earlier, it is only the Secretary of the NTED who can exempt a council from the duties that go with the devolved functions under the Act and are detailed in the PGSC and SDP.

Table: 4.15 Functions that a school council 'may' carry out according to COGSO.(from the COGSO Booklet "You're on a School Council..." 1993, pp.9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCOPE</th>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
<th>ACTION TO BE CARRIED OUT BY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) advise</td>
<td>in regard to implementation of educational policy of the school within guidelines issued by the minister</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) advise</td>
<td>in relation to duty statements of teachers and ancillary staff</td>
<td>the principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) employ</td>
<td>such people as deemed necessary</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) conduct</td>
<td>activities for the community outside of school hours</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) run or lease</td>
<td>the canteen</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) allow</td>
<td>use of the school for recreational purposes</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) administer</td>
<td>contracts for minor new works and capital works</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) determine</td>
<td>the amount of voluntary levy (school fees) to be asked of parents.</td>
<td>council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I found the COGSO distinction into 'must' and 'may' confusing, as the council has a choice with many of the functions listed under 'must', such as numbers 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 13 from Table: 4.14. These are all included under section 71(c) of the Act which is prefaced by the statement a school council 'may'. This is repeated in the PGSC and the SDP manuals. However, if the council does not adopt any of the functions then they will be devolved to the principal of the school. Thus most school councils have chosen to adopt all the functions as listed under the Act. Therefore if the council has adopted the functions, then they must carry out all that is listed above by COGSO -there is no 'may'. Even if so many of the functions are still advisory and not action.
This COGSO booklet is one of the few that actually advises parents about how to effectively participate as a member of a council. It includes much procedural information and explanations but tempers this with ideas on how to be effective as a participant, for example:

Have two questions constantly in mind:

- What should we be doing next?
- How can I best contribute?

This is the only text that I found for which so many of the 'hidden' duties had been extracted, from the official documents, to bring them out into the open.

**Variable: recognition of the intent of parent's requests**

This next section analyses some documents from group D2-C in detail, to determine if there is any pattern that can be established in relation to the manner in which the NTED responds to parental requests. The key documents here are the requests for action arising from the COGSO half yearly meetings, and the Darwin Devolution Symposium in 1992. I decided to investigate this variable following discussions with colleagues that arose out of viewing some of the texts. The discussions concerned the manner in which the NTED responded to requests, by stating policy, without apparently giving recognition that the request was for a change to the policy, because the policy was felt to be inadequate.

COGSO was able to provide me with information from their Half Yearly Parent Seminar and Council Meeting 14-16 September 1990, the 1992 Conference and the NTED responses to the Motions passed.
There were four motions presented to the Secretary of the NTED in 1990. The first requested a review of the staffing of all Territory schools in consultation with COGSO, and the Northern Territory Teachers Federation (NTTF). The reply stated that a review had occurred in 1990, that COGSO and the NTTF had been part of the Small Secondary Schools Working Party and the ideas from this were included in the review, that the review would be ongoing and finished by explaining why all teaching staff were included in the staffing formula "to allow maximum discretion to decide on priorities for use at the school level where, through councils, parents can be involved in the decision making process" (NTED, 1990, COGSO Correspondence file). The response in effect was an explanation of the existing situation and what had been done, not what could be done.

The second requested that the department provide necessary support to the schools which have accepted special needs children. The response was that when the child is placed at a school, a case conference is held to establish the special needs of the child. The school is primarily responsible for the provision of facilities and equipment if they cannot, then they apply through Regional Offices for their needs. This response continued in this vein informing COGSO of the procedures currently operating.

The third requested that the NTED provide therapy services on an equal basis across the Territory. The response was that a physiotherapist had been transferred to Alice Springs to commence term 4, 1990 and that the NTED was working with the Health and Community Services to ensure resources are deployed in the most efficient and effective manner. Again the response was an explanation of what existed and could partly satisfy the request.

In Motion 4, COGSO requested that a language centre be established in Alice Springs. The response was that a language centre was in the Action Plans for the
Literacy Working Party and that when the Action Plan was finished priorities would be assessed. This response is more directly related to the motion however again there is no clear-cut answer or guarantee that something will occur.

In 1992, twelve motions were put to the secretary of the NTED. Nine of the responses given were in the same format as motions 1 and 2 of 1990. With two relating to condom vending machines, there was a categorically negative response and for the twelfth no reply was needed as COGSO was merely notifying endorsement of COGSO Executive action.

In 1992 following the Darwin Devolution Symposium the comments of all the groups, parents staff and NTED personnel who met together over the weekend of the Symposium were collated into a report to which the then Acting Secretary undertook to reply. The replies were sent to schools as a circular in 1993. The trend throughout the response was to reply usually with a yes or no answer and a statement of policy for any straight forward information seeking questions. However, when the questions were asking for change or variation to the policy, the answer generally stated policy and explained current procedure in a similar manner to that employed above with COGSO, for example:

HOW WILL THE VIEWS OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS, PARENTS, THE ATU, COGSO AND OTHERS BE FORMALLY INVOLVED IN THE CONTINUING DEVOLUTION PROCESS?

Decision making processes in the Territory's education system are among the most representative in Australia. This high level of representation has long been a feature of our system and it is enshrined in legislation and exists at all levels from individual School Councils (represented now on local selection panels for promotion positions in schools) to the Board of Studies and the Education Advisory Councils (Devolution Symposium 1992, question and answers pp.2).

From reviewing this small amount of evidence I cannot conclusively state that the NTED does not respond to the intent of a request, it is only possible to conclude that
there is evidence that would support this idea. I will return to discussion of this variable in chapter five in response to the sub-question 2(b).

Variable: time allowed for response

Another variable that has been investigated through the D2-C texts is time allowed for response from councils to the NTED requests.

This needs to be considered with reference to the conditions that councils work under. Councils must meet a minimum of 8 times a year as stated in the Regulations. This means that, taking school holidays into account, councils generally meet together once a month. The meetings are usually held in the evenings so that working parents can attend. Many councils have sub-committees established that deal with major aspects of the council's function such as finance, grounds, canteen, fund raising to name a few (see Regulations). Most mail that comes to a council comes to the school and is held for the next council meeting before it is dealt with. It has been my experience, through attending many meetings, that the agenda is usually full and there is little time for late or extra items, unless the meeting time is deliberately extended. Thus should a circular requiring detailed response arrive at the school between meetings, two to three weeks of the allowed time may have passed before it is looked at. There is general discussion at the first meeting and hopefully more informed discussion at the next when a member or 'committee' may volunteer to draft a reply, or a reply may be drafted at the meeting. This means a minimum time of eight weeks if the work is to be done during council
meeting times then typed at the school before sending. However this time frame would not allow any significant canvassing of community opinion.

Amongst the files that I searched I found 9 circulars with specific time frames allowed for response, and a further six letters, unrelated to the circulars, from schools and COGSO either to the Minister or the Secretary expressing dissatisfaction at the short time allowed for consultation. Of the circulars, the time-frames allowed for consultation ranged from 17 days to six weeks. One major change to school restructuring in Darwin, allowed three weeks for consultation following the publication of the report.

I was unable to obtain a clear picture of the number of such circulars that are sent to councils requesting responses, however the ones that I have included cover a broad area of response. These are:

- The 1993 proposed restructuring of Darwin Secondary Schools (above).
- The proposed changes to senior school studies in line with the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia, 17 days.
- Discussion on the Policy for Special Education, 6 weeks.
- The philosophy and aims of the curriculum review for junior school, 6 weeks.
- Aspects of the curriculum review, 26 days.

Some of these requests only related to parts of major reviews, such as the junior school curriculum review that had many facets to it. However, none of the time frames allowed, in the papers quoted, would give a council adequate time, without meeting outside the set meeting times, to send a considered and consultative response.
Variables: word frequency and nature of discourse

The next section in part deals with data 'of' the text, that is the nature of the discourse, like the readability figures this data is not related to content but to the manner in which the text is written. The second aspect refers to the number of times the term 'parent', 'you', 'your', 'we', appears in a text. These variables, along with the readability, build a picture of the text as to whether it is 'user friendly' and whether it is written in a form that suits the social function that it performs. Samples from each of the document groups in the flow chart will be analysed.

Nature of Discourse

This treatment of the text to determine the nature of the discourse is derived from the works of Halliday (1990), Hasan (1990) and Kress (1985). A discourse organises and gives structure to the manner in which a topic, object or process is to be talked about, it defines, describes and delimits what it is possible to say with respect to the area of concern. Kress (1985, pp.7) writes, that the text will be written in a format that suits the social situation of the text, that is, the social function that the text is to perform. It will indicate the nature of the participants and the manner in which the writer wishes them to engage with the text as well as what it is that the participants are expecting the text to do for them. The nature of the discourse also includes the rhetorical mode, that is what is being achieved by the text in terms of categories such as persuasive, expository and the like (Halliday and Hasan, 1990, pp.12).

I have briefly analysed a sample of text from the document groups according to the factors that can be identified in the discussion above, that is, to 'simply' identify the
social function the text is to perform by analysing the text for information about the
following factors:

1. The nature of the social action.
2. The nature of the participants their roles and status if possible.
3. The manner in which the writer wishes the reader to engage with the text.
4. The status of the text.

Halliday (1990, pp.12) categorises these factors into:

- The Field of Discourse - what is happening (1. above).
- The Tenor of Discourse - who are taking part (2 & 3 above).
- The Mode of Discourse - what part the language is playing (4 & 5 above).

I have chosen to use only part of Halliday's method of interpreting text. Halliday employs quite detailed and complicated processes to investigate the language structure and word usage of text, showing how they determine the type of the discourse. This is beyond the needs of my research. One of the limitations of this study is that I have chosen to rely on aspects of Halliday's conceptual framework, though there are a number of other frameworks from other linguists that could have been employed.

With the eclectic approach taken to this case study none of the individual methods have been employed in depth, as I wish to draw on a number of methods to increase the prospects of triangulation. However the aspects that I have chosen fit within Halliday's classifications as demonstrated above. I have employed this technique to see if it is possible to determine, at this depth, if the style of the texts actually varies according to their function and if it can be determined that variations to text have been made because of the nature of the audience.

The texts that I have chosen to analyse as representative of texts within their document groups are:

- D1 The Education Act (1983).
The texts will be analysed in the order that they are presented above. Though the texts are analysed here, I have not made any comparisons between texts nor drawn inferences from them, this is to be carried out in chapter five.

*The Act (NTED)*

(1) The nature of the social action:

The Education Act sets the parameters within which those involved with education are to operate, it establishes the structures and the means of access through which education is to be made available to all people of the NT and which is suited to their individual needs and abilities. It sets down the rules and the legal sanctions for the operations of the education process. It is a reference document, a 'blue print' for operations.

(2) The nature of the participants their roles and status:

The writers are never referred to and are insignificant in the social function of this text. The reader is to gain knowledge from within which they can function. Thus the 'collective reader' is subordinate to the single authority. Persons in the text are mentioned by title, position or male pronoun, the individual is anonymous, as is the reader (see extracts below).

(e) provide financial assistance to such persons, bodies or institutions as he considers necessary or desirable for, or in connection with, education services;

(g) having sought the advice of the relevant Advisory Council, make provision for awards in relation to the passing of examinations or otherwise in relation to education services; (The Act, Part 11, Section 6, 4(g))

In (e) the 'he' is the Minister for Education, as this part deals with the Minister's role. The text is written in this manner in order to accommodate any persons who might have to be included under the Act.
(3) The manner in which the writer wishes the reader to engage with the text:

The reader is not meant to be engaged by the text or drawn into association with the text. To this end, the involved persons are kept anonymous. The persons involved may only have temporary or transient association with the text, whereas the text must be able to remain constant in its message no matter which persons are referring to it or referred to, in it.

(4) The status of the text:

The text defines the law, in non-detailed form, for the institution of education. The text states 'what is', not the processes or the procedures to enact or implement the 'what'. For example in (g) above, the nature of the 'awards' or the 'otherwise' is not stipulated, neither is to whom they are to be given, only that they exist. The text contains many authoritative terms such as 'provide', 'make provision for', other such terms used are 'approve', 'cause to be undertaken'. Thus the text, in this part, tells the reader that the Minister is to do these things.

(5) The rhetorical mode:

This is legalistic, in order to be controlling of the persons involved, including the reader. The use of the impersonal legal language keeps the power with the originators of the text (Kress, pp. 59). As with this form of rhetoric, the writing is formulaic, being general with provision for relation to the specific (Halliday 1990). The many clauses that comprise each section and subsection of each part make the text difficult to comprehend as the original instruction or doer of the action may have been expressed many clauses before. In the section that I have quoted from (above) there are eleven sub-clauses that follow the main clause.
The Standard Devolution Package (NTED)

(1) The nature of the social action:

This text has legal status under the Act. These guidelines arise from the Act. They are produced by the NTED as the official policy and procedures for schools and school councils to follow, to implement the general specifications of the Act as it relates to devolution. These guidelines determine the manner in which schools and school councils are to carry out their devolved functions. They also establish the relationship of the school council's functions to the operations of the NTED. These guidelines are meant to be working documents. They are regulatory of the council's role in the devolution process.

(2) The nature of the participants their roles:

The NTED is seen as the originator of the text, with the readers being the collective school council members, the principal and the school administration. These persons are addressed by title, position or pronoun thus the individual is anonymous (see below). Because this text establishes the details not found in the Act, the readers are subordinate to the authority of the text. The text contains the knowledge that the readers must have to function effectively in their roles:

- Ordinary General Meeting of Councils

  Voting at ordinary general meetings of a council shall be by simple majority. Each member of a council, including the Chairperson, shall have one vote.

- Pecuniary Interests of Council Members

  A member of the council who is financially interested in any contract or arrangement made or proposed to be made between the council and an outside contractor shall disclose her/his interest at the first meeting of the council at which the contract or arrangement is first taken into consideration, if her/his interest then exists, or, in any other case, at the first meeting of the council after the acquisition of her/his interest. (Standard Devolution Package, NTED, 1991 appendix 3).
The text is written impersonally to accommodate any persons who might have to be included as part of the functions explained here.

(3) The manner in which the writer wishes the reader to engage with the text:
The reader is not meant to engage with the text in any other manner than to be instructed. This is effected through the anonymity of the characters, the use of the passive voice, for example 'voting at ...' and the use of the modal auxiliary verb 'shall'. The latter two, according to Kress (1985 pp.53-54), signify the use of distancing devices in the text.

(4) The status of the text:
This text provides the processes and procedures through which to enact or implement the Act as it relates to devolution and school councils. The information is quite specific "voting shall be by simple majority" with, in this instance, the action to be carried out by the potential reader, who could be a member of a school council or a member of the school administration.

(5) The rhetorical mode (Halliday and Hasan, 1990, pp.12):
This is legalistic in order to control the persons involved, including the reader. The use of the impersonal and legal style keeps the power with the originators of the text. The writing is formulaic (see above) however this has changed in format from the legal style of the Act. In this text, the main clause and sub-clause format has been altered so that they each form stand alone sentences. The sub-clauses have their own headings. However some of the individual sentences making up the sub-clause, such as in the quote above, can be quite long in order to accommodate all meanings. This text is meant to be a document to work with and thus is also didactic in its rhetoric, providing instruction to the council, such as in the case of a complaint against a teacher:
On receipt of a complaint against a teacher, the council may refer the complaint to the head teacher and request that the complaint be investigated through the proper official channels. The council may request that the head teacher report back to the council on the outcome of the investigation (Standard Devolution Package, NTED 1991, Appendix 3).

The School Improvement plan, Action Plan for School Improvement, Draft 4.(NTED)

(1) The nature of the social action:

This text is from a new set of guidelines developed in 1993, that have been formed from the original included in the standard devolution package. Thus these guidelines perform the same function as the previous ones analysed. They are regulatory of the school's forward planning process in their role.

(2) The nature of the participants their roles and status:

This is also the same as the previous text analysed (see quote below), however the authority is softened somewhat by the use of cautions such as "It is strongly recommended that .." and directions such as "please refer to...", which are not found in the other texts.

It is strongly recommended that each school identifies no more than three or four objectives to action annually in order to ensure that each objective is comprehensively actioned and that schools are not placed in an untenable situation...

...A performance indicator is a measurable or observable action, activity or event which demonstrates that one or more components of an outcome has been achieved. Please refer to the appendix for further information on performance indicators. Staff, students, parents and the Superintendent should all be involved in developing the Action Plan (School Improvement Plan, NTED, 1993, pp.16).

(3) The manner in which the writer wishes the reader to engage with the text:

The reader is also kept at a distance with this text through the use of the collective terms and through the use of the 'agentless passives' (Kress 1985, pp58) such as, 'it is strongly recommended', 'in order to ensure'. The text must be able to accommodate all persons over time and thus cannot be specific.
(4) The status of the text:

The text has the same status as the standard devolution package. However as mentioned, the authoritative tenor is softened by the use of such terms as 'please'. The text states that "This document has been developed in order to assist schools with school improvement planning" (pp.2). There is also the comment:

However, the format, style and complexity [of the SIP] is determined by the school community. Ideally this process is conducted in a collaborative manner, involving all members of the school community who desire to make a contribution (pp2).

This text is meant to be a working document referred to in the process of school planning. As the school communities are responsible for the School Improvement Plan then the document is meant to be used by the parents to work from.

(5) The rhetorical mode (Halliday and Hasan, 1990, pp.12):

The rhetoric is bureaucratic (Kress 1985, pp. 57-58) rather than legalistic. The style has changed to a prose with short paragraphs and very few clauses and sub-clauses. There are also few lead sentences with associated sentences such as found in the former legalistic texts analysed. However the power is retained by the originator of the text, as the passives, polite directives and the many uses of auxiliary verbs such as 'should' and 'will' indicate. There is much use of contextual language such as 'performance indicators', 'components of an outcome', 'objectives to action', as well as complex terms such as, 'untenable', 'comprehensively' (from the quotes above).
You, Your School and Devolution, Partnership in Action. (NTED)

(1) The nature of the social action:
This is an eleven page half A4 'glossy' booklet produced by the NTED in 1992 and distributed to all schools. It is referred to by the minister in the foreword as a guide for superintendents, principals, staff and school councillors. It does not follow the format of the other guides. It explains what devolution involves and what forms of parent involvement can occur, with brief reference to how to go about participating. From the size, the presentation and the language used it is promotional literature serving to set down the positive features of devolution and parent involvement in schools. The booklet is not regulatory as there are no directives within the text.

(2) The nature of the participants their roles and status:
The participants are referred to in the third person, either by title or position. The text is aimed at a wide ranging, collective group, from those who are involved in regional education policy making, the superintendents, to parents of children at an individual school. The text is presented by an authority, the NTED.

(3) The manner in which the writer wishes the reader to engage with the text:
The text is presented in a manner to engage the reader. It includes a flow chart and pictures of smiling faces on every page. However the use of the passive acts to keep the reader at a distance, for example 'it is essential that' (pp.6 of the text). The reference to impersonal structures that supposedly carry out the tasks, for example, 'The Territory's education system was among the first in Australia to introduce devolved decision making', 'each school council has the ability to create a school', also adds to the distancing effect. Frequently when describing an action that a person could be involved in the person is reminded that others have the actual power, for example:
... a council-in association with the principal who has overall professional responsibility for the management of the school and for ensuring the quality and integrity of its education program-can promote a particular curriculum focus or activities of special local interest (NTED, 1992, pp2).

(4) The status of the text:

It is difficult to state if the text has formal status or not, it is referred to as a guideline however it is not the kind of 'blue-print' for operation that the other guidelines are. However the text does include information, briefly, about the advisory and political functions that parents can perform and does describe other forms of involvement that are not included under the Act. However without the use of directives and with the frequent use of auxiliary verbs, for example, the 'should' in the quote below, the feeling is that these things do not have to be done.

Councils and staff should define their school's philosophy, set the aims and goals to which their school can aspire, and develop policies for their school's operation. (NTED, 1992 pp. pp2)

The indefinite nature of the wording, for example using 'should' in the above quote, which negates the strength of "set' and 'develop', confirms my opinion that the status of the text is purely as a promotional piece.

(5) The rhetorical mode (Halliday and Hasan, 1990, pp.12):

The rhetoric is promotional, attempting to 'cram' as much 'good' information into the one space as possible, for example: 'ensuring that each school grows and develops in accordance with the wishes of those it serves', 'achievements can be recorded', 'shared desire of parents and teachers to provide a high quality education for all students', 'school can aspire', all is very positive vocabulary. The text is broken into many short paragraphs usually one sentence long. The use of clause and sub-clause is almost gone. However, when the role of the NTED is described the clauses return and jargon increases, for example 'systemic strategic planning', 'accountability arrangements', 'formula-based deployment', 'systemic corporate function' to
illustrate a few. Even though the text is promotional the language is quite bureaucratic with the use of the passive and auxiliary verbs (Kress, 1985 pp.59).

This next text is related to the previous one. They were published at the same time, with the former to provide detail for the persons named in the text. This text is produced for much wider distribution and specifically for parents. I included this text with the latter because it demonstrates a change in the style of the discourse between two promotional texts.

*You Your School and Devolution, and Introduction. (NTED)*

(1) The nature of the social action:

This text is produced to inform about devolution, and is meant to reach a broad spectrum of parents. It is a promotional 'glossy' brochure printed on a single folded A4 sheet, containing many photographs. The text is meant to attract the readers attention and to develop interest in the topic.

(2) The nature of the participants their roles and status if possible:

The participants are parents and the NTED. The text originates from the NTED to both a collective group and the individual. Some paragraphs are quite impersonal and revert to the bureaucratic agentless mode, for example:

> Each school's action plan is developed by its school council and staff, in consultation with the broader school community. The plan is a 'blueprint' for the long-term organisation and management of the school. It is a three year plan which is under constant review within the school. It is modified, where necessary, to meet changing needs or circumstances. (NTED, 1992)

However others become quite directive to the individual:

Through your school council, you and other parents—as well as members of the broader school community—have the opportunity to shape and develop the kind of school best suited to your needs and expectations through the process known as 'devolution' (NTED, 1992).
Thus the NTED stays in the authoritative power position, with the reader being subordinate.

(3) The manner in which the writer wishes the reader to engage with the text:
Throughout the text the reader is referred to directly by the use of 'you', 'your', which does engage readers, there is even the use of 'we' - 'As we all know', to encourage the reader to believe the writer has empathy with the reader. There is frequent use of abbreviations such as 'that's, don't', which add to informality in the text and encourages the reader to feel comfortable with the text.

(4) The status of the text:
The text is not formal nor instructional, it is informative. It does not need to have a lasting quality.

(5) The rhetorical mode (Halliday and Hasan, 1990, pp.12):
The rhetoric is promotional, but instead of being instructive it attempts to be persuasive, to bring parents in to involvement with the school. The informal style, the more open prose, even asking a question of the reader, 'But what is it that makes a good school?,' near the start of the text, is bringing the reader into the text and encouraging them to have a dialogue with the text. These efforts are to persuade the reader to empathise with the content matter.

You are on a School Council...Now What? (COGSO)

(1) The nature of the social action:
This is explained in the foreword to the booklet, "This publication is designed to be a short, easily read, guide for people who have been elected to school councils, as well as those seeking information about the operation of councils"
(COGSO, 1993). The booklet is a 20 page half A4 text. It seeks to inform and advise, those who are already members of a school council. In this instance COGSO is the authority providing advice to the council members.

(2) The nature of the participants their roles and status:

The participants are council members and the COGSO organisation. The organisation has the power that comes from knowledge:

Being an active member of a school council may take time, but can be a very rewarding experience. This booklet will provide you with some basic information and advice based on the collective experience of school councils across the Territory and elsewhere in Australia.

At times the writer becomes quite directive and telling to the individual reader, 'without your presence', 'without your watchfulness' for example, which serves to place the reader in a subservient position.

(3) The manner in which the writer wishes the reader to engage with the text:

The writer wishes the reader to engage with the text. This is demonstrated by the many short paragraphs, frequently only a sentence long. There is little use of clause and sub-clause. There is quite frequent use of the words 'you' and 'your' and 'parent'. However the open dialogue is interrupted by use of the passive, which distances the reader, and some use of auxiliary verbs that soften the directives, but again act to distance.

(4) The status of the text:

The text has no official status in relation to the NTED, it is meant as a helpful guide. The legal language style is not present. However the directives such as "If You don't understand - ask?" encourages the feeling that in COGSO's terms the text has authority and is accurate in its information.

The mode is expository as it seeks to teach the reader how to operate effectively as a school council member. In this respect it explains both what to do and what not to do. At times the text cautions the reader about problems that could arise. The text is a working document, for frequent referencing, demonstrated by its many headings with instructions, advice and information beneath them. However the frequent use of the passive reduces its instruction effect as this style can be confusing for the reader in relation to who is to carry out action or to get things done.

Foreword to the booklet ‘You, Your School and Devolution’

(1) The nature of the social action:

This foreword comes from the office of the Minister for Education. Its purpose is to introduce the concept of devolution and parent involvement in schools to the reader. According to the foreword the readers are to be superintendents, principals, staff and school councillors. Thus a mix of elected parents (school councillors) and NTED personnel. Though the text states that the booklet is to be guidelines for these people, the foreword refers to the international and national scene thus promoting the concept of devolution and parent involvement. The foreword has overtones of propaganda. The Minister refers to himself in the passage, highlighting what he has done and achieved in relation to this concept.

(2) The nature of the participants their roles and status if possible:

The writer of the text is identified as the Minister. We are not sure of who the reader might be expected to be, as no personalised referencing occurs. All others are referred to by position.
(3) The manner in which the writer wishes the reader to engage with the text:
The writer is not engaged with the text at all. There is no wording that causes the reader to identify with the text. The writer puts the reader at a distance not only by the depersonalised referencing but also by the use of 'I'. In other words the reader is informed of the good deeds of the writer.

(4) The status of the text:
The text sets the scene for the contents of the booklet, it lets people know that what is in the booklet is promoted by the Minister and thus is official. However the text does not have to withstand changes with time. The text is descriptive and suggestive of the idea of a partnership in education that devolution involves.

(5) The rhetorical mode (Halliday and Hasan, 1990, pp.12):
The mode is promotional and propagandist. The wording is positive and superlative, such as, 'crucial', 'ultimately', 'constructive relationship'. The propaganda comes through with the use of the 'I' and 'we' and 'all', this latter term creates a feeling of total involvement and a connection with the rest of Australia. The foreword is to be read once and put aside.

The data above indicates that the linguistic style of the texts used for analysis is varied, not only between the texts from different sources but quite significantly between texts from the same source.

Variable: Frequency of the use of the words 'parent', 'you', 'your' and 'we'

The next part of this section deals with word counts. When a writer wishes to engage the reader in promotional, persuasive or expository text they frequently refer
to the reader by name or they use the pronouns 'you', 'your', 'we', in an effort to personalise and individualise the texts, making them 'user friendly'. Even the use of the word parent as a collective is more approachable than the collective terms school council, or community, or citizen. Thus I have analysed a variety of the texts to determine whether this practice of personalising the texts has occurred. This information is presented in Table: 4.16 which presents details of the linguisticality of the texts, that is, word counts and frequency (where they appeared sufficiently often to warrant counting), summary of nature of discourse and average reading ages, both Flesch and Dale Chall. These variables are connected in the literature as contributing to making a text user friendly (Halliday and Hasan, 1990, Kress, 1985, Harrison, 1984).

In the table, even though the frequency scores for the SDP and the PGSC are quite reasonable for the section detailed, this is diminished in terms of the whole text as they rarely appear in any other section.

The text that achieves the highest score is the brochure "You, Your School and Devolution, an Introduction". The frequency score is increased if the use of 'you', 'your', 'we', is added to the use of parent, the frequency jumps then to 27.7 percent. This means that in approximately a quarter of the lines of text there is some form of personalised referencing to the reader. The closest text to this is the COGSO booklet that registers 10.4 percent with the same frequency calculation.

In relation to the Dale-Chall readability the original scores are significantly lower than the Flesch scores for the same documents. However if 5 is added to the Dale-Chall scores as Harrison states should be done to bring them up to the British range of scores then the results are closer to the Flesch grade levels. It is not expected that the scores will be the same as they have in effect measured two different forms of readability (see, pp.116). According to Harrison, even with adjustment this
formula tends to give scores slightly lower than Flesch. These factors taken into consideration, the two formulas do indicate that the majority of the texts are written with a high reading grade level.

Table: 4.16 Statistical summaries of selected texts from the different document groups to illustrate their linguisticality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of pages (1)</th>
<th>sections</th>
<th>Number of Lines of Text (2)</th>
<th>Use of the word 'parent' (3)</th>
<th>frequency of use of word parent (4)</th>
<th>Use of 'you', 'your', 'we', etc.</th>
<th>Nature of the discourse</th>
<th>Flesch reading grade level (5)</th>
<th>Dale-Chall reading grade level</th>
<th>Dale-Chall reading grade level adjusted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Act</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,902</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Legalistic</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Regulations</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Legalistic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.G.S.C Section 1 ONLY</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Legalistic and bureaucratic</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.D.P. Section 1 ONLY</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Legalistic and bureaucratic</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIP and APSI</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.3%</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Bureaucratic</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COGSO booklet for SC members</td>
<td>(A5 size)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Promotional and expository</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(p) You, Your School and Devolution</td>
<td>(A5 size)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Promotional</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(l) You, Your School and Devolution</td>
<td>single folded A4 page</td>
<td>72 (approx)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Promotional</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword You, Your School (p)</td>
<td>(A5 size)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Propaganda</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE:
(1) text only and excludes table of contents and lists of amendments.
(2) anything above half a line has been included as a whole line. Half lines and less have been compiled to make one line of text.
(3) records the number of times the word parent occurs in the text.
(4) results in column 4 as percentage of results in column 3.
(5) average of readings taken
Summary

In this data base I have presented a variety of information concerning the texts in the case study. This information 'fleshes out' the details of the variables in terms of factors of the text such as readability and discourse, which provides a measure of linguisticality, as well as factors in the text content, such as scope and function of involvement allowed parents, which provides a means to measure the messages in the text. The data base has also allowed development of the standards of readability, scope and function against which comparisons can be made. The variety of the texts used and the methods employed provide a large amount of information to approach the answering of the research questions and to respond to the research problem. This is dealt with in chapter five. This next chapter is the second part to the data analysis the first being the development of the data base. Chapter five is analysis of the data to draw inferences and make assertions about advocacy for parent involvement, the value preference of the NTED officers and the possible existence of a barrier to involvement.
CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis of The Data, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In chapter four I built the data base which comprises information about the research variables. These variables were deduced from the literature, the research texts and the preliminary questions. They are factors 'in' and 'of' the texts that, when data is compiled about them, have been able to provide evidence for me to answer the research questions and thus deduce inferences about the research problem:

That the writings of education personnel and specifically for this case study, NTED officers, act as a barrier to parental involvement in schools and school decision making (refer chapter one).

To focus my thinking about the research problem, and to devise a means of extracting information about 'latent' content, I developed my five key questions with their accompanying sub-questions which are presented in chapter three (see pp.81-83). To draw a closure on the thesis I have converted these five key questions into propositions and have subjected them to the data base to determine whether the propositions are substantiated. Through this means, chapter five, presents an application of the data base to the research problem, from which conclusions have been drawn.

From the results of the case study a number of recommendations for action have been made. The literature and the case study itself, also raised a number of possibilities for further research in terms of the research methodology and the
content and context. These have been presented following the conclusions to the case study.

I would remind the reader that, even though chapter four provides the data base for chapter five, I have earlier mentioned that there are some supplementary texts that are short and subject or context specific, that have not been included in the chapter four data base. These texts did not suit the form of the data analysis used with the larger texts. However they do provide supplementary evidence to individual aspects of that data and thus have been drawn on when relevant. Because of the potential private nature of this material they have been returned to the COGSO files. A person wishing to pursue this material would need to obtain the permission of COGSO. I have only made indirect or collective references to this material, none is identifiable from the analysis as required by the ethics of case study research.

I have also drawn on some of my own knowledge and experiences to supplement the data when it is applied in chapter five. I have spent much time working with parents throughout the latter half of my teaching career and believe that my experiences are pertinent to this case study, the validity of the use of my recollections is substantiated by the following comment from Wise (1979, pp.26):

The credibility of an account is as good as the credibility of the author. An account given by an individual who has developed a reputation for personal integrity should be viewed as credible, if not verifiable.

This chapter is separated into two parts, the first being the analysis of the data and the second the conclusions and recommendations.
Analysis of the data

The key questions as propositions

With the development of a data base it became possible to apply this to the research problem to enable me to draw inferences about it. My thinking about these inferences was focussed by the research questions which I found easier to use in this chapter when put as propositions to be supported or not supported by the data and the supplementary information. Thus the five key questions, converted to propositions are presented below:

Key Question 1:

Are mixed messages about parent involvement in schools and school decision making manifest in the documents produced by the NTED that are presented to parents?

Proposition 1:

Mixed messages about parent involvement in schools and school decision making are manifest in the documents produced by the NTED, that are presented to parents.

Key Question 2:

Do documents from the NTED contain latent messages which contradict their manifest advocacy for parent involvement in schools and school decision making?

Proposition 2:

There are latent messages in the documents produced by the NTED that contradict their manifest advocacy for parent involvement in schools and school decision making.
Key Question 3:
Do documents from COGSO provide a manifest and latent advocacy for parent involvement in schools and school decision making?

Proposition 3:

There is a manifest and latent advocacy for parent involvement in schools and school decision making, evident in the documents of COGSO.

Key Question 4:
Is the linguistic pattern adopted by the NTED, in its documents produced for parents, in a discoursive form that inhibits parents' involvement?

Proposition 4:

The linguistic style adopted by the NTED in its documents produced for parents inhibits parent's ability to be involved in schools and school decision making.

Key Question 5:
Do the results to Key Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 allow for positive inferences to be made about the value preferences of the authors of the NTED documents?

Proposition 5:

The responses to propositions 1, 2, 3 and 4 infer that NTED officers have a negative value preference towards parent involvement in schools.

Proposition 1:

In responding to this proposition I asked one question of the data with two parts:

a. Are the 'literal' messages in the documents in congruence with the definitions as set by The Act?
   i. Is there evidence of incongruence amongst the 'literal' messages in terms of the scope of parent involvement allowed?
ii. Is there evidence of incongruence amongst the 'literal' messages in terms of the functions allowed parents?

This response is lengthier than the others because it requires much comparison of the data in chapter four. The texts in DI specify very clearly the parameters of parent involvement which are stated in chapter four pp.100-113 "Deduction of the standards S1 and S2"

- Standard, S1 - Scope of involvement

The scope is to actively control, expend, regulate and determine matters relating to functions that are purely administrative and effect the individual school only.

The scope is either to advise or recommend results of inquiries, considerations or examinations to the minister or head teacher concerning matters that can be considered political and could have effect beyond the individual school level. (pp.112)

- Standard, S2 - Function of Involvement

The functions concerning physical structures, grounds, non teaching staff and finances that are allocated or granted to the school, or raised by the school may be actioned by the school council, that is the administrative functions.

The functions dealing with teaching staff, government policy, community needs, and new capital works may only be taken in an advisory capacity by the school council, that is the political functions. (pp.112-113)

Under the Act, in relation to scope and function of involvement the term 'control' is not applicable to political functions. Also, there are clearly only thirteen functions that are specified that councils may adopt. These functions I have classified earlier into administrative and political.

The weighting of the content of the Act and the Regulations as distributed between these functions, clearly demonstrates that the administrative functions as well as processes and procedures for operations of these functions are given the most credence, as they are deemed to be most needing of explanation and detail (see Charts: 4.1-4.3, pp.105-112). The personal function allowed under the Act is limited to that shown in Table: 4.3 pp.111 and receives little content space (see chart 4.1, pp.105) where it is shown that 15% is given to the sections concerning 'compulsory
attendance' and 'special needs'. The political, advisory function shown in Chart 4.3 is given 8% of the text space.

When reviewing some of the other NTED publications that form the legal Guidelines for councils, ie, the 'PGSC' and the 'SDP' and the 'SIP and APSI', I found that the former of these were apparently quite consistent with S1 and S2. The beginning of each repeated the pages out of the Act that deal with these matters. They were also quite consistent in terms of the proportions of space given to the different functions, procedures and processes (see Table: 4.12, pp.126 and Chart 4.4 pp127 for the PGSC and Table: 4.13, pp.128 with Chart: 4.5 pp.129). However when reviewing the D3 text "You Are on a School Council...Now What?" (COGSO, 1992) in Tables: 4.14 and 4.15 pp.131-132 it became apparent that there were 'hidden' functions not specified in the Act. These functions are part of the processes and procedures that the council must perform, eg,

(10) Council to draw up an annual financial budget of proposed expenditure.

(11) Council to oversee the organisation of urgent minor repairs and minor repairs.


This kind of information about the processes and procedures that detail the functions listed under the Act is not made readily available to parents in the 'PGSC' or 'SDP' as they are very large manuals and difficult to work through.

The 'SIP and APSI' details the processes and procedures undertaken to carry out forward planning for the schools (see Nature of Discourse section pp. 138-152).

... the format, style and complexity [of the SIP] is determined by the school community. Ideally this process is conducted in a collaborative manner, involving all members of the school community who desire to make a contribution. (SIP, 1993, pp.2)

I found it very difficult to determine what comprises the 'school community' from this text, due to such phrases as: 'reporting to all staff, parents, school communities',
'strengthen staff, student, parent and community teamwork', 'is produced by school staff and community' and 'the principal as chief adviser to the school community'. (In other texts such as "You, Your School and Devolution, Partnership in Action', there is the statement "whole school community of parents, staff and students" (pp.2) which implies the school community is comprised of parents staff and students not separate from them. This latter notion is more consistent with the literature (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992, pp.115-137)). This becomes important because it is written in the document that "The format style and complexity [of the SIP and the subsequent APSI] is determined by the school community" (SIP, pp20). Later there is reference to "The School Improvement Plan belongs to the School Community and is endorsed by it, through the School Council" (pp.10) and later on pp.12 "The School Council must endorse the Improvement Plan; therefore it is ultimately responsible for it."

These statements have implications in terms of the functions that are allowed parents defined in S2, keeping in mind that the 'SIP and APSI' is the major forward planning and policy formulating process for the school. On pp.6 of the 'SIP and APSI' are listed the changes to this document since this function has been removed from the 'SDP'. The first of these is:

the primary objective is to focus on educational outcomes and greater educational benefits to students. This document has no reference to administrative matters, to audited statements or to facilities including improvements to school buildings:

and later:

school improvement plans focus on the evaluation of educational outcomes. According to indicators are the outcomes being achieved as planned?

The above information indicates that there appears to be confusion about a parent or council's role in their involvement with the school improvement planning, how can they be responsible for a plan when they are only able to provide advice to the principal about matters in the plan, ie, curriculum and implementation of school and government policy (See S1 and S2, pp.112-113)? Is it that the first quote is really
what is meant, that they, the community, determine "...the format, style and complexity..." only, of the plan? It would appear not, if one also reads the NTED booklet "You Your School and Devolution, Partnership in Action" (1992) where Action Plans for School Improvement are also mentioned (this was published in October 1992, before the SIP was made a separate part of school improvement planning in 1993). In this text the statement is, "Each school's action plan is developed by its council - in conjunction with the broader school community and, in particular, with the principal and staff - to set a 'blueprint' for the long-term development of the school" (pp.6). This quote states that the council 'develops' the action plan not just determines its format. The quote is repeated in the brochure 'You, Your School and Devolution, an Introduction' (NTED October,1992). These latter documents that I have quoted from here, are in wide distribution in all schools in the NT. The 'SIP and APSI', I have been informed, is to be printed as it appears in the draft 4 format. It is to be a working document for all councils and schools.

The messages produced by these latter three texts, are not in congruence with what appears in standards S1 and S2, 'scope and function of parent involvement'. There also appears to be some incongruence between the texts, and within the texts, that cannot be explained away by the length of time between their respective productions.

A final source of texts that I compared with S1 and S2 are two of the forewords to D2-G texts one of these texts foreword to the SDP (NTED1991) is referred to as part of the literature in chapter two pp.58-61. In one of the quotes presented there Spring writes:

"More and more areas of educational decision-making and school management have been devolved from head office...[to allow for]...councils and the community to have greater input to, and control of, the educational programmes of their children."
Spring distinguishes between educational decision-making (could this be a 'political' function?) and school management, and then goes on to state that councils and community have 'control' of the educational programmes for their children, the inference being that educational programmes refer to curriculum and studies. It is clear from S1 and S2 that these are advisory roles and not controlling or action roles for council.

In the foreword to 'You Your School and Devolution, Partnership in Action' (NTED 1992) (see pp. 151-152 for analysis of the discourse and pp.119, Table:4.8, Text 1, for readability) from the Minister for Education's office, there is mention of a 'partnership' between his office and the community most affected by public policy. Devolution is referred to as one such policy. From the information provided in S1 and S2 it is clear that the partnership is limited to administrative functions. The NTED and the Minister are the ones with the control and thus the power in relation to political functions. This kind of distinction is not stated or implied in the two forewords mentioned here nor in others read. In the foreword to 'You, Your School and Devolution, Partnership in Action', Minister Stone refers to the devolution process as a 'partnership in action', he relates devolution to educational processes, educational benefit, educational advantages, these terms infer studies/curriculum as well as administration, that is, all matters dealing with education. Spring, in his foreword to the 'SDP', writes, "The education of the NT students is very much in the hands of the schools, parents and school communities." This implies a power or control over a broader sphere than merely administrative matters and not just an advisory capacity.

From the analysis of the texts found in chapter four, the data suggests that there is incongruence between the messages produced in the texts in D1 and D2 and between the messages in the texts within D2. Though a limited number of texts have been analysed, these are in open publication and widely distributed for reference in
schools and their surrounding communities. Thus there is sufficient data to support the first proposition that mixed messages are manifest in the NTED documents.

Proposition 2:

To respond to this proposition I asked three sub-questions:

b. Do the documents from the NTED in response to parents' requests, reflect that the intent of the request has been 'heard'?

c. When the NTED seeks response to new proposals or evaluations of existing programmes do they allow sufficient time for parents to carry out the task?

d. Is there a demonstrated effort to write documents at a readability level suitable for parents with between 7 to 10 years of schooling?

The answers to these questions will be quite brief here as the data in chapter four is presented in a format that either already makes comparisons, or is discussed sufficiently for me to merely draw conclusions as indicated in the introduction to chapter four.

Data pertinent to question - b - is found in chapter four, pp.133-136. The information compared on these pages between the D2-C, D3 and D4 texts indicates that there is evidence to suggest the NTED does hear the intent of the request but chooses to answer without acknowledging that change might be considered. The frequent restatement of policy indicates that those making the requests are not considered to have power in the situation and will be satisfied with repeated information only. The repeat of policy assumes that the 'requester' does not know the facts and therefore needs to be taught. The direct answer to question -a- must be, yes! However, with the addendum that the evidence suggests that the NTED is not concerned to action the request.
Data pertaining to question - c - is found in chapter four, pp. 136-137. On pp.136, I have provided a time frame that I believe is the minimum that should be allowed councils to respond to requests:

... a minimum time of eight weeks if the work is to be done during council meeting times then typed at the school before sending. This time frame would not allow any significant canvassing of community opinion however.

I further suggest that this time frame would only be suitable for small issues and that for larger policy changes, a time frame that allowed canvassing of opinions should be implemented.

Data from the D2-C texts, as discussed in chapter four, indicates that neither of the above time frames are adhered to. There are comments in letters from school councils and COGSO in the supplementary information to chapter four, which indicates that these groups have concern about time frames. For example:

...considerable community anger, not only about the specific school closure ... but the time given for consultation. (3/4/91)

...the time limit allowed for comment has prevented as full a consultation ... (18/10/89)

...quite short notice was given. (28/5/91)

...the time frame for consultation was too short. (1/6/93)

...a public meeting ... could not be arranged and widely advertised in that time. (22/5/93)

I did not find evidence, in the COGSO correspondence file, of the practice of presenting information about major policy change just prior to school holidays. However my experience has been that this does occur. In this circumstance the parents are particularly disadvantaged as they do not have their usual access to their school for information and clarification.

From the data analysed in chapter four and the supplementary evidence presented in this chapter the answer to question - c - must be 'no', sufficient time is frequently not allowed for effective and considered parent response to issues.
Data pertinent to question - d - is obtained in chapter four pp.113-125, with specifics relevant to the NTED texts in Table: 4.9, pp.120, Table: 4.10, pp. 121, and Table: 4.11, pp. 123. A standard for readability (from pp.115, ch.4 has been reproduced on pp.168 of this chapter.

Standard for readability - S3:

- A Flesch grade level of 7 - 10 years.
- A Flesch reading ease score of 50 -70
- An average sentence length of 17 - 21 words
- No more than 25% of the text in the passive voice.

There is a wide range of scores registered in the tables and graphs. The graphs demonstrate that all scores sit in a range above and often well above the standard set for reading grade level. The highest scores are registered by the material published by the BOS or that dealing with curriculum matters. These suggest that at least 17 years of schooling would be required to read the texts with ease. Only one of the texts has less than the standard for the percentage passive and another has less than the standard for sentence length. It is interesting that within the text 'You, Your School and Devolution, an Introduction', text number 6 on Table: 4.10, the average of the reading grade levels for the whole text is 14.6 (taken from a number of analyses done through the brochure) however the specific grade level for the section dealing with text concerning the 'Role of the Department', which deals with matters such as who develops policy and curriculum, those matters that I have deemed political, has a reading grade level of 17.0. The inference here is that the reader does not have to worry about this section. This change to the reading level would not have been made deliberately, but rather as a subconscious response to the knowledge that, parents particularly, do not have to be involved with these matters, merely told of them. This publication has been produced with the specific intent of introducing parents to devolution and is meant to be at the school front office desk for parents to browse.
There is evidence that NTED officers can adjust the text to lower reading grade levels from the range that does occur. However it is interesting that the grade levels registered by D1 texts pp.118, Table: 4.7 and D2-G texts - the reference and working manuals - are all in the range of 15 and above, with the sentence length and passive factors inhibiting the readability. Because of this, a large body of parents would find these texts extremely difficult to use, thus making them reliant on the school administration to manage the matters in these texts.

From the analysis of the data in chapter four concerning readability of text, I have found that there is little evidence to show that adjustments have been made to the texts. There is evidence that NTED officers can make such adjustments but that this rarely occurs. Thus I conclude that the answer to question - d - above, is negative.

From the responses to the three research sub-questions concerning latent messages, about parent involvement in schools and school decision making, in the NTED texts it can be inferred that these latent messages found ‘in’ and ‘of’ the text do contradict the manifest advocacy of the text and thus proposition 2 is supported.

Proposition 3:

In response to this proposition I asked three questions of the data:

Sub-questions:

e. Is there a demonstrated effort to write documents at a readability level suitable for parents with between 7 to 10 years of schooling? (These figures are explained below).

f. Is there evidence of greater use of the terms parent or pronouns that take the place of the word parent in the COGSO documents compared with their use in documents produced by the NTED?

g. Is there evidence that messages written by COGSO are congruent with each other and that allowed for in The Act?
The evidence to answer question - e - is found in Table: 4.11, pp.123, in chapter four. This data does not demonstrate that a consistent effort is made to adjust the readability level. The range of reading grade level is wider than for the NTED documents. When the two graphs for COGSO and NTED, are placed side by side, it can be seen however, that COGSO generally produces its texts at a more 'user friendly' reading grade level than the NTED. The lowest grade level is scored by an early newsletter written in 1989. However there is evidence that one other readability factor needs to be taken into consideration. The use of the passive in four of the texts is significantly lower than the standard, which is a better record than the NTED. However, I cannot state that the answer to question - e - is positive, the evidence suggests that the texts are not written with a readability grade level of between 7-10 years.

The data for question - f - is found in chapter four pp.152-154, and Table: 4 16. From the data and analysis presented there, the COGSO text ranks second to the "You, Your School and Devolution, an Introduction" brochure. Other NTED texts fall well below these figures with some containing almost no personalised referencing especially the 'SIP and APSI' that are community reference manuals. There is evidence overall, that the COGSO text does contain more personalised referencing than other NTED texts, however this was not at the level that I expected to find. Thus I conclude that the answer to question - f - is positive.

There was only one text analysed in chapter four in detail, to respond to question - g. This text, the 'COGSO Booklet', was found to be inconsistent in its messages about parent involvement in schools and school decision making in terms of what councils 'must' and 'may' do as their functions, (see pp.130-133 and Tables: 4.14 and 4.15.) when compared with texts in D1. However when this text was compared with D2-G texts it was found to be more consistent in picking out the expanded functions that form the details of the generalised ones listed in D1 texts. No other texts that I have
read have attempted this task. The messages through the text were found to be in congruence with each other.

The evidence suggests that question - g - is predominantly supported (see Tables: 4.14 and 4.15 pp.131-133). There has been an effort, to reflect for the parents, the true situation in terms of parent functions as council members. However there is indication that the idea of whether a council 'must' or 'may' carry out certain of these functions has been, misrepresented.

The literal responses to the questions asked of the data in chapter 4, in relation to proposition 3, would suggest that this proposition is not supported. However there is information in the data, outside of the questions asked, as alluded to above, that does suggest that COGSO is aware of the need to reach a broad range of parents and that it has attempted to adjust its texts accordingly. Thus I believe that there is some evidence of latent advocacy in the texts, that readers would perceive, which was not allowed for due to the poor wording of some of my questions.

**Proposition 4:**

In response to this proposition I asked two questions of the data:

*Sub-questions:*

h. Is there evidence from the type of discourse used by the NTED that 'power' remains with the department?

i. Is there evidence that the linguisticality of the messages from the NTED changes according to the type of parent audience?

The evidence to answer both of these questions is found in pp.138-152 and in the other information that I have classed as representing linguisticality (pp.152-155), that is readability and word use frequency, both referred to above in chapter five.
To answer question - h, the NTED data concerning the discourse analysis of the NTED texts needs to be referred to. Throughout the texts there is evidence that power remains on the side of the NTED personnel. There are frequent grammatical and lexical (use of words) references that act to distance the reader from the texts, such as the use of the passive voice, the use of auxiliary verbs and the use of anonymous titles and group referencing which depersonalise the texts. The larger manuals being written in either a legalistic or bureaucratic style mean that for many people the text would need to be interpreted for them. Thus the parent, in this situation, is in the inferior position.

However there is evidence that the styles change according to the status of the text and its purpose. Those that are teaching or reference documents tend to be expository and didactic, with the lexical and grammatical forms keeping the originator of the text in the authoritative position. Those that are promotional or propagandist attempt to draw the reader in. Of the texts that I analysed there were far fewer written in this form of discourse than the latter.

From the data presented in chapter four and analysed in this chapter I have found that there is evidence to answer in the positive to question - h, that power does remain with the NTED.

In response to question - i -, the discourse analysis in chapter four, provides evidence that the discourse of NTED texts does change according to the social function performed by the text. Where the text has a legal and lasting function the discourse is legalistic and distancing. When the text is to promote and to interest the discourse is propagandist and drawing the reader in. When the text is to teach and provide a manual for operation the discourse is expository and didactic but also distancing to ensure that the reader does not ask too many questions of the text or
the NTED. The analysis demonstrates the ability of NTED text writers to change the discourse according to the audience.

Thus from the data presented in chapter four the answer to question - i - is also in the positive.

Over all the evidence is sufficient to support proposition 4, that the discoursive form of the NTED texts inhibits parent involvement. Only the promotional or propagandist literature is in an attracting or involving discourse.

**Proposition 5:**

There were no sub-questions asked of the literature in relation to this key question. The evidence relating to this proposition has been gleaned from the discussion/analysis, of the chapter four data, presented above concerning the first four propositions.

Value preference is a difficult factor to determine because it can be well hidden, particularly in a person's public life. An overt negative value preference in the current context of outward advocacy of the concept of parent involvement in schools and school decision making, could be quite damaging to an NTED officer's career. Thus I developed the propositions above to search for latent clues in the texts that could indicate negative values.

I believe that there is evidence to support this proposition demonstrated by the following:

- The lack of apparent caring about how parents are drawn into the involvement process and assisted in that process. Certainly none of the texts that I analysed were 'user friendly' to the parents, as reference or instructional material.

- The lack of effective response to COGSO requests and the Devolution Symposium questions.
• The ignoring of the time needed by parents to effectively carry out a consultative role and to effect considered responses to educational issues that they are confronted with.

• The lack of clarity in the messages that appear in the texts that parents must refer to and use. COGSO demonstrated that it is possible to draw information from the large manuals that gives a clearer picture of the scope and function of involvement.

I do not infer that all NTED personnel as individuals hold negative value preferences in relation to this concept, however there is evidence that, as a collective, proposition five is substantiated.

Summary

To return to the three possibilities in chapter one (pp.6), that I set out to explore. It is evident that the data and analysis in chapters four and five substantiate that these can no longer be considered possibilities, but rather that they do exist. The incongruence in the messages is a confusing factor for parents, not only because they create doubt about what the parent's roles may be, but also because the quantity and breadth of the tasks expected of parents is hidden in the volume of information, that is, in the published guidelines. Many of the texts (such as the forewords) create an expectation amongst the parents that the scope of their involvement is greater than that legally allowed. This can create confusion and frustration when a parent or council tests parameters only to find that their proposals are not possible. The quote below from a letter in the COGSO correspondence file illustrates this point:

What we were asking was reflecting what we thought was meant by devolution. However, by your response we were yet again wrong. Devolution is only about giving administrative trivia and chores to Councils and/or school administrative staff. (1992)

The confusing nature of the texts means that it is possible for information to be withheld by the NTED, thus adding to the differential power bases between the NTED and parents.
The difficulty that the parents can experience in reading and comprehending the written material and the confusing nature of this material, suggests that parents could perceive that the producers of the material are not really in favour of the concept that they are writing about. The inference is that advocacy would be demonstrated by the originators of the material taking care with what they produce, so that it is user friendly for all those who might wish to be involved.

From these findings, it is possible to infer that the collective nature of the value preference of the NTED personnel tends towards the negative in relation to the concept of parent and community involvement in schools.

Conclusions in relation to the research problem

The evidence above clearly indicates that both the nature of the texts and the content in the texts, affects how parents can relate to the text. As demonstrated by the data accumulated about the variables and then applied to the propositions, the texts are not user friendly for a large proportion of the population. They are 'user friendly', but still distancing, for those who have completed high school to year 12 and even more relevant, to those who have some college education.

As a result of the above only a small proportion of the population, those that reach college level and possess a reading ability to match this, have access to the information needed to function effectively in the legal mode of parent involvement in schools (other than the personal), that is, through participation as a member of a school council. The texts that I have analysed would effectively operate as a barrier to involvement for large numbers of any Government School community in the NT.

When Stone, the former Education Minister writes that devolution brings about a partnership in education matters, this is rhetoric to promote the concept of
devolution. This partnership cannot occur as long as texts, such as those that I have analysed, are presented to parents for their use. Holland (1993) comments:

"Partnership implies becoming partners in a shared task for the benefit of the child. It also indicates equality as well as empowerment. Empowerment is a process; fundamental changes are needed in attitudes and policy if all parents and teachers are going to be able to work in a partnership where each has equal rights. (Personal communication Faculty of Education NTU, 1993).

The barrier that I have identified through this case study - That there is a problem with the nature of the texts produced by the NTED, which inhibits parent's involvement in schools - illustrates that values and attitudes have not changed to align with the rest of the published statements. This barrier indicates that recognition is not given to the need to allow 'all' in the community the right to access, and to make decisions about their access, on an equal footing with others. The results of this case study bear out the comments made by Fitzgerald that I first mention in chapter two of this thesis:

People who are poor and disadvantaged are victims of a societal confidence trick. ...schools reflect societies' intention to maintain the present unequal distribution of status and power. Because the myth of equal opportunity has been so widely accepted by Australians, the nature of unequal outcomes has been largely ignored. Thus failure to succeed in the competition is generally viewed as being the fault of the individual rather than as the inevitable result of the way our society is structured.

As demonstrated by my case study, of the NT situation, failure to achieve access to knowledge and information, by the individual, concerning effective involvement in schools and school decision making, cannot be construed as merely a problem of the individual's making. The evidence is considerable that the individual has literally been "talked out of involvement".
Recommendations

For further research

There are a number of recommendations that arise from this thesis that relate to further research in terms of the methodology used and the findings. Resulting from the findings some recommendations have been made for action to overcome the barriers identified and discussed.

This case study is context specific and not generalisable beyond the NT. The methodology employed is also context specific and developed to suit the particular setting. However there is scope for similar studies to be carried out using the underpinning ideologies of the method, to find if the barrier identified here, can be similarly identified in other states.

With reference to the three possibilities for exploration in chapter one, these is only one set of possibilities that I chose to investigate. Within the context of parent involvement in schools there are any number of other sets that could be chosen to look at using a similar methodology or paradigm or employing different ones. These different approaches could be used to further explore the notion of advocacy.

From this research I can strongly state that the messages as interpreted by the target audiences have not always been the intended messages. Frequently the messages have not even reached the target readers. Consequently there are concerns raised about the inadequacy and appropriateness of such messages. The 'blue print' against which all subsequent literature should be aligned is the legal literature. All operations of departmental officers, including their publications, as well as operations of council members must comply with this 'blue-print'. If this were to occur then problems of mixed messages and perceived lack of advocacy could be overcome. As stated in the research, its eclectic nature did not allow for in depth
study through any individual technique employed. It is recommended that further research into the nature and use of literature to manipulate parental responses could be carried out. Or accordingly to determine the style of writing that would suit a much broader range of people in the community.

One of the factors raised in the literature as a barrier relates to the mobility of parents. The NT is recognised as having a highly mobile population, a specific study exploring this factor in terms of the ability of these mobile parents to become involved in schools would add to the information.

For Action

If the parents are unable to read or comprehend the literature that they are confronted with then one of the key players in their access to information is the principal. To this end the role of the principal in the school is pivotal. In order for the community to have trust in the principal the community needs to perceive that the principal identifies with their school and has a shared element of self interest in the school. The principal still must be the department's representative. However in identifying with the school, the principal will also endeavour to better blend the parents wishes with the needs of the department. Thus the role of the principal needs to be reviewed as part of the ongoing devolution process, so that principals become an integral part of the community-based management team to administer government schools.

The appointment of a departmental officer in 1991 at Superintendent level to co-ordinate the process of devolution, indicated to school councils the desire of the department to maintain effective communication with them. To that end, the role of the Devolution Manager was primarily to make the process user friendly for councils. The position was not continued in 1993, though the devolution process has been ongoing. This research has demonstrated that effective communication is not
occurring, and that key information is not user friendly. Thus it is recommended that further research be focussed on the provision of a facilitator for the devolution process, whose advocacy and value preferences are perceived as positively as possible, but without compromising the parameters of the policy of the NTED.
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Education Research Unit, Research Unit of Social Sciences, Australian National University Canberra, pp. 198-211.


NORTHERN TERRITORY EDUCATION ACT, extract Section 71, Establishment of School Councils.
NORTHERN TERRITORY EDUCATION REGULATIONS (SCHOOL COUNCILS).
As at 1 January 1992


Appendix One

Address of COGSO:
NT COGSO, Darwin Education Centre
McMinn Street DARWIN
GPO Box 1065 DARWIN 0801
Telephone: 89 5612
Appendix two

LIST OF NT NEWS TEXTS ANALYSED TABLE: 4.6.

LIST OF THE ACT TEXTS ANALYSED TABLE: 4.7.
2. The Act, Canteens.
3. The Act, Canteens.

LIST OF MINISTER AND SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION TEXTS ANALYSED TABLE: 4.9.
3. Finch Hits Critics of School Plan (NT News).
4. Letter from the Minister to COGSO Executive.
5. Foreword to "Devolution, What Is It" (NTED 1989).
6. Foreword to "School Improvement Plan" (NTED, 1993)

LIST OF NT BOS TEXTS ANALYSED TABLE: 4.10.
3. Board of Studies Mission Statement from "NT Board of Studies Handbook" (NTED, 1993).

LIST OF NTED TEXTS ANALYSED TABLE: 4.11.
2. Introduction to Towards The 90's, Excellence Accountability and Devolution in Education (NTED, 1987).
4. Introduction to School Improvement Plan (NTED, 1993).
5.* You, Your School and Devolution, an Introduction (NTED brochure).

LIST OF COGSO TEXTS ANALYSED TABLE: 4.12.
1.* Foreword to "You Are on a School Council ... Now What"? (COGSO, 1992).
Appendix Three

Readability Formulae:

The Flesch formula (Harrison 1984, pp.77)

Reading ease score = 206.835 - (0.846 x SYLLS/100 WDS) - (1.015 X WDS/SEN)

where SYLLS/100WDS = syllables per 100 words

and WDS/SEN = average number of words per sentence

Dale Chall formula (1948) (Harrison 1984, pp.74)

US grade = (0.1579 x percent ufmwds) + (0.0496 x wds/sen) + 3.6365

where ufmwds = unfamiliar words.

and wds/sen = average number of words per sentence UK reading level = 5 + US grade