Parental Involvement
Possibilities for Partnership

I.N.T.O.
Serving Education

An INTO Publication

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Ard Rúnaí
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The Irish Constitution gives every child the right to education. The Constitution also recognises the parent as the prime educator. The State and school management authorities ensure that qualified teachers are appointed to educate the child and parents entrust teachers to do this. This defines the educational partnership. In this context, increasing parental involvement in the education of their children has been a feature of education systems in Ireland and other countries particularly over the last twenty five years.

The INTO welcomes parental involvement in the education of their children because it presents enormous possibilities to enhance the existing educational partnership between teachers and parents. Parenting and teaching are two very different but closely related responsibilities. Generally, they are quite distinct, but there are also aspects of them which blur into each other. It is essential, therefore, that there be understanding and mutual respect between teacher and parent.

The INTO is concerned that the involvement of parents has not, in the main, been the result of a planned and coordinated development. It has been brought about by a series of often unconnected initiatives with the result that parental involvement has not always been easy to accommodate within the school.

New professional practices must be developed to support and encourage worthwhile initiatives particularly in the areas of communication between teachers and parents, which will give parents realistic expectations of what the school system can achieve and to provide real opportunities for parental participation within our schools.

The INTO believes that there are potential rewards for teachers, parents and children, in terms of trust and confidence building, if the process is openly negotiated, properly planned and carefully coordinated.
Parental involvement does not present a threat to teacher professionalism but provides an opportunity for teachers to demonstrate to parents the expertise, dedication and skill that has often been unseen and therefore unrecognised outside the four walls of the Irish primary classroom.

This document is a contribution to planned and structured change. It sets out areas for discussion and investigation along with possibilities for progress. It demonstrates the INTO's commitment to a partnership approach where the partners, in this case teachers and parents, have equal but very different rights and responsibilities in education for the benefit of our pupils.

Senator Joe O'Toole
General Secretary
October 1997

An Seanadoir Joe O'Toole
Ard Runai
Deireadh Fomhair 1997
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INTRODUCTION

In response to increasing involvement of parents in Irish education the INTO Education Committee decided to undertake a review of the issues that relate to parental involvement in schools. The pace of change, particularly in recent years and the lack of overall planning, resource provision, agreed practices and outcomes is a source of concern for many teachers and parents alike. Proclamations of partnership in the absence of agreed and workable policies risk not only failure but long term damage to the enthusiasm of all concerned, to current practice and commitment to future projects and a breakdown of mutual trust and respect.

Consequently, it was decided to review developments to date with a view to initiating debate and discussion both within the profession and between the new partners in education. Issues that must be addressed include a review of present practices, agreement on the intended outcomes of future developments and a clear understanding of how those outcomes will be achieved. This also entails an examination of how change will be resourced and implemented.

Chapter One traces the evolution of parental involvement in schools from an era of exclusion and marginalisation to a time where opportunities are continually being provided to involve parents in the life of schools. It provides an opportunity to view the present in terms of a process of on-going development and change. Landmark initiatives include involvement in management boards, the establishment of the National Parents' Council, the reports of the Primary Curriculum Review Body and the Primary Education Review Body, the Education Convention and the publication of the White Paper.

Chapter Two focuses on the issue of teacher professionalism and argues that increased parental involvement in schools represents not a threat to the professionalism of the teacher but an opportunity to clearly demonstrate and therefore enhance professionalism. Respect for and appreciation of teachers' expertise cannot be taken for granted but must
be earned. Public trust on which professionalism is increasingly based and judged, cannot simply be proclaimed. Parental involvement in education presents teachers with opportunities to authoritatively communicate with and so demonstrate their professional expertise to parents.

Chapter Three looks at a number of issues in parental involvement where collaboration between teachers and parents can lead to positive educational outcomes for children. These issues include homework, assessment, communication with parents and direct parental involvement in the classroom and are not intended as an exhaustive list of opportunities for co-operation but serve to illustrate perspectives, problems and potential outcomes.

Chapter Four is composed of teachers' accounts of parental involvement in their own schools which provide an indication of the number of initiatives that are in place in Irish schools to promote and develop parental involvement. While by no means an empirical evaluation of the extent to which schools have sought out and planned opportunities to increase co-operation between home and school, these accounts provide examples of practice in a variety of Irish primary schools.

Chapter Five is concerned with the issue of teacher education and the role that it plays in preparing teachers for the professional reality and necessity of parental involvement. Course details are included from the two largest Colleges of Education, a brief account of one teacher's perspective on the issue, along with INTO proposals that have the potential to effect meaningful improvement.

Chapter Six contains information relating to the role and rationale of parents' associations in schools. Comprising largely of work undertaken by the National Parents' Council-Primary it details arms and objectives, issues relating to operation and for reference purposes, a number of constitutions that were drawn up by existing Parents' Associations. It concludes with INTO proposals for developments in this area.
Chapter Seven examines initiatives that have been undertaken in Irish education to improve home-school links directly or which involved a high degree of parental involvement. The origin, operation and evaluation of the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme is outlined along with the issue of parental participation in the Early Start Project.

Chapter Eight provides teachers with details of a number of programmes that have been shown to be beneficial to pupils which involved a high degree of parental involvement. They are intended as a resource from which individual schools can develop their own similar programmes. Particular attention is focused on Paired Reading and Early Childhood Education initiatives.

Chapter Nine contains conclusions and recommendations that arise from the document. A number of appendices contain reference information on the issue of parental involvement in education.
CHAPTER 1
THE EVOLUTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Educational developments in nineteenth century Ireland which led to an expansion of provision at primary, secondary and third level have been acknowledged as "a remarkable achievement ... due ultimately and equally to church initiatives and positive state intervention" (O Buachalla 1988). Prior to the intervention of the State in the provision of the national school system, provision by the Kildare Place Society and Catholic teaching orders was well established. Although it was hoped that the new national school system would be multi-denominational in nature, the system quickly became a denominational one where the local clergyman became the Manager of the local school as different religious groups sought to impose their own terms on national policy. The stage was set for the dominance of church and State in Irish education. Parents, teachers, pupils and others figured little in the symbiotic accommodation arrived at by both churches and State.

Yet, parental involvement in the education of their children was a notable feature of the Irish educational landscape prior to the establishment of a system of formal primary education in 1831. The interest of parents and the support provided by them for the education that the children of the time received in the hedge schools has been acknowledged.

"Visitors to Ireland and observers of the social scene marvelled at the evidence of such keen interest in education exhibited by indigent Irish parents, and contrasted it with the apathy and lack of interest in schooling found among the common poor in other European countries of the time". (Coolahan, 1988)

However, the introduction of the national school system marked the replacement of such parental involvement in education by the authority of the churches and the State who were well organised to establish control over the emerging system. Again Coolahan comments that:
"Parents were removed from centre stage to outside the school gates, a place where they remained until the recent past". (Coolahan 1988)

This position is confirmed by O Buachalla who, writing on the same theme, remarks that:

"Parents, to whom churches and State accord primary rights in education, were effectively barred from taking part in the policy and process until very recently". (O Buachalla 1988)

This control of education developed and strengthened during the 1800s and was allowed to continue in post-independent Ireland in spite of the fact that Article 42.1 of Bunreacht na hEireann contains an acknowledgement of the family as the primary and natural educator of the child and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide for the education of their children according to their means.

"The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of the parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children".

Farry in Education and the Constitution makes the point that this article in the Constitution is undoubtedly of clerical origin and cites Cahill S.J. who suggested to deValera in 1936 that "as a fundamental principle, primary responsibility and control of the education of the young belong inalienably to the parents and the church and it is a function of the state to assist where necessary and supplement their efforts" (Farry 1996).

This opinion may be compared with that of McKerma S.J. who in 1927 asserted that it is a principle of natural law that the right of educating children belongs to children's parents and commented that:
"This right implies, of course, a duty on the part of others not to interfere with its exercise'. (McKenna 1927)

This position is very different to practice which evolved, as can be seen by the recommendations of the Central Council of the Catholic Managers' Association which were adopted in October 1934:

(a) to maintain the rights of primary school managers;
(b) to insist that any additional names come from central funds and not from local rates;
(c) that no lay committee of any kind should be associated with the manager in school management;
(d) the site of schools must remain in the names of Trustees, one of whom should be the Bishop. (O Buachalla 1988)

There is little doubt that in the past, parents or lay persons were not welcome by the church authorities as participants in managing primary education. Effectively, parents were excluded from any involvement in the management of primary schools despite a publicly stated policy that recognised and upheld parental rights in the education of their children.

A similar charge can be laid against the State. While Eoin McNeill, Minister for Education in 1922, pointed out that the right of education in the first place belonged to parents and that "we must be extremely careful in anything that we lay down as general principle that we do not say or appear to say that the control of education belongs as by right to the State" (Dail Debates 1922) the official attitude towards parents did not mirror this position. When James Dillon T.D. complained to Thomas Derrig, Minister for Education about the use of the Irish language as an instructional medium and used parental dissatisfaction to support his argument he was met with the response "I cannot see that parents as a body can decide this matter... Parents are always free to make representations on this matter" (Dail Debates 1935). Parental rights and involvement in education were little more than a flag of convenience to be embraced and discarded as opportunities arose.

Neither were parents the only group excluded from meaningful
partnership in the education process. At local and often at national level teachers were treated with scant regard by both Church and State as both sought to exert maximum control and domination in the administration of the system. The attitudes and practice of both Church and State changed little in the following decades and parents remained excluded from participation in the life and work of schools. In 1953, deValera felt able to comment about the Irish education system and parental involvement:

"There are few parents' associations as such and parent participation in school activities is therefore usually in accordance with the desires of individual parents in this respect. The Constitution of Ireland however, lays down that the primary rights and responsibilities in education are those of the parents and our system of education is based throughout on this principle". (O Buachalla 1988)

A decade later Patrick Hillary, Minister for Education, stated in regard to proposals in relation to comprehensive schools, that he had consulted with the Catholic Hierarchy on the management of these schools in view of the church's teaching authority. This position enabled the minister to have regard for the rights of parents because "in relation to the fundamental principles of education (parents) are represented by the Church". (Randies 1975)

It is evident that the practice adopted by both Church and State with regard to parents' rights in education differed greatly from the principles enunciated. It is also clear that, as Titley has remarked, that "parental rights in education was as much a slogan of convenience for the State as it was for the Church". (Titley 1983)

However, in keeping with the educational reforms of the late 1960s these attitudes began to change albeit slowly. Coolahan has remarked that within the Catholic Church the Bishops' pastoral letter of 1969 was "a landmark in publicly recognising the right of parents to consultation about education of their children" (Coolahan 1989). Yet it was to be a further six years before parental representation on Boards of
Management became a reality.

In a similar fashion the State's attitude to parental involvement began to change. In 1969 a booklet *Ar nDaltaf Uile* was issued to all homes in the State outlining the impending changes in Irish education. Despite such a positive step Griffin has noted that the "emphasis was very much on parents understanding the system rather than attempting to influence it" (Griffin 1991). This attitude was also reflected in Curaclam na Bunscoile in which Padraig Faulkner, Minister for Education stated as part of the preface:

"Tá suil agam go ndeanfaidh se mear ar eolas go speisialta do na tuismitheoirí agus go spreagfaidh se iad le tuilleadh suime a chur ina bhfuil ar siúl ag a gcuid páisti ar scoil agus le comhoibriú faoi bhá agus faoi thuiscint a dheanamh leis na múinteoirí".

(Department of Education 1971)

However, the same document went on to sum up home school liaison policy by charging the principal teacher to "foster in conjunction with the manager, a proper liaison between the home and the school". It did not, go on to lay down clearly how this objective was to be achieved. Little if any meaningful reference was made to the roles of teachers or parents in this process of home school liaison. In spite of such shortcomings these publications were an indication of forthcoming change.

Parental representation on Boards of Management became a reality in 1975 following a proposal by the then Secretary of the Department of Education Sean O'Connor, to the AGM of the Clerical Managers' Association in 1973. Such a proposal was hardly a new concept having been recommended over a century earlier by the Powis Commission. Its report stated that:

"Every school in the State should be managed by a local Committee regularly appointed, and.... every school fund should have a Treasurer who we think should as a general rule be a layman". (Powis Commission)
The slow but uncertain thinking of the State and the churches in the matter of parental involvement in Boards of Management is further exemplified by the exclusion of parents from the negotiations relating to the restructuring of Boards in 1980 and the failure of the Department of Education to consult on the revision of *Boards of Management, Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure* (1986). This latter position is all the more difficult to understand in light of the establishment in 1985 of the National Parents’ Council by Gemma Hussey, Minister for Education. This, she argued, constituted "the first steps to involve Ireland's parents in the formation of education policy making" and as has been remarked "effectively recognised their position as equal partners with the traditional agents in education, Church, State and Teachers" (Griffin 1991). A year later the Irish Times commented "A National Parents’ Council has been long overdue; its arrival should bring a welcome breath of air into our schools and hopefully, also a new partnership between teachers, parents and the Churches".

The establishment of the National Parents' Council can be traced to the Programme for Action in Education 1984-87, which stated:

"Recognising the primary role of parents in education and the important contribution they have made to educational development, parents will be facilitated in organising themselves into a Parents' Council through which the views of parents may be expressed. The Department will consult with the Council, once established on a national basis, on matters relevant to educational development. The Council should be broadly representative of all parents."

In September 1984, the INTO received an outline of the Minister for Education's proposals for a National Parents' Council, a two tier body (one primary, one post-primary) which it was hoped would provide an opportunity for all parents of children at school to participate. It would have right of consultation on issues such as the action programme, Curriculum and Examinations Board and transport. Serving teachers would not have a role in the Parents' Council and would be excluded from its membership. The Council would not have any role in
conciliation or arbitration or in the negotiation of salaries and conditions of service of teachers or the qualifications of teachers or the management of individual schools.

In January 1985 the Minister issued a circular (7/85) announcing the establishment of a National Parents' Council which was accompanied by a memorandum setting out the areas in which the Minister would consult the council and in which the Minister would not have rights of consultation. These were as outlined to the INTO the previous September.

In the following years the development of partnership in education became apparent. It was advocated that parents should have a role in the formulation of certain policies at school level. Circular 7/88 relating to the development of Codes of Discipline in schools was welcomed as enshrining "for the first time the right of parents to be involved in the drawing up and approving of the content of any school's code".

(Curam)

In 1987 the Primary Curriculum Review Body was established with one representative of the National Parents' Council. Its report, published in 1990, drew attention to the vast literature from Ireland and other countries demonstrating the particular importance of parental involvement in their children's education. It recorded the importance shown in studies of the relationship between parental interest and children's performance in school. It also noted that there was now widespread acceptance that parental influences are the primary determinants of social and emotional development.

It is significant that by 1990 the National Parents' Council was confident enough of its own position to issue a reservation to this report on a number of issues including the allocation of time in the curriculum, the introduction of a modern European language, assessment and evaluation, resources and parental involvement in curriculum implementation. The latter stated the need for the inclusion of a more detailed and comprehensive section on the structured involvement of parents in the implementation of the curriculum and gave specific
ment to Reading, Mathematics and Art and Crafts.

In 1988 there were two representatives of the National Parents' Council on the Primary Education Review Body. This report published in December 1990 examined all aspects of Irish primary education and made a number of general and specific recommendations in relation to parental participation in education. It noted criticisms of the management of schools which, despite moves to make the process more inclusive and democratic through parental involvement in Boards of Management, had failed to produce genuine partnership.

The report recorded criticisms that the Board of Management was little more than a minor maintenance committee while the control of managerial functions lay elsewhere. The Department of Education retained control of curriculum, made rules and decided policy while the Patron played a central role in the appointment of the Board, the Chairperson of the Board, the principal and teaching staff. Other agreements entered into between trade unions, the Department of Education and/or managerial bodies further limited the authority of Boards of Management.

The Review Committee was of the opinion that Boards of Management should provide effective and progressive leadership in schools and recommended that Boards should seek genuine partnership and participation between parents and teachers in promoting the success of the school in its work and in its dealings and relationships with the local community.

In its specific consideration of parents as partners in education the Review Committee noted that the peripheral role of the parents was changing as instanced by inclusion in policy making at national level, Board of Management membership and the establishment of Parents' Associations. The establishment of the National Parents' Council with school based, county and national structures was acknowledged as a mechanism through which collective involvement could be channelled.
Specifically, it stated that parents should not be viewed as simply consumers of a service but rather as interested partners in the education process. The right of parents to be consulted in the same way as other interests was also acknowledged along with their right to have a significant influence on national policy and its implementation at local level.

The Report of the Primary Education Review Body highlighted the dominant influence of parents on children's first educational experiences and acknowledged that this role was not always appreciated. For this reason it stated that home school rinks should be established when children are accepted for enrolment and strengthened thereafter. As a consequence it was recommended that every school should have a clearly defined policy and programme for productive parental involvement.

Schools were encouraged, subject at all times to the professional autonomy of the teacher, to involve parents in support roles within the classroom. Direct communication should be established with parents through regular meetings with parents and parents' associations. Improved communication between school and home and access by parents to records relating to their own children were also recommended.

The Review Committee gave specific consideration to the need for schools to make buildings accessible and familiar to parents and noted that school buildings were rarely if ever, designed with parents in mind. In this context the general lack of ancillary accommodation such as waiting rooms was noted which meant that many parents were kept waiting in school corridors. Schools were urged, in the context of declining enrolments, to designate a spare classroom as a parents' room.

Finally, in the context of the development of good home school relationships, the Review Committee highlighted the need for a positive commitment from all concerned. It specifically urged the Department to:
(a) define a clear policy towards this end;
(b) extend inservice provision to provide for this purpose;
(c) continue financial support to the National Parents' Council

By 1991 the Department of Education was actually promoting partnership for parents in education as a stated policy aim of government. The Programme for Economic and Social Progress formally recognised the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children as an essential strategy of educational policy and practice.

Circular 24/91 (see Appendix 1) requested each Board of Management to take whatever steps were necessary to ensure that a Parents' Association was formed in association with its school and urged effective co-operation between the school and the Parents' Association. However, once again little advice about how such aims were to be put into practice accompanied the publication of this circular. Neither was financial or other support provided,

By 1994 the Report on the National Education Convention was able to summarise the evolution of parental involvement in education:

""With more educated parents, most of them exhibit keen interest in their children's education and are more conscious of the constitutional prerogatives of parents than formerly, the older model of patron 'acting on behalf of' such people is coming under challenge. This was clearly in evidence at the Convention." (Convention Report 1994)

It also explicitly recognised the new position of parents in educational matters at national and school based level.

"the role of parents which gets priority status in the Constitution, but which, in practice, has tended to be peripheral to the formal education system, has greatly altered. The rights of parents have been given fresh articulation in recent years and provision made for their more central engagement in schooling
practices and in educational debate and policy".

The philosophical framework for educational policy and practice outlined in the White Paper "Charting our Education Future" (1995) noted the Constitutional right of the family as the primary and natural educator of the child and stated that "the role of the family in the child's development remains central up to and into adulthood". It recognised that parents bring to children's education a unique expertise derived from intimate knowledge of the child's development, needs, interests and circumstances outside the school. The White Paper enunciated parental rights and responsibilities in the area of education, the right to active participation in their child's education, the right to consultation and information and the right to be active participants in the education system at school, regional and national levels. Responsibilities of parents, according to the document, include nurturing a learning environment, co-operation and support of the school and other educational partners and to fulfil their special role in the development of the child.

It is clear that developments particularly over the last two decades, have moved parents from the position of excluded and isolated spectators outside the school gates to a position where they are becoming centrally involved in the education of their children. At national level policy making bodies include parent representatives so that, far from simply being the recipients of policies, parents can now influence and shape developments. That much progress has been achieved is indisputable. Much more remains to be done. However, to date achievements are encouraging due in no small part to the mutual respect that teacher and parent groups have afforded one another. The future is perhaps best summed up by Andrew Burke who urges "we must all proceed courteously and cautiously". (Burke 1992)
CHAPTER 2
TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

In recent years the INTO's Education Committee has researched and analysed many aspects of teacher professionalism. Beginning with the discussion document "Professionalism in the 1990s" (1992) this series of publications includes studies on inservice education "The Professional Development of Teachers: Issues in Inservice Development" (1993), "A Career in Teaching" (1994), which examines a range of issues including promotional opportunities and "Educating Teachers" (1995) which reviewed the pre-service preparation of primary teachers. This work was complimented by the publication of a discussion document on professional control and authority entitled "An Chomhairle Muinteoireachta" (1994). While these publications have contributed significantly to the development of teachers as professionals and have enhanced teachers' understandings of their own professionalism, they cannot be viewed as a complete statement on a concept that is, by its nature, multi-faceted and evolutionary.

Macbeth (1989) argues that educational partnership with parents is at the very heart of teachers' "professionality", a term which he defines as the actual practice of the ideal of professionalism. Rejecting the point of view which he argues is advanced by some teachers that liaison with parents is an optional extra, a favour to be bestowed on parents, he puts forward the view that a structured educational partnership is to some degree central to the concept of the teacher as professional. Prior to an examination of this claim it is necessary to consider the concept of the teacher as professional in greater detail and focus, in particular, on the need to extend and develop public confidence and trust at school based and national level.

Traditional conceptualisations of professionalism are based on the "trait" approach and contend that certain occupations are regarded as professions because they exhibit certain attributes or traits which represent core elements of professionalism. Among the most commonly
cited traits are:

- Practice based on a body of theoretical knowledge;
- a long period of training to acquire a body of knowledge and skills;
- central control of entry requirements and accreditation by an occupation that is strongly organised integrally;
- client orientation rather than self-interest;
- an ethical code of behaviour and disciplinary procedures;
- individual practitioners motivated by a sense of altruism;
- the exercise of personal responsibility in core activities.

This approach has been shown to be problematic in that its supporters tend to accept professionals' own definitions of themselves, ignore the fact that certain established professions do not display some of these traits and treat all traits as if they were of equal importance. The approach poses particular difficulties for teachers who, because the traits tend to be associated with the established professions of law and medicine, are viewed as semi-professionals on a journey towards full professionalisation.

This approach poses further problems for teachers in that clarification is needed on the question of deciding who is the teacher's client. The pupil receives education, the parent is responsible for the child's education and the teacher acts in "loco parentis" while the state employs the teachers and society as a whole has expectations of the education service which it funds. In considering this issue, Macbeth (1989) argues that since parents are responsible for the education of their children, it is they who are the clients of the education service and therefore of teachers. In support of this argument he instances national laws, Church teaching and the United Nations declaration on the Rights of the Child which states that:

"The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his(her) education and guidance. That responsibility lies in the first place with his (her) parents."
National laws quoted are those applying to Germany and Britain. The former lays down that "the care and education of children are the natural right of parents and the duty is primarily theirs". In Britain, responsibility for education of the child lies with the parents:

"It shall be the duty of the parent of every child of compulsory school age to cause him (her) to receive full-time education ..."

The claim that the State can be considered the client is acknowledged but summarily dismissed by Macbeth as one put forward to suit some teachers in that they are then responsible to a distant bureaucracy rather than a "front line" client. Arguments that the child is the client are similarly disposed of as convenient to teachers in that having minors as clients leaves teachers free to determine client needs with accountability only to occupational peers. Macbeth's analysis concludes that pupils are the consumers of the education service, parents are the clients, the State is the employer and the general public is the indirect beneficiary.

Recognising this weakness in the trait approach, analysts of professionalism developed the concept of a profession in terms of "professionalisation". This process approach rejects the concept of established traits and considers in their place a sequence of events or natural history through which occupations pass in becoming more professional. This approach is exemplified by the work of Wilensky who identifies five stages:

- the emergence of a full time occupation
- the establishment of a training school
- the founding of a professional association
- political agitation directed towards the protection of the association by law
- the adoption of a formal code (Wilensky 1964)

However, this approach has also been shown to be problematic in that it ignores historically significant or specific conditions under which occupational activities develop, relies on the assumption that inherent qualities of an occupation determine emergence as a professional or non
professional group and ignores the nature of the client and the service provided by the occupational group. This latter criticism is particularly relevant to a consideration of primary teaching where it is viewed that the low status of a young child influences the low level of prestige in professional terms often accorded to primary teachers.

A third model which attempts to construct an understanding of professionalism is that of professional control. Finding one of its clearest expressions in the work of Terence Johnson, a profession is described not as an occupation but a means of controlling an occupation. Different types of control emerge ranging from "patronage" control, "collegiate" control or "state-mediated" control. The former usually pertains to large corporations which retain the services of practitioners where the authority and power of the patron reduces the autonomy of the professional. Collegiate control exists where the practitioner has a high degree of professional autonomy and practice and behaviour is governed and regulated by colleagues in the form of an occupational organisation. The latter type of control entails the State intervening in the professional client relationship to define needs and the manner in which they are to be met.

While all three of these conceptualisations of professionalism are to some degree problematic in attempting to build an understanding of teachers' professionalism, the latter concept of professional control does at least provide a way of understanding the role of the State in mediating professionalism and enhancing or inhibiting professional aspirations. The State regulates entry, recruitment and probation in addition to enforcing norms, monitoring standards, ethical behaviour and professional development. Teachers have in recent years sought increased collegiate or self-determined self-control while recognising that a bureaucracy such as the State will continue to regulate its employees in certain ways. This claim for self-determined control finds its clear expression in the demand for the establishment of a Teaching Council which was examined fully by the INTO in 1994. It is also based on developments in the knowledge base of teaching which Burke (1992) argues has done and continues to do for teaching what the experimental sciences did for medicine. Initiatives in the professional
development of teachers, calls for improvements and developments in the pre-service education of teachers, participation in the process of curriculum planning at national level and school planning at local level are further demonstrations of teachers' professionalisation. However, in its document "Professionalism in the 1990s", (1992) "the INTO recognised that "the legitimacy of professional control is becoming more and more a matter of public trust" and that the achievement of full public support will demand new initiatives from teachers. One aspect identified was the need for teachers to take control of their enterprise at local level which demands a "greater commitment from teachers to communicate their practices and procedures to parents on a regular basis". Expanding on that theme the process of communication demands the provision of information to parents on the competence and progress of each individual child, which in turn entails the establishment of a systematic approach to assessment of pupils in every school and a regular evaluation of the work of the school as a whole. The school plan is an essential part of such a process facilitating a process of planning, review, evaluation and implementation. It creates a sense of professional community which in turn empowers teachers to justify their professional activities and communicate them with confidence to parents and the wider community. This perspective is shared by Coolahan who exhorts teachers to take greater control over their professional activities in order to justify their school based practices and procedures and explain their rationale to interested parties such as inspectors and parents (Coolahan 1981) Macbeth, (1989), while recognising the weakness of the trait approach to professionalism, argues that four main criteria characterise a profession - expertise, a code of conduct, the taking of responsibility and altruistic service to others. He argues, perhaps not unsurprisingly in view of the fact that his work concerns involving parents, that it is on the ground of service to others (especially to a client) that teachers' strongest claim to professional status rests.
This line of argument is not entirely incompatible with other conceptualisations of professionalism which directly or indirectly lay emphasis on the ideal of service to a client. Process approaches/professionalisation stress the establishment of a training school and professional association which are directed towards higher standards of education and service to a client. Professional status considered in terms of occupational control can never simply be proclaimed by practitioners but must be earned by the provision of high standards of service from which public confidence and trust is determined.

At national level, teachers' organisations have worked hard to create public confidence in teachers as an occupational group and recognise that such standing is a precious asset. Teachers' participation in Review Bodies, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, policy research, inservice development and partnership in Department of Education committees are evidence that teachers are committed to quality in education and the delivery of high standards of service to clients.

However, it is equally important for teachers' claims for professional recognition that public trust and confidence is maintained at school based level. According to INTO General Secretary, Joe O'Toole, "the teacher is the one to ensure that parents have trust and confidence in the school. Creating that trust is as important as any other part of the teacher's role and like any other part, it must be planned, structured and implemented". The teacher's claim to expertise must be demonstrated through the acceptance of responsibility for dealing with problems that may arise in the professional setting. (Tuarascail 1996)

Yet fears remain that increasing parental involvement in schools particularly to the point of partnership and the involvement of parents in the classroom constitute a threat to professional status and even professional competence. It is argued that professionals and non-professionals cannot be partners except in a very loose sense. Partnership has not been proclaimed with the medical professional with whom parents share the health care of children or with the legal
profession when cases of law and justice arise. There are however compelling reasons why teachers should foster the ideal of parental partnership in education as part of their professionalism.

There is clear research evidence on the influence of home background and home learning on educational development and school learning. It has been estimated that some 85% of children's waking time from birth to the end of compulsory education is spent outside the school. Kellaghan and Greaney (1992) have recognised this fact in the following terms:

"Of all the agencies that impact on a child's educational development, it is clear that the family is crucial, if for no other reason than that it is in a better position than any other agency (including the school) to provide continuous, intense and long term support for the child".

For many years education and schooling were seen as synonymous. Parents can offer schools unique and intimate knowledge of their children (Macbeth 1990, Henderson 1988). In considering this issue Burke argues that while it could be assumed that the impact of schooling, being professionally provided, is greater proportionally than the mere 15% of waking time allotted to it, parents must be accepted for what they are in law and in reality, the co-educators of their children. In making the case for teacher professionalism, Burke suggests that it would be foolhardy for teachers not to utilise to the full the parental potential that is available to them.

It can also be argued that a failure to recognise parents as co-educators and to utilise them fully could impact negatively on teachers' claims to professional recognition. Excluding parents perpetuates the notion that schools alone can provide all education. The corollary of this stance is that blame for educational failure can then be attached to teachers when in fact many of the reasons for such failure lie beyond teachers' control and within the ambit of parental responsibility and influence. Perhaps nowhere is this brought into sharper focus than with the issue of the Irish language where schools alone were charged with language revival.
As schools face increasing demands for initiatives in response to societal and economic problems and challenges it must be made clear that schools cannot, nor should they be expected to, shoulder total responsibility. Teachers therefore must avoid such an eventuality and take the initiative in organising collaboration with parents.

The issue of collaboration between teachers and parents has been considered by Warnock (1985) who exhorts teachers to be confidently authoritative in their dealings with parents in which she argues, lies the professionalism of the teacher. She sets out her case in these terms:

"A school is not a club or society to be run by its keenest members (but) must make its own policies and set its own standards, not without regard to the wishes of parents, but not subject to changing parental whim... Schools cannot and should not be run on the lines of a consumer service... Even though educating the child is a joint enterprise, involving both home and school, parents should realise that they cannot have the last word. It is a question of collaboration, not partnership... Such a collaborative relationship, less than equality, yet not authoritarian, authoritative yet not patronising, is one of requiring sensitivity and tact. In the exercise of such virtues lies the professionalism of the properly trained teacher".

Such a position is in stark contrast to policies advocated by successive governments in Britain and other countries who have urged parents to view themselves as consumers of the education service. Meaningful and potentially fruitful partnerships are lost when the market driven view of schooling is promoted under a banner of "parental choice". Teacher professionalism demands not a reactionary response to consumer demands but an authoritative response based on expertise that will actively involve parents in the work of schools for the good of pupils. This challenge is outlined by Warnock who writes:

"A teacher cannot adopt a proper attitude to parents if he is, himself, unsure of what he is doing or what he is doing it for ...
The teacher must be prepared to argue his case as an expert. (He) must be confident that he has something the parents haven't got. He is trained to educate. The parent has knowledge of his child, and experience perhaps, but not expertise ... Teachers are accustomed to think in terms of authority over pupils; it is just as important that they should be able to be authoritative with parents. For this is what expertise and conscious professionalism entails." (Warnock 1985)

A claim for professional recognition by teachers must be based not on a concept of "teacher control" which will generate or be matched by an opposing force of "parent power" but on a commitment to seeking genuine partnerships between parents and schools.

Far from diminishing the work of teachers, well-planned programmes of parental involvement will enchance teacher professionalism through the achievement of improvements in the life of the schools and in the quality of education offered to our pupils.
Advantages which accrue from increased parental involvement in the education of their children have been well documented. Research by Mortimore et al (1988) shows that parental interest in and attitude towards education is positively correlated with academic achievement, lizard (1982) points to a link between parental involvement and reading attainment. In both the USA and Britain studies have linked parental involvement in education with increased school effectiveness.

However it is important to enter a note of caution in this area and state categorically that increased parental involvement in education cannot be viewed as a panacea for every socio-economic problem that confronts society as a whole or the more localised school community. Wolfendale (1983) has remarked that increased parental involvement in schools will inevitably attract some parents whose motivation may be rooted in a selfish or anti-social stance.

It is equally important to take cognisance of the very real barriers that exist in the area of parental involvement in schools. Lack of time and inadequate pre-service and inservice education in the area severely compromises teachers' abilities to liaise effectively with parents. There are physical difficulties in most primary schools which were not designed with parental involvement in mind. The vast majority of our schools do not have suitable accommodation for parent interviews or group conferences. It must also be noted that there are attitudinal and professional difficulties among teachers, many of whom feel threatened by what is seen as parental encroachment in a professional domain.

Nevertheless it is possible to highlight a number of areas within the domain of parental involvement where the opportunity for progress exists. This chapter seeks to outline a number of these.
Homework

The regular undertaking of homework provides a very obvious and practical way in which parents can demonstrate their interest in and commitment to their child's education. It provides an opportunity for parents to make a valued contribution to and influence the child's education. It is the most regular link between home and school and should therefore be seen as an ideal opportunity to develop a meaningful and workable partnership between the home and the school.

Lyons (1992) in one of the surprisingly few published pieces dealing with the subject of homework poses a number of fundamental questions about the subject of homework. He asks "Do teachers set homework because they feel it makes a valuable contribution towards the education of the child or simply because they are expected to?" Homework he argues is at best an educationally sound notion; at worst a necessary and established evil stifling the enthusiasm of the bright child and frustrating the weak child. He goes on to outline a number of conditions that are necessary for homework to be a valuable educational tool:

• homework should be interesting, related to the work in class;
• homework should consolidate what is learned in class;
• independent learning should result;
• home circumstances should not conflict with the work.

He concludes that homework is the joint responsibility of parents and teachers to effect the most befitting mode by which the pupil can gainfully accrue a positive attitude towards homework. Without the necessary co-operation between these two principal parties, the pupil is abandoned to "the immaturity of his own devices".

For homework to be an effective link between the home and the school, it must have a sound educational rationale. The following features of effective homework have been outlined by the European Parents' Association.
• homework should be part of a carefully devised learning programme;
• homework should have a purpose;
• homework policy should be part of the school plan with consistent policy applying throughout the school;
• homework should be suited to the capabilities of pupils and children should be capable of tackling the homework set;
• homework should be properly explained to children, in advance;
• homework should be checked by the teacher. Personal effort should count for more than perfection of results;
• comments and other feedback should be given to pupils about their homework;
• homework should foster independence and the use of non-school resources (parents, library, environment);
• parents should be fully aware of the school homework policy and how they can assist;
• parents should provide appropriate conditions for homework;
• homework should enhance a sense of education partnership with parents.

However, if homework is central to the educational progress of the child and to the fostering of effective home-school links then the conditions in which homework is completed at home merit examination. Central to this is that parents should have a clear understanding of their role in the process. The National Parents' Council-Primary has drawn attention to parental concerns in this area regarding their role particularly in the subject areas of Mathematics and Gaeilge where lack of parental competence and confidence can often be a cause of difficulty and tension (NPC 1991). Clarification is needed by parents regarding their role in the encouragement of their children's work along with observation of work and the review of work completed. The question of parental intervention in the event of a difficulty being experienced requires explanation along with the question of how and when to make the teacher aware that parental assistance was required in the completion of work.
Issues such as these highlight the need for homework policy to be an integral part of the school plan and discussed with parents in order to establish understanding between teachers and parents. The National Parents' Council-Primary (1991) advocates that a class meeting at the beginning of each school year is the ideal mechanism for building such an understanding of parental input to homework. However Macbeth (1989) argues that teachers can provide guidance to parents on the topic through publications, consultations, Parent-Teacher Association, Parents' Associations and class meetings. The type of advice offered to parents in school publications is highlighted by the following example from Bankton Primary School Lotian Scotland:

"Homework is set to consolidate work done in class and to encourage independent study. Normally, this would be given only on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings, leaving the weekend free for all to relax. If your son/daughter has given of his/her best and after 30—40 minutes at the very most is still struggling with homework please tell him/her to stop, write a note to this effect on the jotter to let the class teacher know of a difficulty being encountered. Homework will not be given in areas not already covered, taught and discussed in school so your child should normally be able to handle it.

Please take an interest in asking your child to show you his/her work - they really appreciate this - and sign at the foot of each night's work. We request this signing to ensure you are kept aware of your child's progress. Homework repeatedly not signed or repeatedly left at home or not tackled will be investigated. Again, I think most parents will appreciate this concern. The younger children will probably have little to do at home, other than reading and simple number work but in order to prepare older pupils for the school life ahead of them, I will actively encourage a healthy outlook to the whole question of homework and here parents have a large part to play setting aside at home a regular quiet place and time in an encouraging (but not over-demanding) atmosphere for such".
In addition to the above advice the document outlines types of homework and ways in which parents can be involved. Care of books and materials is covered as is a request to ensure that basic equipment is provided for the child.

The staff handbook from the same school contains a corresponding section on homework. Outlined in it is the need for teachers to set regular homework which allows parents to gain an insight into the child's progress, to ask children to complete school work at home should the child fail to work to his/her potential and to ensure that homework is signed by the parent each night. Advice is given on the setting of appropriate homework for children of different abilities, the reporting of "regular homework offenders" the allocation of homework to children who are absent for considerable periods of time due to illness and recording of dates when a pupil fails to submit homework.

Parental responsibilities in the area of homework are addressed by a number of bodies. The National Parents' Council states that it is the task of parents to ensure that homework is allocated due time and effort by the child. Parents also have the duty to identify suitable times for undertaking homework taking account of other needs such as play, relaxation and family time. Physical circumstances are also important and proper conditions must be provided for children - a quiet time and place, a suitable work surface and appropriate reference books. Although not easily achievable, children require a quiet well lit room, which is free from distractions.

The National Parents' Council has also made suggestions on the amount and type of homework and time to be allotted. It is argued that children in infant classes should not have formal homework beyond activities such as drawing and listening to stories read by parents while, for children in First and Second Classes, 20-30 minutes is viewed as appropriate. In Third and Fourth Classes it is stated that 30^0 minutes is an appropriate allocation of time, and in Fifth and Sixth Classes, 40-60 minutes is suggested. However, it is acknowledged that these are target times and that the child as an individual must be taken into account and, if an excessive time is taken by the child to complete
homework assignments, discussion with the teacher should be initiated to ensure a reasonable time period is set.

In its position paper on the issue of homework the National Parents' Council-Primary also states the case that homework should not be assigned at weekends, that the type of homework set should be related to and determined by the school programme and that "lines" are an inappropriate and wasteful form of homework.

The INTO is of the opinion that the regular seeing and checking of homework serves a number of desirable educational objectives. In the context of parental participation in schooling it provides a means of involving parents in their children's work in school and as such is a very valuable form of communication between home and school. Parents are provided with an opportunity to see the work the child is doing in school and form their own judgements on how the child is progressing.

The question of what type of homework to set, how it is marked and how long it should take are primarily professional matters and as such are the responsibility of the teacher. However, individual teachers should work within the context of a carefully formulated school plan in this area. In the course of the development of this plan there should be consultation with parents of pupils.

A failure to develop such a policy and practice has the potential to lead to misunderstanding, unfair comparisons and comment, frustration on the side of both home and school and, most importantly unsatisfactory educational experience for pupils. Consequently, the INTO advises all schools to formulate its homework policy in consultation with parent representatives and communicate policy clearly to all.

Assessment of Pupils, Record Keeping and Communication

From 1942 to 1967 pupil assessment in the primary school was dominated by the Primary School Certificate examination which was taken by all pupils at the end of Sixth Class. Major criticisms that were levelled at this form of assessment included its concentration on
Gaeilge, English and Arithmetic which led to a narrowing of the curriculum and a neglect of non-examination subjects. The effects of failure and the practice of retaining pupils in Fifth Class so that they would not have to sit the examination were also included in criticism of this approach.

Following the abolition of the Primary School Certificate examination, pupil assessment and progress was maintained through the use of a record card system in which teachers were to carry out assessments on pupils and record progress on the following scale: lag, cuiosach, maith, an-mhaith. Other information relating to attendance and behaviour was also to be recorded.

However, by the late 1980s there was an emerging consensus that this system was ineffective, an opinion that was noted by the Primary Curriculum Review Body (1990). This report cited difficulties in comparing ratings across teachers, schools and subject areas (page 82). The report suggested that a system of pupil assessment should have the following characteristics which it stated were not in any order of priority;

- the system of assessment should be related to and reflect the content and objectives of the curriculum;
- assessment should provide information on how pupils are performing and their potential ability in relation to the aims and objectives of the curriculum;
- the results of the assessment should provide a basis for decisions about pupils further learning needs;
- there should be continuity between classes and schools (primary and post-primary) in relation to such procedures. Thus there is a need for a moderating component in the assessment;
- the procedures should allow for effective communication of relevant information to parents, teachers, Department of Education and other agencies.

In a reservation to the report, the National Parents' Council-Primary argued that in order to complete the specification of characteristics the
following should be added:

- assessment procedures themselves should be subject to frequent scrutiny and review;
- comprehensive diagnostic assessment should take place throughout the primary years and not only focus on older children.

In addition to these, the National Parents' Council-Primary expressed 'grave concern' regarding the absence of a clear unequivocal statement in the Primary Curriculum Review Body Report that parents must have full access at all times to all information relating to their children. It condemned the recommendation that 'the teacher will meet with parents on a regular basis and provide them with a report on pupils' progress' as wholly inadequate in this regard and maintained the right of parents to full access at all times to all school-based information relating to their children.

The National Parents' Council-Primary stated that it did not accept the argument that allowing parents full access to such information will lead to bland and ineffective assessment and recorded its confidence that the professionalism of teachers would not allow this to occur. It also commented on the need for records of pupil progress to be justifiable and the need for parental knowledge in advance of any record of poor performance likely to cause dismay to that parent.

The report of the Primary Curriculum Review Body recommended in relation to communication of information on pupil profiles that the profile be updated annually by the class teacher. "Information should be given to parents in a formative way, to be used by them in their interaction with their children. For this reason the information should contain sufficient detail and be accompanied by suggestions which would allow parents to take action which would help the child. We feel that assessment reports, whether presented as percentages, grades or other, are useless to parents without accompanying remarks and interpretations by the teacher".

In 1991, the National Parents' Council outlined the needs of parents in
relation to assessment and reporting in "Issues in Education - Pupil Assessment". In the document it was argued that communication needs to be seen as an essential component of assessment because, without communication, assessment was of little value. The information obtained through assessment should be communicated to parents and pupils.

The following were listed as parents' requirements to enable them to follow their child's progress through primary school in a satisfactory manner.

(a) A class meeting at the beginning of the academic year which provides a forum for the teacher to discuss with parents the curriculum objectives, methods used for assessment of children's progress, guidelines on homework, discipline and other relevant matters.

(b) An invitation to meet the class teacher during the year to discuss the pupil's work and general development and subsequent meetings which could be arranged when deemed necessary by the teacher and the parent.

(c) Information for formative and developmental use which presents a full picture to parents and is accompanied by suggestions which would allow parents to help their child. Percentages, grades or other merit marks should be accompanied by remarks or interpretations which indicate whether the grade is based on overall performance for a school year or on the end of term test and whether performance is judged against previous performances, class norms or national norms.

(d) An account of the child's performance across the curriculum which might include categories for comment such as attitude to a subject, participation in oral work, vocabulary, reading, comprehension/mastery of skills, understanding of concepts, problem solving, creative skills and writing/presentation of work.

(e) Comments on the child's personal and social development which might be included under the following headings: attitude to school, attendance, punctuality, observance of rules, behaviour/conduct, mixing and cooperating with others, tolerance and respecting the
property and rights of others,

(f) Details of work habits to include contribution to class discussion, concentration, effort and eagerness to learn, ability to work carefully and neatly, ability to work independently and ability to work with others,

{g} a report at least twice yearly, which would contain provision for parental comments as a response to their child's report. The report should be sent to parents before the end of a school year to allow sufficient time for a parental response.

The document concludes with a number of recommendations from a parent perspective in relation to assessment in the primary school including the requirement of each school to have an assessment policy, parental knowledge of and access to records kept on their children, guidelines to be drawn up by the Department of Education on assessment and pre-service and inservice education for teachers.

However, the document cautions against the establishment of an extensive formal assessment system and states parental concerns about the negative effects of excessive formal testing.

"Formal testing may restrict the implementation of the full curriculum and result in undue emphasis being placed on those aspects of the curriculum which are being tested. Frequent testing may be very time consuming, thus reducing actual teaching time. It may put undue pressure on pupils, resulting in stress. While some forms of assessment, if used correctly, may service to motivate the pupils, i.e. in one to one reporting by the teacher to the pupil, frequent testing of pupils may also have negative effects in terms of motivation if pupils perceive themselves to be unsuccessful".

The INTO has examined the issue of educational assessment on several occasions and has consistently and vigorously opposed negative aspects associated with many curriculum reform movements in which assessment is associated with attempts to develop explicitly curriculum statements expressed in terms of expected behaviours. The organisation
has instead supported the promotion of formative assessment as an integral part of the teaching/learning process. This permits the teacher to collect detailed information about pupils' learning from which to plan and teach effectively, thus maximising future learning.

Such a view envisages a shift away from traditional transmission approaches to learning which often relied heavily on rote-learning techniques which do little to foster flexibility and adaptability to change required by modern society. It promotes a more constructive view of conceptual understanding in which children's conceptions are made clear and on which teachers can plan educational activities and encounters. It requires a move away from norm referenced assessment designed for selection evaluation or curriculum control. It also demands a range of assessment activities from informal observation to oral, practical or written tasks.

The INTO has examined the issue of access to school records and supports the view that parents should have access to school records kept on their children. However, it recognises that good records are the result of teacher judgements as well as facts and demands guarantees that teachers who make such judgements in good faith are protected from any legal challenge which may arise from such contributions. It has also raised serious questions in relation to the possibility that the personal liberty and privacy of pupils, particularly in the area of social behaviours and health may be infringed by external access to records. Success in this area will demand that all concerned with school records act in a responsible and professional manner.

Recognising the importance of facilitating home-school links, the Central Executive Committee of the INTO initiated discussion with Catholic Primary School Managers' Association in the early 1980s with a view to establishing an agreed position on home-school links which would be acceptable to both parties. The INTO policy paper on home-school links which was adopted at Congress 1982 formed the basis for the negotiations. The full text of the agreed statement is contained in Appendix II.
Parent Teacher Meetings

Meetings between parents and teachers can be categorised into informal or ad hoc meetings and formal consultations. These meetings are personal in nature as distinct from class group meetings or general meetings of parents and involve the class teacher or principal teacher and individual parents.

Informal Meetings

Informal parent teacher meetings may be initiated by either party when it is felt that one is necessary. The National Parents' Council states that meetings should be arranged as often as is deemed necessary by parents and teacher. It is of the opinion that parents should have access to the teacher when they are worried about the child and that teachers should initiate such meetings when there is cause for concern. Macbeth (1989) considers that such a facility should be available and its use encouraged.

The INTO supports this position subject to reasonable control and regulation. It is unreasonable to permit frequent, unscheduled interruption of classes or the holding of long meetings during class time. This is unfair to pupils and teachers alike whose work is interrupted by such meetings. This situation may be partially resolved in schools where there is an administrative principal who may be free to undertake such meetings but is almost totally impossible in schools where the principal has full time teaching duties.

The difficulties associated with informal meetings are recognised by Macbeth (1989) who argues that a system of recognised consultation times each day or each week makes sense. These should be made known to parents in a school handbook. More urgent calls could then be made with a member of the teaching staff with fewer timetable commitments or the school secretary who with knowledge of teacher availability could organise appropriate meetings. It is however noteworthy that in Irish primary schools teachers do not have non-contact hours free from class teaching duties, with the exception of administrative principals, home school liaison teachers and some
remedial teachers.

In an attempt to overcome this problem, Macbeth draws attention to a Scandinavian technique which he terms the telephone surgery. According to this scheme at a particular time each week or fortnight class teachers are available at a pre-publicised phone number at a given time (e.g. for one hour) and parents are informed that they can telephone at this time. Many teachers provided a home number and recorded an official telephone time of 20-30 minutes one day per week. In a survey of one municipality, 25% of parents reported that they had telephoned the class teacher and 9% answered that the teacher had phoned them during a particular month.

He notes however, that within the European Union such schemes are uncommon and only in the Netherlands and Denmark was the practice of listing home telephone numbers of staff in school handbooks encountered. He argues that while the Swedish study expressed disappointment at the low rate of phone calls from/to parents (25%) if such a scheme were to be introduced in Britain (the focus of his attention) it would take time to build up to that rate. However, such a scheme could only be considered as a supplementary one and could not be seen as a replacement for person-to-person parent teacher meetings.

Formal Meetings

The Principal Teacher should seek to win the confidence, co-operation and good will of the parents of her/his pupils and should be prepared to discuss with them, individually or otherwise, any matter relevant to the education of their children. At the beginning of each school year the Principal Teacher should discuss with the Manager and the members of the school staff the question of group meetings of the parents of the pupils. (Teacher's Handbook, Part 11971)

While a great deal can be achieved through informal contacts between teachers and parents that take place for example when children are being dropped to or collected from school, by their nature these
meetings are brief, informal, at best semi-private and unsuitable for indepth discussion. They cannot be seen as a replacement for a formal meeting, arranged in advance to which each party can bring their concerns. Formal structured parent-teacher meetings are required to provide interpretation and consideration of merit marks on reports sent home, the necessity for which has been previously stated. If meaningful home-school relationships are to be constructed then communication is the cornerstone and formal meetings are a key element of that communication.

However, it is probably fair to state that while both parents and teachers come to parent teacher meetings with their own agendas, the lion's share of the short meeting is devoted to the teacher's agenda. Macbeth (1989) in commenting upon this finding states that it would ease tensions if agendas, in the form of written reports, were exchanged in advance of meetings. However, he goes on to state that the vast majority of parents will expect the teacher to take the initiative and set the structure, comment and pace of the meeting. It makes sense if the teacher, because of professional expertise and responsibility and familiarity with the process, were to plan meetings ensuring that all essentials are covered.

Conclusions
It is essential that schools devise their own policy on home-school relations as part of the school plan. Such a policy must be drawn up in consultation with parents' representatives and take account of genuine parental concerns such as the issues that have been raised.

The INTO has to date indicated its commitment to the development of positive relations between teachers and parents through its annual publication of *Your Child in the Primary School: Tips for Parents* which provides much needed advice and information for parents of children who begin school. The INTO has confidence that its members will exploit this work to the full and make transition from home to school as easy as possible for pupils, parents and teachers.
In order to obtain information on levels of parental involvement in Irish schools, the INTO Education Committee sought submissions from teachers working in schools in all parts of the country. This chapter contains a number of these accounts, written by practising teachers which describe levels of parental involvement in their own schools. The work is the outcome of semi-structured interviews/questionnaires conducted by members of the Education Committee in their own districts. Cooperating teachers were asked to comment to the committee on a number of issues relating to the topic of parental involvement in schools. In a number of cases further information was sought relating to the accounts provided. A copy of the topics covered in the semi-structured interviews/questionnaires is included in Appendix III. These interviews highlight levels of parental participation in schools that have thus far received little or no public recognition. They have produced valuable information not only on levels of participation but on teachers' opinions relating to this issue. They also provide an indication of the efforts made by teachers and parents to establish positive interaction between home and school.

Some of these reports were the work of individual teachers while other reports represent the views of whole staffs. These submissions do not of course form an empirical study of parental participation in the life and work of schools but they do provide valuable descriptive evidence of efforts by both parents and teachers to work together at local level for the good of a school and the benefit of its pupils. While they contain many examples of endeavours which can be identified and held up as "good practice", the INTO is of the opinion that no one account forms an ideal of parental involvement for all schools. As each child is an individual, each school is unique and those committed to its welfare must devise their own strategies and systems to promote co-operation and partnership between parents and teachers.

There follows a descriptive report of each school's activities concluding
with a summary which highlights certain emerging themes.

School A - Co. Wexford

School A reported that while there are few formal structures set up in the school to involve parents in the work of the school there is a most welcoming attitude among members of staff towards parents. Most teachers in the school are in favour of closer links being developed between parents and the school to improve the delivery of a quality education. However, some of the teaching staff feel threatened by parental involvement in the school and try to avoid contact if at all possible. This is viewed as a major problem by those teachers on the staff who attempt to break down barriers.

In this school there is little provision for resources and facilities for parents. There is a notice board in the school where matters of interest/importance are posted to inform parents. One teacher in the past proposed the establishment of a parents' room but failed to get the support of colleagues for the project. There is no special fund set up by either the Board of Management or the Parents' Committee to promote parental involvement.

The school plan contains a policy on meetings with parents which outlines an open door/drop in policy and parents are free to call to the school at any time during the school day. However, parents are encouraged where possible to make an appointment with the teacher. While not formally written into the school plan each teacher is expected to meet with parents as a group at least once a year. About half the teaching staff in the school undertake such meetings.

Formal individual parent/teacher meetings are a feature of this school where 75% of the staff meet with the parents of her/his class twice a year. Parents are given a specific timetable for these meetings and each family has about 10 minutes with the teacher. The first meeting allows the parent to tell the teacher about her/his child and the teacher has an opportunity to explain the year's work to the parent. At the second meeting the teacher provides the parent with a detailed assessment of
the pupil. Time for these meetings is provided during school hours by
the school policy which allows the teacher's class to stay away from
school on these days.

Information meetings with parents are held in this school as the need
arises. Information meetings/evenings have included topics such as
substance abuse, paired reading and transition to post primary schools.
Parents of children receiving sacraments for the first time attend two
meetings during the school year for information and instruction. Some
teachers in the school hold meetings with parents in the evenings to
discuss their own classes.

The school undertakes a number of projects during the school year
which involve parental participation in the life of the school. Each class
teacher undertakes a paired reading programme with their class and an
information meeting is held for parents and the programme outlined
and explained. Each autumn, parents take part in the school book fair
where they visit the school after school hours and select books with
their children. One teachers enters the "Write a Book" competition and
parents are invited to view the finished products and talk to the teacher
at an evening meeting. An annual school concert is part of the school
programme to which all parents are invited.

Formal written reports are sent home to parents twice each year in this
school at Christmas and Summer. Notes are sent home on a regular
basis and teachers are encouraged to send home notes of a positive
nature from time to time as most notes sent home tend to be of a
"negative" nature.

A school newsletter issues once per term to parents. However
individual teachers do send notes or letters to all parents when they
wish to explain some aspect of school policy. At the beginning of each
school year the school rules are sent out to parents for comment. Parents
are invited to the school to discuss problems in this area as they arise.

The remedial teaching policy of the school is outlined to parents in the
first newsletter each year. Each child is given a standardised reading
test and children who exhibit problems are sent to the remedial teacher for further investigation. If special intervention is thought necessary the parents are invited to discuss the issue with the class teacher and the remedial teacher. If the child subsequently attends remedial teaching there is on-going contact between parents and teacher.

Formal structures for parental involvement in the school are not functioning fully at present. There is very little contact between parents and management and most parents would not be familiar with members of the Board of Management. At the present time there is no parents' association/committee functioning in the school. In the past, however, parents were involved in fundraising for computers and sports equipment, school tours and classroom equipment/resources. There is no home/school/community liaison scheme in operation in the school as the school is not classified as disadvantaged.

Parents do not assist in the classrooms in this school and the idea has never been tried. Parents are encouraged to take part in school tours.

School B - Northern Ireland

Facilities for parents in this school are few. The author reports that 'parents are allowed to wait (for their children) inside the school', but notes that other schools in the same area 'make parents wait outside the school in all kinds of weather'. No plan exists to promote parental involvement; neither is any finance provided by the school or the parents to further support parental involvement.

A high degree of good will exists among the staff towards the issue of involving parents and activities undertaken include paired reading, helping out in the library and with book fairs. Parents help with the organisation and undertaking of school outings. The school has annual concerts, school shows and orchestral performances for parents. There is equally good will on the part of parents towards such activities.

One to one teacher-parents meetings frequently occur in this school and are initiated by both parties. Parents are always welcome to visit the
school and do so, as the need arises. Information is provided to parents on special issues through meetings which are held from time to time. Written reports are sent home once yearly.

There is no formal involvement by parents in issues concerning school management and there is no parents' association in the school. Newsletters, notes and letters issue to parents from the principal and class teachers when the need arises. There is a code of discipline in the school but the parents did not have any input into the development of policy. It was felt by the author of this report that this was regrettable.

Within the school there is an increasing involvement with social services and other external agencies. An educational psychologist visits the school twice each term and sees pupils referred by teachers. Parental consent is always obtained prior to any such assessment which follows consultation with parents.

Although parents seldom help out in the classroom there is easy access to teachers in this school especially in the early years.

School C-Co. Galway

As this school does not have a staff room it is perhaps understandable that a parents' room does not exist! As a consequence the provision of furniture and other resources does not apply. It is a two teacher school with an enrolment of less than twenty pupils.

The school plan has addressed the issue of promoting parental involvement in the school and promotes an open door policy. Parents are aware of this policy for meeting with teachers and know that the best times to meet are during breaktimes and at the end of the school day. Teachers make contact with parents either individually or collectively by letter to respond to issues that arise from time to time. It is understood that the principal and the chairperson of the Board of Management undertake responsibility for promoting parental involvement. While no specific fund is provided for this purpose, any costs arising from the provision of information is borne by the school Board of Management.
A number of projects involve parents in the work of the school, including paired reading for children with reading difficulties, sacramental preparation for First Communion, transport to and from school matches, school trips and outings, cleaning of the school. Parents are extremely involved in fundraising for the school and in the opinion of the author are 'excellent'. They also support the school through the provision of a weekly contribution which is used to purchase books and equipment.

One to one parent teacher meetings are held annually, usually in May, a policy that was initiated by the staff a number of years ago. These meetings are in addition to any incidental meetings which may occur from time to time and other meetings on special issues which are held as the need arises. There are no meetings for parents of new intake children as the school normally enrolls only 2/3 infants per year. These parents are contacted individually and invited to the school, shown around, told about school times and given general information about the school.

Parents are invited to a number of events during the school year including concerts, musicals and sports day. Some years ago parents were invited on school tours but as nobody accepted, the idea was dropped. Parents are always invited to sacramental events in the school/parish.

Up to 1990 the school used to provide parents with a written report of their child's school work on the 'yellow' report sheet from the Department of Education. This was discontinued because the teachers felt that the language (good, very good etc.) was very inadequate to describe a child's effort in any particular area of the curriculum. The school changed over to an annual, one to one meeting where parents were shown examples of their child's work such as poems, essays and art work and provided with the results of standardised tests. These were accompanied by comments from the teacher. Through the adoption of this approach it was hoped to provide a holistic report of the child's work over the school year. According to the author of this report, parents are 'very happy with this approach'.

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The school does not have a Parents' Association. Some years ago the school principal received information from the National Parents' Council Primary and passed it to the parents' representative on the Board of Management urging them to take the necessary action. No feedback was received. However, issues of parental concern are discussed by the Board of Management as they arise and parents are not 'one bit shy in bringing forward topics for discussion'.

While the school does not have a newsletter, parents are contacted individually by letter if a teacher requires a meeting to discuss an aspect of a child's education. Parents, as a group, are frequently informed by letter of school events such as holidays, closures, matches, meetings and visits by the doctor/dentist.

Parents in this school are very supportive of the school code of discipline and were involved in the drawing up of policy. Each family receives a copy of the code of discipline which is reviewed each year.

Parents are not involved in classroom work in this school.

School D - Co. Wicklow

There is no specific room available in this school to use for promoting parental involvement as all rooms including the library are in use at least part time as classrooms. While the School Plan does not set out in written form how the school seeks to promote parental involvement there is a commitment to the concept from the school staff, who a number of years ago set out and achieved the goal of the establishment of a Parents' Association.

There is now an active Parents' Association in the school whose activities are financed through a number of coffee mornings and a small profit made on swimming if all places are taken up. The Parents' Association organises an awards scheme, swimming as an extra curricular activity, book fair, a school fair to fundraise for the school, participate on a rota basis in yard duty with the teacher, organise talks and classes for parents and sporting activities for pupils. The latter
includes camogie during school hours and badminton after school hours. There are five parents of pupils on the school Board of Management who are very supportive and committed (2 elected, 3 nominated by the patron).

Interestingly, since the FAS scheme of classroom assistance was initiated in the school some parental activities have been discontinued. In particular, a FAS classroom assistant has undertaken library duties.

High levels of contact between parents and teachers are promoted and encouraged by the school plan. Group meetings are held each year for parents of intake children. Group meetings for parents of other classes are held if the class teacher wishes. Attendance at these meetings varies. Formal one to one parent-teacher meetings take place annually. Meetings concerned with sacramental preparation tend to become one-to-one over a cup of tea. Other meetings on topics of interest and concern such as drug awareness are often badly attended. The only meeting guaranteed to attract a good attendance is on transition to second level, as placement is a problem in the area.

The school hosts an open day once a year which includes an exhibition of children's work and a dancing display. It is followed by a lunch for parents and children organised by the Parents' Association. Parents assist on school tours for infants as required.

Written reports are sent to parents once a year at the end of the school year. Other formal contacts between home and school concern issues such as assessment for remedial teaching or psychological assessment. Newsletters are sent to each family about three times per year.

The school is conscious of the need to involve parents in policy initiatives. At present the school staff is developing a code of behaviour which will then go to parents for their contribution. Several initiatives have involved parents in the classroom. Nature classes were given by a parent last year to a number of classes but this has not continued. Parents have an input into art and craft activities in some classes where parents (and grannies!) help with knitting. The author of this report is
of the opinion that while these initiatives were worthwhile it is difficult to sustain interest.

School E-Dublin

There has been a Parents' Committee in this school since the mid-seventies, long before the arrival of Circular 24/91 (Parents as Partners in Education). There had been a Parent Committee in the School since the mid-seventies. They represented each class - usually mothers - and helped the Principal with Fund-raising ventures. There has been an Annual General Meeting of Parents since Circular 7/85 and a Committee of The Parents' Association has been elected each time.

All guidelines for the Parent Association and its Committee are contained in its Constitution which was drafted by a Subcommittee in 1992-1993 and was revised and up-dated for voting on, at the Annual General Meeting, in 1996.

The school does not have a room for parents, due to a lack of space. However, there are two "Parent Notice Boards" located at exits frequented by the parents of Junior Pupils. A section of the school plan is entitled: "Parental Involvement" and contains the names, and details of the current Parent Committee, Guidelines for Parents, the School Rules, the Constitution, Timetables of Parental Involvement in Crafts and Basketball. School Management has never allocated any school finances to this area. The Committee organises its own Church Gate Collection to finance activities.

The parents of first class and second class pupils engage in Paired Reading with their own children, at home. The Remedial teacher introduces parents to the topic and class teachers monitor it and provide books.

Each class has one day for formal or planned parent teacher meetings each year when parents are met, one to one, by appointment. The class pupils do not come to school that day. Parallel classes have this meeting on the same day, as follows:
5th and 6th classes: early December: on 2 consecutive days
1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th classes: late January: on 4 consecutive days
Junior and Senior Infants: before Easter: on 2 consecutive days

On those days, relevant parents are also invited to meet with the Principal and with the Remedial and Resource teachers.

Informal meetings between staff and parents are frequent. Infant teachers are in daily contact with parents, as they come to collect children. Parents are sent for by class teachers when necessary and by the Principal, if there is a serious breach of discipline. Should a parent wish to meet a teacher other than above, an appointment is made through the office.

The school holds a number of information meetings for parents.
(a) Infant In-Take Class. All new pupils are enrolled during one week, during the end of January/early February. The Principal meets each parent and future pupil.
(b) In Mid-June, an afternoon meeting is arranged for the parents of all in-coming pupils. The School Rules; Code of Discipline; and Procedures for parents, are all explained in detail. Parents are given ample opportunity to ask questions and clarify issues of concern. A comprehensive tour of the school building and playgrounds, takes place, in the interests of familiarising new parents in particular, with the school.
(c) On Re-Opening Day in September all Junior Infant pupils and parents come at 11.30 a.m to the P.E. Hall, where once again, all are welcomed. They are then allocated to their classes and follow the class teacher to the classroom. Further and more specific details relating to classwork, are given. Parents are encouraged to come with Junior Infants until they settle down. This gives Infant teacher and parents very adequate opportunities to communicate on a daily basis, if necessary.
(d) Parent Notice Boards: Relevant notices, etc. are placed on two notice boards located strategically at a front and rear entrance - close to the Infant Area, but accessible to other parents, also.
A number of special events involve parents in the life of the school.

(a) Opening of Year Mass: All parents are invited and come with their children. Committee members act as stewards/ushers. Parents, who already are Eucharistic Ministers distribute Holy Communion.

(b) Carol Service: All parents are invited and come with their children. Committee members act as stewards/ushers.

(c) Parents prepare teas for parents of sixth class pupils after their Primary School Graduation Mass.

(d) Corpus Christi Procession: Parents are invited to help teachers with classes.

(e) A parent/nurse takes care of First Aid on Sports Day.

(f) Parents accompany teachers with all classes on school tours.

Communication with parents is regular and takes the form of newsletters which are sent out as follows:

1. End of September
2. Before the Christmas Holidays
3. Before the Easter Holidays
4. Before the Summer Holidays

These cover all foreseeable events, dates, etc. The unforeseen is communicated by means of newsflash/letter, when necessary. As well as long term listing of events in Newsletters, written reminders are also sent before meetings, etc.

The Parent Representatives on the Board of Management are regular attenders at meetings which can be held as often as once every month. They are ex-officio members of the Parent Association, which also meets once every month. One or other or both representatives always attend these meetings and facilitate a two way communication between parents and management. In this way, the Board of Management is always briefed on Parent Association activities.

The Parent Association Committee is affiliated to the National Parents'
Council and sends representatives to County meetings. The school is not designated disadvantaged and hence does not have a Home-School Liaison Teacher.

The Parent Association Committee was very involved in drawing up the school's Code of Discipline and in developing an Anti-Bullying Policy.

Where pupils are in need of remedial teaching or have other special needs, the principal and class teachers send for parents of pupils whom they think need help. Parents also meet the relevant remedial teacher or both before a pupil goes for help. Parental consent is always obtained in such cases.

From 1974 onwards parents have been invited to the School for pre-sacramental meetings as follows:

(a) First Confession/First Holy Communion:
Three meetings were held, one each term:
Term 1: A general meeting on the R.E. Programme.
Term 2: A specific meeting on Reconciliation/Confession.
Term 3: A specific meeting on Eucharist/The Mass.
Parents present their children for both Sacraments; children remain with their families for both ceremonies.

(b) Confirmation
Confirmation is generally held in March and meetings have been held as follows:
October: Meeting One Parents only
November: Prayer Service of Commitment Parents and Pupils
January: Meeting Two Parents only
February: Prayer Service of Light Parents and Pupils

However, the Parish is taking over this Ministry this year.

Parents accompany their children on the occasion of school medicals and there is a special Doctor's Room in an area of the school that affords
total privacy to parents.

A large number of the teachers, but not all, are helped by parents at craft time who assist with craft work in First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth classes.

Two parents from the Parent Association Committee, two teachers, two Board of Management members and the Principal form a School Funding Committee. This group, in partnership, looks after all fund-raising for the Board of Management.

Parents also take an active part in the school's sports programme and coach and teach skills during lunch break daily with fourth to sixth classes. The Parent Association Committee also helps finance swimming to ensure that all pupils may avail of a swimming programme. Parents also make themselves available to help with dressing after swimming.

School F- Midlands

This school is a small rural two teacher school in an area of very high unemployment. Recently it has been included in the Breaking the Cycle initiative for rural schools designated as disadvantaged.

According to the author of this report, parents are extremely loath to become involved in the life of the school because they believe that they will soon be asked to take a turn to raise funds for a project because of the lack of funding at primary school level.

Apart from the formulation of the Code of Discipline and the election of Boards of Management a significant number of parents are rarely seen together. Parents meet for First Communion and Confirmation and on Sports day but other than that it is very difficult to persuade parents to accept membership of the Board of Management.

There is a relaxed attitude to parents in the school and whenever they choose to come they are made welcome. This is easily done because of the small number of parents.
School G - Inner City

School G is a senior primary school with an enrolment of over 240 girls from 2nd to 6th class. There are eleven class teachers, two remedial teachers, a home-school liaison teacher, and an administrative principal. It is an inner-city location and has been designated disadvantaged.

The home-school-community liaison teacher has responsibility for promoting parental involvement. The Home School Liaison Scheme began in the school in 1995. One teacher organises home visitations, liaison with her counterpart in the second-level school (which is on the same campus) and other activities. The scheme has three rooms at its disposal. These rooms are used for:

- drop-in facilities for parents (from 8.45 am to 3.30 pm);
- courses for parents (e.g. art and craft, cookery, first aid, flower arranging, computers, aerobics);
- creche facilities.

Meetings are arranged as issues arise. Finance for meetings comes from school funds. In particular, parents are involved in a paired-reading project. There is a parents' room with tea/coffee making facilities, seating, and toilets. Parent-Teacher Association meetings are held in this room.

One to one parent teacher meetings are held once a year in the first term. Incidental meetings are encouraged. The children remain at home while one to one parent-teacher meetings are taking place. Information is communicated through individual interviews and newsletters. Reports are furnished on a report-card each year in the last term.

The elected parents attend regularly at the Board of Management meetings and are active in fund-raising. The school is no longer involved with the National Parents' Council.

Parents were involved in the drawing up of the code of discipline. The
code has not been reviewed recently. Parents are encouraged to consult with the school on all aspects of its Remedial Education policy.

Two meetings in preparation for Confirmation and two meetings for Communion are held each year. The school provides information for parents on the services available in the region for children who have disabilities of any kind. Parents have, on occasion, been used as classroom assistants during craft classes.

School H

Management and staff hold the view that a positive attitude to parent/guardian involvement in the education of their children is essential if children are to gain maximum benefit from the full range of experiences both structured and incidental which form the total school experience.

Parents are encouraged to visit the school, to familiarise themselves with curriculum and the discipline code, to get to know school buildings and environs and participate in social activities organised by parent groups. Parents and teachers meet informally before class and when pupils are dismissed. However, to ensure that such meetings cause minimal disruption to classwork parents are asked to make an appointment. The practice in school is that the principal works with the class while the teacher and parent(s) meet in the principal's office. A similar procedure is followed when a teacher requests a meeting with parents.

In September/October of each year, the Board of Management holds a meeting to which all parents are invited. At this meeting the Board of Management reports to parents on income and expenditure, plans/projections for coming year, explains how Management, Staff, Parent Associations and National Parents' Council work and encourages parents to get involved in at least one of these groupings.

Meetings are held for parents of pupils in second class for sacramental preparation. At these meetings the religion programme and
organisation for the relevant days is discussed.

In May of each year parents of children who are to attend the school for the first time the following September, are invited to a meeting. The meeting is addressed by the principal and vice-principal. Part One of the meeting is devoted to informing parents of general policy and procedures and helpful hints on how to prepare a child socially and practically for school. Part Two addresses curriculum and methodology and attempts to highlight for parents the range of opportunities they have to lay the foundations for all subjects in the curriculum. In June, parents and children (of the coming September Junior Infants) visit the school and meet the class teacher. These meetings are timetabled over two half days during which the principal takes responsibility for the organisation of the current classes.

Once a year, parents of each pupil are invited to meet the class teacher to discuss the child's progress. These meetings are timetabled. Parents are given a report on their child's development, behaviour and academic progress which they then discuss with the class teacher. One member of staff holds a minimum of two meetings a year with the parents of his pupils and involves them in a Paired Reading programme.

The members organise a variety of fund-raising activities during the year. While the staff is not involved in the organisation of these activities a majority of teachers attend functions, table and quizzes, and fashion shows.

The local parents' committee organises coffee mornings, information meetings and lectures and liaise with the principal and Board of Management when appropriate.

Parents of children involved (usually 1st and 2nd classes) are invited to attend the Christmas play or musical. Many parents help with costume making, make up and provision of props. All parents are invited to visit the school and view the 'seasonal' art which is displayed on the corridor. Parents are encouraged to attend Cor-Fheile na Scoile on the
days when pupils from the school participate. Parents of pupils involved assist in transporting, dressing in costume and supervising. When necessary, parents assist in the supervision of pupils on school outings.

Parents, teachers and pupils decorate the hall and parents are invited to attend the End of the Year Mass. Tea/coffee and a treat for the children follows Mass on the day. Some parents attend sports activities on Sports Day.

Parents of children who need remediation are invited to meet the class teacher and remedial teacher to discuss the programme planned for the pupil and ways in which parents can help. A newsletter is sent to parents four times a year, and includes information from the principal, the Board of Management and Parent Associations.

Reminders of school closures, staff meetings etc, are sent when appropriate. All parents receive a copy of the school Code of Discipline.

First/Second Classes
"Helping your child to read", a list of some helpful hints is sent to parents of children in first/second class.

"Learning Spelling" some helpful hints are sent to parents of pupils in second class.

School I-Northern Ireland
The school believes in involving parents in the school in order to enhance the children's learning experiences. A community room has been made available in the school for parents to encourage parental involvement. The school also undertakes the Delta Project which is aimed at the parents of pre-school children. Reasons for involving parents in their children's educational progress both capitalises on and enhances their relationship with their children. Moreover, parents are in a very advantageous position for fitting new knowledge to the child's previous experience. They can often have a one to one teaching
situation and have a plentiful supply of natural teaching situations available to them.

The project attempts to show how parents can provide experiences which enable the child to develop towards reading, writing, number, talking and listening.

It involves the parent and child visiting the school for about one to one and a half hours once per week for a period of four to six weeks. Creche facilities may be made available for younger children to facilitate the mother's attendance. During the project, a different module will be presented each week. The local librarian may agree to visit the school on one of the afternoons to show parents the range and variety of suitable books available for very young children.

The programme encourages closer liaison between school and home and between teachers and parents, which benefit the school in the long term.

Children gain in language and thought processes. Mother, father/child interaction is fostered. Entry to school is made smoother.

Parents are invited to visit the Community Room during the school week either before or after school to work with their child using the many resources which are available. These include reading and language games, number games, jig-saws and suitable library books. Parents of Children in P4 (2nd class) are invited to the school where the Paired Reading Programme is explained to them. The programme lasts for 6-8 weeks during which time the parents spend 10 minutes each day for five days a week with the child reading, according to the procedure outlined, from the book chosen by the child. At the end of the programme, certificates may be presented to all the children who complete the programme.

Parent/teacher interviews are held during the second term each year on a one-to-one basis. Infant teachers are timetabled to meet their pupils' parents after the children's school day ends from 2:30pm until 3:30pm.
for as many days as are needed. Senior class teachers meet their pupils' parents also between 2:30pm and 3:30pm because the infant teachers have agreed to provide the necessary cover during these times.

Information evenings are held by the teachers for parents of PI children (Junior Infants). During these sessions the teachers explain their approaches towards reading, writing and number. Parents are invited to the school when anything new requires discussion.

Parents are involved each year in charitable activities e.g. 6 km walk in aid of Africa Famine Relief. Parents also assist with costume making for the annual Christmas Concert and a parent makes a video-recording of this event each year.

Written reports are sent to the parents of each child annually. The parents signs and returns a copy of the report to the school. The Chairman of the Board of Governors who is the School Chaplain pays regular visits to the school and liaises between the school and the parents.

The Educational Welfare Officer attached to the Education and Library Board responds to requests from the school and approaches parents regarding their child's absenteeism or truancy. Social Workers employed by the Department of Health and Social Services will contact parents about children's problems e.g. poor hygiene, hair nits, bruises.

School J - Sligo

Parental involvement is an integral part of the organisation of this school and provides an essential support system for the teachers in the organisation of the school environment.

Any commitment made must be a regular one in order to benefit the children and the school. Parents are involved in such areas as:

(1) typing and office work;
(2) organisation of the library;
(3) R.E. and Games;
(4) Arts and Crafts;
(5) Support for the teacher in the organisation of the group activities in the classroom;
(6) Accompanying children and staff on out of school visits to locations for study or to sports events;
(7) Playground supervision;
(8) Development of a Health Education Programme;
(9) Supervision of computer work;
(10) Music.

To encourage parental involvement in the classroom, a timetable of activities was posted on the notice board and parents were invited to offer their services. Involvement with other activities was organised in private consultation with each teacher. Parental involvement in the infant classroom can be divided into three areas:

1. Specialists
2. Assistants
3. Supervisory

Parents with specialist skills involve themselves, after consultation with the class teacher in specific areas.

(a) P.E. (Trained P.E. teacher)
(b) Art (qualified Art graduate)
(c) Music - Music graduate with a psychology qualification
(d) Computers - qualified operator - takes children in small groups at end of classroom.

Assistants in classroom activities
Parents may assist with Maths work, pre-writing skills, picture-drawing and discussion. They may also supervise children who remain in school after the normal finishing time for infants. They also organise games, read stories, and do general tidy up.

Parental involvement at this level can be very worthwhile to pupil,
parent and teacher. It must always be pre-planned in consultation with teacher and is highly recommended.

The following are the areas in which there is parental involvement in the Senior Infants and First Class.

(a) Specialist areas include Computers, Physical Education, Music, Art and Craft and Drama.
(b) Parental assistance in general classroom activities e.g. making of musical instruments, English, Maths Group Work.

In second and third class parents are involved in classroom activities in the following areas: Computer, Art and Craft and Drama.

During the year, two parents assisted in a supervisory capacity in the organisation of group activities in Mathematics and English. One parent comes in to do formal Irish conversation with the children for twenty minutes every Tuesday morning.

**Extra Curricular Activities**

Extra curricular activities are organised by a member of Board of Management in consultation with the Principal. The choice of activity is determined by the available expertise of parents and teachers.

It is made clear to all parents of children participating in extra-curricular activities that the commitment of the activity must be a serious one and that if children are unable to attend on any occasion they inform the teacher concerned. Parents are reminded that the same Code of Discipline that obtains within the school is operative during extra-curricular activities and that breaches of this code will be viewed most seriously.

**Guidelines for Parents who help in the Classroom**

It is the policy of this school to encourage parents to participate in the education of the school's children by allowing them to actively help in the classroom. This participation is viewed as a positive contribution to the children's education and adds to the variety and scope of the
curriculum experienced by the children. The school has had a participation rate by parents which has significantly developed the educational base of the school and the Board of Management offer every facility to maintain this input.

To clarify the role of the parent in the classroom, the following guidelines are offered:

1. Any matters relating to any child's ability/academic progress and behaviour in the classroom is privileged to the teacher of that class and the parent of the child. Consequently, strict confidentiality must at all times be respected and adhered to in this regard.
2. It is essential that any parent wishing to help make a prior arrangement with the teacher concerned and, except in unavoidable circumstances, honour that commitment.
3. Parental input in the classroom, remains at all times under the direction of the teacher.
4. It is necessary that the teachers discuss with the parents beforehand the nature and scope of the input offered and particularly the time and date at which it will take place.
5. If the parent is unable to fulfil the commitment, adequate notice must be given to the teacher in advance.
6. Should any problems arise in the classroom, they must be referred to the teacher concerned immediately.
7. Parental involvement is at all times at the discretion of the Principal of the school and the class teacher concerned.
8. All disciplinary procedures will be implemented by teacher.

Conclusions
As has been acknowledged previously these accounts do not provide any empirical evidence relating to parental involvement in Irish school. They do provide clear evidence of the large range of activities that are undertaken by both parents and schools to promote parental involvement in schools. They also point to the very real constraints under which those seeking to effect change must work. This is valuable in two ways. The accounts highlight difficulties which must be
overcome by those who are in the process of planning initiatives in this area. They also identify clearly where resources must be channelled if meaningful partnership is to be achieved at school-based level.

Accommodation

At a time when many schools lack facilities such as a staff room, office facilities and general purpose rooms it is with some sense of "wishful thinking" that a case must be made for the provision of a parents' room. Nevertheless if schools are to be transformed into welcoming places for parents and where teachers and parents can meet to discuss children's educational progress in relative privacy and with a degree of comfort each school must have a parents' room.

It is unacceptable that parents and teachers should have to meet to discuss matters of concern on a school corridor, in the doorway of a classroom or school or in a staffroom which has it own designated use. It is unsatisfactory that when a parent calls to a school she/he is not provided with a room where they can wait to have their concerns dealt with. Some schools have utilised vacant classrooms for this purpose to excellent effect and have provided such accommodation. In a majority of schools such an opportunity does not exist.

Government has proclaimed partnership between parents and schools as a desirable objective. The willing of such ends is unacceptable without the provision of the means to sustain them. The INTO will judge government commitment to the ideal of real partnership by the provision of financial support for facilities to accomplish parental involvement in school activities.

Time

The school year and school day, as presently constituted, do not facilitate regular and structured contacts with parents. Teachers, whose school day is entirely composed of class contact hours, cannot at the same time devote more than a few minutes to a parent who calls to the school. This is often a cause of frustration to both teacher and parent.
More consideration must be given to quality that could be generated by the provision of a number of hours per year for parents and teachers to meet. A half day at the start of the school year would facilitate class group meetings where the curriculum for the year could be outlined and explained to parents. The main provision of a day for parent-teacher meetings, free from class teaching duties towards the middle of the first term, would afford parents and teachers opportunities to discuss progress, issues of concern and ways to enhance children's development. The opportunity to provide feedback at the end of a school year in conjunction with an end of year report is another desirable objective which requires a time provision. It is important that these issues be explored in detail as a matter of urgency.

It is often easy to ignore or undervalue the number of meetings which schools actually organise or facilitate. Special issues meetings, pupil intake meetings, meetings about sacramental preparation, class meetings and special projects are regular school events. The value of these meetings should not be underestimated.

Policy

It is interesting to note that while many teachers supported the concept of parental involvement, evidence appears that some teachers feel threatened by such developments. This can partly be explained by the fact that many schools operate without formal structures and without the framework of a clearly defined policy. It is reasonable to assume that if teachers have this reaction so also will parents who will feel intimidated or unsure when not familiar with organisational structures.

Two issues need to be addressed in this context. Firstly, a comprehensive programme of inservice education needs to be developed and funded by the Department of Education. Many teachers received their pre-service education when there was little awareness of the growing partnership between home and school. Equally, there is an obligation on government to make financial assistance available to parent groups to provide information and guidance for parents. The second issue that arises relates to the need for the School Plan to
incorporate a detailed and implementable policy on home-school linkages. Such planning requires a commitment from schools and might be a duty that a school could consider as a post of responsibility. In many cases schools reported few formal structures but referred to "a welcoming attitude" towards parents. While this is of course a necessary part of parental involvement it is not in itself enough if parents and teachers are to cooperate in a productive and lasting partnership.

It is clear that a high value is placed on good channels of communication by teachers. Newsletters and notice boards, notes and letters home in addition to annual reports are features of many schools. Yet it is important that communication works both ways and that opportunities are provided for parents to respond to school communications or put forward their points of view. Parents' Associations are the most effective means of achieving this provided that there is on-going and effective liaison between the teaching staff and the Parents' Association. Some schools have devised other methods of communication such as a "suggestion box" in the school. However, the means of communication is of secondary importance to the overriding priority that communication should be regular, open and positive. In this respect it is interesting to note that parents are being consulted on an increasing number of policy issues such as school discipline and codes of behaviour.

It is evident that Irish primary schools are dependent on parental involvement in the area of school funding. Parents are involved in fundraising activities, caretaking and cleaning duties, routine maintenance as well as providing transport to and assistance with extra curricular activities. This contribution by parents must not be undervalued given the gross shortfall in funding for primary schools. Yet in many schools this places a drain on parental good will and prevents others from becoming involved in the first instance. The difficulties involved in sustaining parental involvement and interest in the work of the school when they are effectively making up for the shortfall in government spending on primary education are becoming apparent.
While these accounts have yielded a rich harvest of descriptive information about the involvement of parents in schools it must be remembered that they are only one-sided accounts of school practice. There is a need for more detailed research that will provide the perspectives of parents on this issue. The INTO recommends that such research be funded by the Department of Education and carried out jointly by the INTO and the National Parents' Council.
The study of relations between home and school, which in recent years has developed into calls for the construction and implementation of partnership with parents, has been a feature of educational research for many years. However, it is only since the mid 1980s that the role of parents in the education of their children became a major concern of politicians, teachers and parents. This policy change is perhaps best exemplified by the establishment in 1985 of the National Parents' Council by the then Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey. The intervening period has been marked by a change from stressing the importance of parental involvement in education by policy makers to a recognition of parents as partners in policy making and the creating of obligations on schools to act to involve parents in the work of schools. Relations between home and school are no longer an optional extra but an integral part of professional practice for the effective school. This was recently recognised by the INTO in its document "Effective School Organisation" (1996):

"Teachers have a professional obligation to meet with parents to assist them informing realistic expectations for their children and to encourage them to support their children's schooling. Schools should also be organised so as to provide a framework of consent and cooperation, accountability and communication. Effective school organisation therefore demands that schools seek out and take account of the views of parents".

Yet despite this recognition of the centrality of parents, attention must be focused on how the rhetoric of parental involvement is translated into the reality of participation. In this context, the area of teacher education and on-going professional development is of crucial importance.

In England and Wales, where central government exercises a high
degree of control over the content, nature and format of teacher education, this issue has been examined by Atkin and Bastiani (1987). Mindful of the control of government, they pose the question "Has a national policy emphasising partnership with parents been accompanied by a recognition of the training needs of teachers?" and conclude that at both initial and inservice level "the picture is bleak". They point to and criticise as vague the only reference in the GATE criteria for the initial training of teachers "Schools should be made aware of the wide range of relationships - with parents and others - which teachers can expect to develop in a diverse society and of the role of the school within a community" (Bastiani 1987). They also point to finding priorities which are concerned with curriculum matters ignoring the issue of training for work with parents.

In Ireland, the Colleges of Education enjoy a far higher degree of autonomy than similar institutions in England and Wales and therefore the comparative question of a national policy emphasising the role of parents in education does not arise. However, anecdotal evidence from teachers in Ireland appears to coincide with the observations of Atkin and Bastiani in Britain who note that in their work in the area of inservice training "We became accustomed to their (teachers) claims that their initial training had left them ill-equipped and unprepared for the new kind of role they were being expected to make". They report that the only memory of the issue that many could recall were lectures they had received on social class and education and their imputed support for working class apathy towards education.

However, given that when the majority of today's teaching force received their initial teacher education the role of parents in education was less recognised than it is now, such evidence is not perhaps unsurprising. In an effort to examine current practices in teacher education, the INTO Education Committee asked two Colleges of Education to provide details of how the issue of parental involvement in schools is addressed in pre-service courses.
In St. Patrick’s College of Education, Drumcondra, the issue of parental involvement does not comprise a specific course but receives mention and study in a number of courses. Parental Involvement is part of both First Year and Second Year Reading Courses. In the first year approximately half a lecture is devoted to emphasising the role of parents in promoting early literacy along with a discussion on changing attitudes towards early formal education. In the second year one and a half hours is allotted to the study of shared reading, its research, method and evaluation which includes a video presentation on this topic.

Within the sphere of curriculum Irish in First Year, students’ attention is focussed on how children learn/acquire first language from parent(s) especially in an unpressured situation:

(a) listening, babbling, moving freely, building the deep structures of language for at least a year prior to producing utterances;

(b) atmosphere of kindness/love, relaxation, parent(s) satisfaction with one-word or telegraphic sentences, avoidance of correction, supportive attitude in repeating the child's first effort in an extended version etc.;

(c) study of parents' role in the revival of Hebrew, the St. Lombert bilingual project and Busley's (1959) account of his son's bilingual development;

(d) utilising parent-teacher meetings to explain that the use of Irish by parents (who have all by now learned Irish in school but, in many cases, have allowed their bilingual skills to decline) will help the child to have a positive and beneficial attitude to Irish as a subject. This is essential in Irish-medium schools.

Parental involvement in education is also addressed in the Third Year Sociology of Education course where a total of four lecture periods are devoted to the topic in the following way.
Lecture 1:
The growing awareness from the 1950s onwards that a child's progress in school is heavily dependent on the support and encouragement received from the home, the research evidence;

Lecture 2:
The nature of parental involvement in primary school life in Ireland 1831-1950; the constitutional rights of Irish parents in relation to the education of their children (Article 42); the research work of the 1960s revealing the extent and form of parent-teacher links in Ireland at that time (Kelly (1967); (1970); Kathleen Cullen (1969)); and the first attempts to involve Irish parents in the school of their children (the Intervention Programme for Disadvantaged Children in Rutland Street (Kellaghan (1799); Holland (1979); and the Home Intervention project in Kilkenny (Archer and Kellaghan (1976));

Lecture 3:
Major initiatives taken to involve Irish parents in the management and administration of schools from the 1970s onwards; the allocation of places on Boards of Management to parent representatives when the single managerial system was abolished in 1976; the establishment of a National Parents' Council in 1985; the role of the NPC since its inception 1985-1996 (the Council's policy on a range of educational issues; representation on a number of important statutory bodies; its publications - the newsletter 'Curam', their Issues in Education' series, etc); and the more formal partnership role envisaged for Irish parents in the Government's White Paper (1995);

Lecture 4:
The Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme; its history (its development out of the Disadvantaged Area scheme introduced by the Department of Education in 1984); the aims of the scheme; its structure and administration (National Steering Committee; National coordinator, etc.); and the evaluation of the scheme by the Educational Research Centre (1996) and the main findings.

In addition to these lectures, outside speakers are also invited to address
students including representatives of the National Parents' Council and practising Home-School-Community coordinators. The latter also entails follow-up work involving visits by students to a school to witness the work of the HSCL coordinator at first hand.

In the Second Year of the B.Ed. programme, the issue of parental involvement is also covered as part of the History of Irish Education Course. This course aims at developing an understanding among students of how current structures in Irish education developed since 1800 in the context of conflicting ideologies, changing political power and practical compromise.

The course deals specifically with the narrowing of the consultative base of education planning and policy formulation from the early to the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this time the Churches took greater control of education and adopted a protective role with regard to their school and college-going students due to religious animosities and the perceived threat of ideologies such as liberalism and secularism. The effect of such moves was the virtual exclusion of lay and parental involvement particularly in Catholic schools. This course includes the changes since Vatican II which resulted in increasing lay and parental involvement in education planning and management, the establishment of Management Boards in the 1970s and the place assured to parents in proposed legislation.

Mary Immaculate College of Education, Limerick

The issue of parental involvement in the education of young children is addressed at a number of different levels in Mary Immaculate College of Education, Limerick. Specifically, the following modules include lectures and/or workshops for students on the topic:

Module TP4711 - General Methodology programme taken by all B.Ed 1 students prior to initiating their intensive Teaching Practice continuum and micro teaching programme with middle standards.

Module EN4713 - which includes the Pedagogy of Early childhood
Education taken by B.Ed 2 students prior to their placement on the Infant Education Teaching Practice.

Module EN 4733 - Theory of Education 2, which includes Educational Psychology and Development Psychology taken by all B. Ed 3 students.

Module EN 4716 - Curriculum Studies selected by B.Ed students from a possible range of fourteen curriculum areas, five of which address the issue of parental involvement in education.

Module TP 4715 - titled "Additional Educational Experience" and taken by all B.Ed 3 students at the end of the Semester 5 affords all students the opportunity to select an educational setting other than a primary school in which to gain teaching experience over a two week period. The role and involvement of parents in the education of children in this setting is explored in depth by students and their tutors in preparation for the placement, and in a written assignment on completion of the placement period.

In addition to the above, a specific programme of one week duration is organised each year for all B. Ed. 3 students on the themes of "Preparation for Life in the Workplace" and "The Professional Development of the Teacher". Students are provided with an exciting programme during Week 12 of Semester 5, during which they are afforded opportunities to explore in detail the issue of parental involvement in the education process through the medium of workshops and lectures given by invited guests, such as the INTO, the National Parents' Council-Primary and experienced coordinators of Parent Support Courses in the mid west region.

A Teacher's Account of Teacher Education and Preparation for Working with Parents

In order to ascertain how theory as outlined above is transferred to practice in light of the classroom realities faced by newly qualified teachers the INTO Education Committee sought and received the following account from a teacher in her first year of teaching:
The topic of parents was dealt with under many different subject areas, during my time in St. Patrick's College from 1994-1997. As a B. Ed. student in these years, parental involvement was briefly addressed in such subject areas as Home-School links, shared reading, the changing structures of Boards of Management and so on.

In my opinion, however, none of these courses truly prepared me or my colleagues, for the daily encounters we now experience with parents. Furthermore, my fellow colleagues and I are very apprehensive about the quickly approaching parent teacher meetings. My own personal anxieties regarding these meetings were exacerbated recently in the staffroom when a fellow teacher proposed the withdrawal of the one-to-one format, in favour of a group session. How intimidating for an inexperienced young teacher! The practicalities of addressing the parents of a first Communion or Confirmation class, I still have to learn.

I believe that an actual module based on all aspects of parental involvement in the day to day running of the classroom, should be slotted into the B.Ed course immediately. This should be a practical and useful guide, upon which the newly qualified teachers can refer back to when needed.

Conclusion

It is clear from these course outlines that parental involvement in education is a topic that receives a great deal of focus in Colleges of Education. Theoretical perspectives are presented to students and practical experience is provided especially in the second of the two accounts presented above. Within the constraints of a three year B. Ed. with its demanding academic and professional programme it is doubtful if a great deal more could even be attempted.

In recent years the INTO has examined the pre-service education of primary teachers in it publication "Educating Teachers: Reform and
Renewal". This report drew attention to change in Irish education, including changing relationships between schools and parents and demanded new approaches and responses from initial, induction and inservice teacher education. It also examined in detail the issue of the induction of new teachers and made recommendations for change. The needs of teachers in the area of inservice education was considered in an INTO report "The Professional Development of Teachers" (1994).

One of the major criticisms of teacher education raised in all these documents is the lack of a continuum in teacher education which has unsatisfactory induction procedures and inadequate inservice provision. Perhaps nowhere is this brought into sharper focus than in the case of teacher preparation for parental involvement in schools.

'Teaching Practice' is for the vast majority of teachers the only systematic and planned practical preparation for life in school. However, due to a number of factors including an overwhelming focus on lesson preparation, delivery and evaluation, the short duration of such practices in any one school and a failure to involve student teachers fully in the life of the school, issues such as parental involvement or dealing directly with parents rarely impact on students in this setting.

In considering this and other issues the INTO made a number of recommendations in this regard to reform initial teacher education and argued for a four year B.Ed, course with an extended teaching practice element to be added. This proposal has a number of merits in that it would permit student teachers to develop a more detailed knowledge of home background, provide opportunities for encounters with parents in a school context and enable a connection to be established between theory and practice. This could be achieved in the context of an improved and extended reflection particularly with the assistance of an experienced teacher mentor.

In its examination of induction procedures the INTO put forward a similar criticism. The first years of teaching for many young teachers are a time of survival, where full class responsibility and the lack of an
appointed mentor teacher can be a "reality shock" that causes much of the impact of teacher education to be washed out and replaced by narrow, pragmatic, rule of thumb practice. Meetings with parents (class group, individual, formal or informal) are an important feature of teacher's professional life. Yet rarely, if ever, do young teachers get an opportunity to be viewed by a more experienced colleague who could provide feedback which could build professional self-confidence and morale and help overcome difficulties. Such a "sink-or-swim attitude towards young teachers is perhaps a reason why many fail to develop a confidence and an authority in the early years of their careers.

Inservice education arrangements remain ad hoc and require urgent reform. The INTO has argued strongly in the past for the establishment of a national structure for inservice education serviced by a Director for Inservice Education who would plan, develop and implement inservice education courses for teachers. In recent years the INTO's Inservice Education Department has provided a vital service in this area but, as presently funded and staffed, cannot meet all requirements. Government commitment to parental involvement will to some extent be judged by its readiness to provide for meaningful and professionally rewarding inservice education opportunities for teachers.
CHAPTER 6
PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS


However, if parents are to participate in a meaningful way that benefits their children's educational progress then they must be informed about the school, the education system and how it operates. Schools as professionally staffed organisations, have a responsibility to communicate their activities to parents and to maintain a dialogue with parents about educational matters. In order to support this dialogue there is a need for established structures that will foster and support the educational organisation of parents in schools.

In consideration of this role the Primary Education Review Body (1990) made the following recommendations:

We recommend that.....
Board of Management seek genuine partnership and participation between parents and teachers in promoting the success of the schools in all their work and in their relationships with the community.

AH schools have a clearly defined policy and programme for productive parental involvement.

Schools be encouraged, subject at all times to the professional autonomy of the teacher, to involve parents in support roles within the classroom.

Schools establish direct communication with the general body of parents
through regular meetings with parents and parent associations.

Following the publication of this report in 1990 the National Parents' Council Primary published a policy document, "Parent Associations: Making them Work". The production of this document was also based on the Programme for Economic and Social Progress which recognised the constitutional role of parents as "the primary educator of the child" and recommended that there should be an active Parents' Association in connection with each individual school, to promote and develop effective and positive participation by parents in education at school level.

The rationale underpinning the need for a Parents' Association is two-fold. Firstly, because school is regarded as an extension of the home, and active partnership between parents and teachers makes this a reality especially in the eyes of the child who is central to the education process. Secondly, parental interest and attitudes to school, to books and to education, influence children's educational outcomes.

The aims of a Parents' Association are outlined as follows:
- to represent the views of parents;
- to inform parents of developments in education and in the school;
- to foster cooperation between parents, teachers and school management.

The development of these aims is considered under three headings.

1. Promoting Parent Confidence
The sharing of difficulties and concerns enable parents to benefit from the experience of others. Confidence by parents in their own abilities needs to be developed and the importance of the parent in the life of the child needs to be stressed.

2. Providing Information
The provision of information to parents is central in the development of an effective Parents' Association. Information on general topics relating
to school life including homework, child development, and suitable nutrition can be provided for parents along with information on a wide range of other matters of interest. Parental attitude to the content and aims of the curriculum will be influenced by the provision of knowledge and the development of understanding which will in turn deepen the understanding of the role of the teacher and the school in the child's education and development.

3. Forming Relationships

The development of relationships is fundamental to the life of any organisation and a vital factor in building relationships is communication. The National Parents' Council-Primary has identified the following set of communication systems as vital in that effect:

- between the body of parents and their elected committee;
- with the elected parents on the board of management;
- with the National Parents Council Primary delegates; and
- with any subcommittees which may be formed for particular purposes.

In order that the best results can be achieved for all the parents of a school it is essential that there exists a cohesive parents' group. Key relationships that must be established include relationships with the school principal, the teaching staff and the Board of Management.

Circular 16/73 which outlines the duties and responsibilities of principal teachers and teachers in charge of national schools states that;

"The Principal Teacher should seek to win the confidence, cooperation and good will of the parents of pupils and should be prepared to discuss with them, individually or otherwise, any matter relevant to the education of children."

The National Parents' Council-Primary document suggests that the parents' committee might delegate a member to liaise with the principal teacher and discuss activities. It notes that "the opinion of the principal about any proposal is extremely valuable due to her/his experience and
knowledge of both the practical and educational implications of the project for the school”. Conversely it is recommended that a parents' committee should encourage the principal to ask the committee for advice or assistance when required.

A further range of activities that can be used to broaden and deepen relationships within schools include meetings between parents and the school staff or Board of Management for an exchange of views on policy and practice, special projects and social functions. At all times the benefit of the children attending the school is the focus of such activities.

**Representation for Parents**

Parents' Associations have the facility to affiliate with the National Parents' Council-Primary which provides access to information and advice on educational issues. The National Parents' Council-Primary is also a recognised partner in education which provides for consultation with the Department of Education, managerial bodies, teachers' organisations and other relevant groups.

The National Parents' Council-Primary is a national organisation with committees at county level. Delegates are elected to County Committees by Parents' Associations affiliated to the National Parents' Council-Primary, the number of delegates being determined by the size of the school. The National Executive of the National Parents' Council-Primary comprises representatives of each county committee in addition to officers who are elected. Delegates to county committees communicate with the parents in their school through the presentations of views and the provision of information. There is also an annual delegate conference which considers issues of policy.

**The Operation of a Parents' Association**

The National Parents' Council-Primary has outlined a number of issues involved in the effective operation of a parents association. Its focus is on the Parents' Association committee which represents the interests of all parents with children in the school. Among the issues identified as
significant are:

**Representation** – ensuring that an elected committee is representative of the general body of parents.

**Participation** – encouraging participation rather than depending on individuals to volunteer services.

**Commitment** – individuals who are generous with their time, energy and skills and who are conscientious in their work.

**Turnover of numbers** – a mixture of change with continuity is viewed as ideal.

**Planning** – a programme of work will include annual events such as the AGM and projects which may be undertaken from time to time.

**Subcommittee Work** – Allows for sharing of work and the involvement of individuals who may not be part of the committee. Activities may include fundraising, social events, extra activities for pupils after school and special interest groups.

**Debate** – an effective association is one which provides an opportunity to voice ideas and learn from the experience of others.

**Communication** – effective communication entails keeping parents informed of representations and ongoing work. The process of communication between the principal and the committee is viewed as particularly important.

**Consultation** – change takes time to be understood and
accepted therefore frequent consultation promotes knowledge and understanding and lessens the potential for conflict.

In the past a small number of difficulties arose concerning parental involvement in schools and in particular with the establishment of Parents' Associations. In 1991, the INTO was contacted by the National Parents' Council to state that in their opinion a number of primary school principals were obstructing the establishment of parents' associations in the schools in which they worked. The INTO took the view that while it would not be appropriate to advise principals regarding the establishment of Parents' Associations it did not condone obstruction of any kind.

The INTO is confident that such difficulties will be consigned to historical accounts of parental involvements along with the concept (however, humorous the intention) that "parents are a necessary evil" (Griffin 1991). Parents' Associations should not be viewed as a vehicle for parent power but rather for the building and reinforcing of genuine partnership dedicated to the achievement of quality in education.

Although the majority of Parents' Associations in schools affiliate to the National Parents' Council it is important to bear in mind that there are a number of other national associations to which local school based associations may affiliate. These include the Federation of Catholic Primary Schools, Parents' Councils and the National Association of Parents. However, the National Parents' Council is the body which the Department of Education would normally consult in relation to issues of concern to parents.

A number of Constitutions for Parents' Associations were received by the INTO Education Committee and are outlined in Appendix for reference purposes.
The Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme

The Home-School-Community Liaison programme was first established on a pilot basis by the Department of Education during the school year 1990-91 as one initiative to counter the effects of educational disadvantage. In pursuit of this objective it sought to increase cooperation between participating schools, parents and other community agencies. Initially the scheme was confined to primary schools only and provision was made for thirty posts of Home-School-Community Liaison Coordinators who were replaced in their schools by temporary teachers. Seven clusters of schools were selected to participate in the project. These were situated in Outer North Dublin, Inner North Dublin, Inner South Dublin, West Tallaght, Clondalkin, Cork and Limerick.

A National Steering Committee was established to advise on all aspects of the programme including aims, objectives, implementation and monitoring. A National Coordinator and subsequently an Assistant National Coordinator were appointed whose task was to advise on and support the development of the Scheme, liaise with participants at school based level and provide linkages with national level. Included in the Steering Committee were representatives of the Departments of Education and Health, the Education Research Centre, the Economic and Social Research Institute, School Management Organisations, the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CORI), the Teachers' Unions, Parents' Councils and the Gardai.

The aims of the Scheme were outlined in an explanatory memorandum which issued to schools and are as follows:

1. to maximise active participation of the children in the project schools, in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk;
2. to promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children;

3. to raise awareness in parents of their own capabilities to enhance their children's educational process and to assist them in developing relevant skills;

4. to enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post compulsory education and to third level and their life long attitudes to learning; and

5. to disseminate the positive outcomes of the project throughout the school system generally.

The work of the Home-School-Community Coordinators is based on these aims and coordinators are guided in their work by the National Coordinators. These in turn report to the Steering Committee and to the Department of Education. The Steering Committee continues to meet twice a year, since the scheme was made permanent in 1994.

The Role of the National Coordinator

The role of the National Coordinator for the scheme is defined in the Explanatory Memorandum for schools as "to advise, support and animate the local coordinators on an individual, local and school cluster basis and act as a liaison person between the cluster areas and the National Steering Committee of the project".

This was to be achieved through individual meetings, cluster group meetings, overall net working and inservice. The focus of the work was on listening to current concerns, hearing needs and fears, sharing good practice and its processes and examining with local coordinators how to establish and sustain programmes, reach out to parents, give a sense of ownership to the local community, network and meet, plan and evaluate, define and meet training needs.
The Role of Local Coordinators

The task of local coordinators was to reinforce cooperation between home school and community in the education process. Their duties were outlined by the Department of Education as follows:

1. Assisting and supporting the principal in the Development of a Home-School-Community Liaison policy.

2. Supporting class teachers in working with parents/families;

3. Establishing contact with parents;

4. Identifying parents who would act as leaders' and be likely to influence others in contributing to the educational development of children;

5. Encouraging and helping parents in organising groups for children under school age;

6. Establishing links with preschools and with voluntary and statutory groups in the area;

7. Organising and facilitating activities to affirm and develop parents' roles as educators and as partners with the school in the children's education;

8. Addressing the needs of children with poor attendance and other problems;

9. Keeping the local committee informed of progress and receiving proposals from the local committees;

10. Preparing such reports as may be required from time to time by the National Steering Committee and the Evaluation Team.

11. Developing attitudes of cooperation in and between the home, the
school and the community.

The Home-School-Community Coordinators organised programmes accordingly having identified needs with the school and wider communities. In order to ascertain how Home-School-Community coordinators and their teaching colleagues viewed their role, the INTO requested coordinators and staff representatives to provide an overview of what they considered the role to be. This overview is included in the INTO CEC Report 1995, and the following summary highlights the main points.

The Home-School teachers perceive their role as follows:

The Home-School teacher develops a relationship, built on trust, with the parents of the children attending the school. The Home-School teacher builds this partnership by forming bonds of trust between home and school and through making the school a more welcoming place for parents. The partnership approach helps parents to develop a positive attitude towards the school and education, and assists them to understand their role as the primary educator of the child. In providing support to the school, the Home-School teacher's role includes assisting the class teachers in understanding the realities of the pupils' home life, assisting the teachers in liaising with parents to address educational and discipline problems, and keeping teachers informed of progress and developments in the home. The Home-School teacher also assists in the development of school policy on home-school relationships.

Class teachers, in general, supported this view of the role of the Home-School teacher. Nevertheless, there appears to be an element of dissatisfaction in some schools with the direction of the scheme and with the perceived lack of control of the scheme by class teachers. This dissatisfaction is caused by a number of factors. For example, not all school staffs appear to be familiar with the aims and objectives of the scheme. Some class teachers believe that there appeared to be a top down approach which inhibited the development of school based programmes. Class teachers identified the need for staff development and inservice on a whole school basis to ensure that all teachers were familiar with the objectives of the scheme, and with a view to assisting
schools in drawing up school policies on home-school liaison.

However, class teachers also responded positively to the programme by acknowledging that the fact that the Home-School teacher can act as mediator between parents and teachers creates a more positive relationship in general with parents. The programme also helps to reduce stress on teachers. The majority of class teachers view the scheme as a long term one and are confident that, as such, the programme would produce results in the long term.

Early Start Project

The Government of Renewal policy document commits the government to the further expansion of Pre-school education. A pilot pre-school intervention programme, Early Start, was first established in designated disadvantaged areas in September 1994 in eight schools and was extended to another thirty two schools in September 1995. The Early Start philosophy views learning as a guided discovery through a series of structured activities, aimed at the harmonious development of the whole child. The children are respected as active agents in their own development within a learning environment which encourages creative self expression through language, music, drama, art and physical education. The pre-school curriculum makes language and numeracy skills a priority and includes an appropriate introduction to the Irish language.

Parental involvement is seen as a key element of the scheme and an annual grant is paid to each full unit for the development of parental involvement. A grant of £1,500 has been given annually since the beginning of the project. Early Start involves parents at three levels: parents belong to an advisory group in each centre, parents participate in the everyday running and organisation of the centre and join their children in many of the centre's activities. This creates a shared exchange of expertise between the centre and the parents, helping parents to develop a fuller understanding of their child's learning needs and allowing the centre's activities to benefit from the parents' unique experiences and insight.
There is also a parental representative on the National Monitoring Committee in addition to a representative from the National Parents' Council. The involvement of older children in the community is also encouraged, which includes the senior children in the schools in which the classes are based and transition year pupils from local post-primary schools.

Building connections between the Fre-school and other developments in the local community strengthens the impact of Pre-school intervention. This places Early Start within the wider context of the Government's Local and Urban Renewal Development Programme, particularly with reference to disadvantaged communities. Early Start is one element of an integrated approach to education, training and employment initiatives for the entire community.

The initiative for the establishment of the Early Start pilot project programme came from the evaluation of the Home-School-Community Liaison Programme. The Home-School-Community Liaison Programme was established in 1990 as a pilot programme in developing relations between parents and teachers as a means to enhance children's educational achievements and opportunities. The Home School Community Liaison Programme, however, could not, in itself break the cycle of disadvantage. Schools which are participating in the Home-School-Community Liaison Programme have, therefore, been given priority when Early Start classes were being allocated to schools. Early Start is an educational service, targeted at children who are considered 'at risk' of not benefiting from the educational opportunities presented to them in school. Early Start caters for three year old children who live in the catchment area of the schools in which the Early Start classes are located.
Parental involvement in the education of their children begins before children are enrolled in school and should continue during their educational career. Evidence suggests that the early years of children's learning have a significant impact on future educational attainment. Responding to children's behaviours, encouraging exploration and play and elaborating on children's language are particularly important in this context. Lack of congruence between home and school has been identified as one factor that contributes to under-achievement in school. It is essential, therefore, that children should be familiarised with the work of school in early childhood education.

This chapter sets out two of the various programmes that have been developed for the purposes of involving parents in their children's education, and describes an INTO initiative which provides helpful information to parents of children beginning school. The two programmes are presented as written for parents.

A Programme for Parents - Pre-school Stage Western Education and Library Board, Northern Ireland

READING

This programme does not attempt to teach parents HOW to teach reading. It does, however, attempt to show how parents can provide experiences which enable the child to develop towards reading.

To get a child ready for reading, there are many simple, playful little things that parents can do before school and without interfering in teachers' methods of introducing and teaching reading. However, first of all, it is important to realise that successful learning depends on the child feeling happy and secure:-
Have you ever thought what is involved in learning to read? Here are some of those things:

LISTENING
TALKING
LOOKING
WRITING

LISTENING
Much learning depends on the child listening to teachers, whether that is the parents or the teacher at school. You can help develop the child's listening by talking, by playing 'sound' games, by reading stories, by telling nursery rhymes and so on. Do remember that a child has to learn how to listen, and for many children it is a skill which needs time to develop.

TALKING
One of the ways in which children come to understand their world is by adults talking to them about it. Children need adults who TALK, LISTEN, REPLY and DISCUSS. All this plays a big part in extending a child's vocabulary and developing language - which, in turn, will make learning to read that bit easier.

LOOKING
Children approaching reading will find recognising letters and words much easier if they have learned to look carefully at things around them - particularly if they have had a chance to play with looking at shapes and matching them such as picture dominoes, picture lotto, snap, simple jigsaws, lego and so on.

WRITING
It is important that children come to understand that writing is talk written down and that before anything is read it has first of all to be written. Let children see you write down their 'talk' - for example, their name on a birthday card or on their painting
WHERE TO START

There are countless opportunities during the ordinary course of any day for children to learn about reading - both inside and outside the home.

Inside the Home

It is amazing how much we read! Most house parents say they don't have the time to read - they probably mean they haven't time to read for enjoyment. We all forget how often we must read:

(1) For information
(2) For instructions
(3) For directions

Your example is important - let the children see you read sometimes. Tell them what you are reading and why - for example:

- a cookery book - to follow a recipe
- a map - to find out where exactly someone lives.
- a newspaper - for the news

Involving them is important

Encourage the child to look at things you read. Why not even stick some labels and captions around the house? Your child will eventually show an interest in the print, and may point to a word asking "What does it say?" When a child does this, she/he has really made considerable progress towards reading, for now she/he understands what the funny black squiggles are all about. Before long she/he will be able to memorise a few words which she/he has met frequently - for example, her/his own name, names on packets, labels on cupboards etc. Show her/him an interesting picture - for example, in a newspaper: an escaped animal, a sick child, a funny clown, and tell the story. Look at a catalogue together, for example, to select new shoes.

Outside the home

From time to time, point out some of these signs/symbols, and their meanings to the child, and read out some of the shop names. Remember children 'read' pictures, signs and symbols as we read words. Pictures,
signs, symbols, give a child new thoughts and ideas. A child who is relating the different activities and objects in a picture is, in a sense, reading. She/he is getting thoughts from picture symbols, instead of from printed symbols. This 'picture reading' is one step towards acquiring the skill of reading. Isn't it amazing the opportunities we miss! All that children need is someone to point things out to them, and make learning fun.

Learning comes from everyday situations where the parents and children are involved together, because both are interested.

Getting the most out of books is important
Books are going to play a big part in the child's life, particularly when she/he goes to school. However, it can be most helpful if she/he is first introduced to books at home. You can look at picture books together, you can tell her/him stories, you can read stories. If this is done in a happy atmosphere, and in a spirit of fun, it will mean that books will have pleasant associations. But you can do more. When sharing books together in these early years, there are opportunities for preparing your child for the real business of learning to read at school. Here are some suggestions.

Looking at the Pictures
Talk about pictures in picture books or magazines. Get your child to tell you what is happening in the picture and sometimes make up stories about it together. The family photograph album - children love to look at real pictures, especially of themselves and their own families. Imagine the fun of remembering and recalling events like birthdays and other celebrations and recognising relations!

Collections of old Christmas cards and pictures provide all sorts of talking points.

Children particularly love real stories about themselves.
Telling Stories to your Child

Children love to be told stories and their obvious enjoyment can be seen in the expressions on their faces. They enjoy stories even more if a parent plays the part of one of the characters. Later the child may like to take a part.

Prepare the story beforehand if possible. In that way, you can become more involved, and avoid the danger of perhaps forgetting the middle or the ending. As you and your child get good at sharing stories, sometimes stop before the end and ask her/him to guess what the ending might be. Get your child to tell you about her/his favourite person in a story, for example, ask her/him questions like - "What colour was his hair?", "Do you think she was kind?" and so on.

Sometimes it is a good idea to ask your child to re-tell the story in her/his own words. You might have to help her/him to get the story in the right order by comments such as "Yes- but do you remember what happened after that?" It's worth remember that parents often find telling stories a useful way of dealing with difficult situations such as washing a child's hair, or getting a thorn out of a finger.

Reading Stories to your Child

Read stories as often as possible. Any time is a good time - don't confine stories to bedtime. Make sure that your child can see the words as you read. Sit her/him on your lap, so that you are "reading" the book together. Let your child choose the book she/he wants you to read, even if it is the same one you've read many times before. Your child will eventually get to know a favourite story by heart, and then she/he may pretend to read from the book. This "knowing what the words say" is a step towards ability to read.

When you are reading to your child, let her/him turn some of the pages. Talk to her/him about things like 'start at the front of the book', 'turn to the next page'. Sometimes, (but not always) run your finger, or the child's, under the words, so that the child can understand the left to right movement that is involved in reading. Your child will have little
idea of what a word is. She/he must be shown that these printed patterns, or black squiggles, are letters which form words, and words convey meaning.

Sometimes at the end of a story, or before you start, pick out a familiar word - e.g. Daddy, Mammy, Baby. Let the child point to the word and say it with you. This is not teaching the child to read, but you are making her/him aware of the printed form of words.

A child who enjoys being read to, will eventually want to read for herself/himself, and the actual task of learning the skills involved in reading will come more easily to her/him. A love of books is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your child.

Fun with Words

Traditional rhymes and poems appeal to children because of the rhythm, repetition and rhyme, and at the same time all of these make remembering that much easier. Children enjoy the sounds of certain words even before they understand the meanings fully.

Find some nursery rhymes you can enjoy saying together. Sometimes have a game of listening to the words that sound the same, for example: Hickory dickory __________ .

**The mouse ran up the __________ .**

and wait for the child to supply the rhyming word.

Young children enjoy playing with sounds and words. From time to time, ask your child to listen to the sounds in words, for example "Listen Jane, there's a sound like your name in 'rain' - listen Jane, rain". Have fun with words!

Selecting Books for your Child

Variety is the key word.

- Board books (particularly for very young children).
- Picture books with words.
- Picture books without words.
- Story books (simple and colourful).
- Nursery rhymes/Finger rhymes/Jingles and Songs.
- Pop-up books (to be handled with care).

In addition it is a good idea to have a range of catalogues - (mail order, toy catalogues etc), for children to browse through and look at their favourite things.

Books with other uses
- Books and loose pages to scribble and draw in.
- Old catalogues and magazines to cut pictures out of.
- Scrap books to stick pictures in:
Sometimes a page could be entitled "Toys" or "Food" or "Animals".

Advice on obtaining books

**Borrowing**
Visit the public library with your child and get to know the people there, especially the children's librarian. They will be delighted to advise and help you.

**Buying**
Most good book shops carry a selection of suitable books for young children, but don't take the book by its cover! Check that the pictures are simple and interesting, with not too much print.

You will also find the teachers at your local school willing to help.

**TOWARDS WRITING**
To young children, writing means scribbling, drawing, painting or even making a pattern on a misted window. Every little mark or dot has a meaning for them - they know what it says.

To a parent, writing often means shopping lists, notes for the milkman, letters to relations, etc. Tell the child what you are doing, and why.

Good writing habits begin early when a child first begins to scribble.
Guide your child gently and accurately from the start.

Handling Objects
When parents first give a baby objects to touch, to hold, and to play with, they do not think they are providing her/him with practice in the skills which are essential to reading, writing, and counting later on. But the child needs experience in handling lots of different objects - of all shapes, and colours - in order to get hands and eyes working together. Start with the child handling larger objects: for example, building blocks/stacking beakers/empty containers/boxes. Gradually introduce smaller items: for example, jigsaws/building bricks/posting shapes/inset trays, cotton reels etc.

Then move on to: threading a shoe lace/threading beads/cotton reels/buttons; even make threading materials by punching holes in card. These activities are such fun in themselves, and the child is learning many new skills - hand/eye co-ordination, fine muscle control, the ability to recognise and copy.

Before You Begin
First of all, a child needs the right tools and a safe place where she/he can use them freely. Keep a good store of paper. In doing so, the walls may escape! Collect loose pages, backs of used paper, bits of cardboard cut into interesting shapes. Don't throw card away! Save it for a rainy day! Ask the local D.I.Y. shop for disused wallpaper books - they make excellent writing/drawing materials. Use your own left-over wallpaper.

A Word of Caution
While the use of paint, markers and scissors is to be encouraged, ensure that you have the time to remain close by - otherwise the undesirable may happen! Scribbling is a stage of writing, so when children can hold a fat crayon, let them scribble and 'write' on large pieces of paper, perhaps on the floor. Old newspaper is excellent for this beginning stage.

Many children like to start with large circular movements. If it appears
that they need help to get started, get down beside them and show them the movements. They will copy you. When they tire of the floor or the table, they may like to try a blackboard and easel, especially when it comes to painting. This allows children a different approach, greater space and freedom, and control over the crayon or brush.

Painting, making shapes and patterns in sand and water, (not forgetting the seaside), working with plasticene, dough or clay, all provide the experience of making shapes and lines later needed in writing. Colouring in and cutting out can also help hand and finger skills, as do playing finger games, with exaggerated use of fingers - for example "One finger, one thumb keeping moving"... "Two little Dicky Birds"... "Incy Wincy Spider".

Drawing can be great fun. It's another way of talking. You can even get them to talk about their drawings. Sometimes children will draw complete 'pictures' - other times they will love to fill in the detail on large drawings. You don't need to be very artistic, just make them large. Here are a few examples:

...ask child to put in - windows on a house.
...ask child to put in - apples on a tree.
...ask child to put in - eyes on a face.

Hi their own drawings, children make many different patterns - some of which will be especially useful when they come to writing.

Getting Closer to Writing

It is useful, early on, to encourage a left to right direction, so show the child where to start. A dot can be a useful starting point.

Get the child to trace over patterns with finger first - then trace over with a crayon. Pattern writing helps develop control over the crayon or pencil which will be used later on. Make use of simple letter shapes, which also make interesting patterns.
Once children have got started on any of these activities, they will experiment on their own. Encourage them by showing interest and giving lots of praise.

Left-Handedness

It should be made clear that all suggestions are intended for right and left-handed children, but the following comments may be particularly helpful to parents of left-handed children. It is not always easy to establish whether the child is left-handed or right-handed. Most babies start off using both hands to grasp with. It may be some time before the child shows a definite preference for one hand.

How to Help?

Ideally left-handed persons should have tools designed specially to meet their needs. For example, a young left-handed child needs a pair of left-handed scissors. These can be obtained from most good Art and Craft shops.

Ensure that children hold the pencil properly from the very earliest age - whichever hand they use. A pencil is controlled by the fingers - not by the hand.

Demonstrate with the left hand when showing left-handed children how to do something. If they are using a crayon, brush or pencil at a table, left-handed children need lots of space on the left side. Place the paper well away from the body - otherwise they cover the work, or end up working almost vertically.

Towards Number

For those of us brought up on 'sums' and 'tables' it is difficult to appreciate the new approach to the teaching and learning of Mathematics. It is based on the belief that children need experience in 'doing' in order to understand. Mathematics is about size, shape, space, quantity and capacity as well as about number, and in order to learn about these things, children need lots of opportunity to play. Some of the best play things you can give them include those things which we
so often dump out without thinking - empty boxes, empty cartons, squeezy bottles, wrapping paper, off-cuts of wood and much more - materials that we don't like our children using because they mess our nice clean floor. For example - sand, water, paint, dough ... As well as the opportunity to play with these kinds of materials, children benefit greatly from talking about play to an adult. Try to join in this play, especially when they want you.

Talking to them about an experience and questioning them about what might happen 'if' are crucial parts of learning.

Children move objects around, fit them together, or inside one another. They use empty match boxes, larger cardboard boxes and all household items within reach, They also explore all the various toys they are given, particularly the simple ones like building bricks and blocks that can be fitted together to make 'stairs' or 'towers'. They are learning about size, shape, space, quantity... the learning is endless.

It may be difficult for parents to see how playing with objects and toys can contribute to an understanding of Maths, but the intention here is to show how children learn to think mathematically. Mathematical thinking really starts when children begin to compare things with their hands, eyes and the words they are learning.

For example, when children pick up two bricks to bang together, or toddlers fit two rings to put on a plastic pyramid, they have discovered a 'set' of two things. As children get older and play with a variety of toys and observe everyday things around them, they will naturally begin to develop an idea of sets - that is a collection or group of anything at all which have something in common. For the under-fives, the recognition of such groups is the first step on the road to an understanding of number. Let your child see you sort things into their rightful place around the house.
Things to Try

Let children help to unpack the shopping, putting tins in one place, the packets in another.

When children play with farm animals, make an area for pigs, another for cows, etc. and suggest that they put the correct animals in each field. When tidying up, put books together in one place, boxes in another.

Children love sorting into sets, so it is useful to have a collection of a wide variety of odds and ends for this purpose. Many should only be used with adult supervision.

Things to Collect

- bottle-tops
- feathers
- acorns
- feathers
- shells
- empty cartons
- small plastic animals
- (yogurt pots, ice-cream butter/margarine etc)
- small bricks
- plastic spoons
- cotton reels
- egg cups
- corks
- lolly sticks
- plastic fruit
- plastic boxes
- real or plastic coins
- real or plastic cutlery
- plastic clothes pegs
- paper bags
- lids
- card
- ribbons
- wood

While sorting these objects into sets, the child will come across a wide variety of language that will be extremely useful in other number learning. For example, children become fascinated by the colours of these objects. They become intrigued by finding things that look the 'same' or 'different'. They become aware of 'more' and 'less'.

What colours?

Red/Yellow/Blue/Green - the common colours.

Children vary in the age at which they become interested in colour, so
never force them. However, because most children hear colour language in their own homes and elsewhere, they often pick up the names of colours, and repeat them. This is no indication of a sound knowledge of colours.

Parents can help children to learn colours. When they seem ready, get them to match colours, for example, all the reds together, all the blues... Tell them the name of one colour at a time. If it is red, have a game of looking for other red things around the house. When dressing the child, use the colours of clothes to reinforce the idea of colour.

Same or Different?
Get any group of objects together, two of which must be the same colour. Ask the child to pick out the two that are the same colour. Get another group of objects together, two of which must be the same size. Ask the child to pick out the two that are the same size.

Use a group of objects which are exactly the same, and include one which is quite different. See if your child can spot the one which is different, or 'not the same'. Don't forget to take your turn! (Children will understand "not the same" before they understand "different").

More or Less?
Place eight objects (blocks) in one set and two in another. Ask the child which has more. You may have to tell them the correct answer. Repeat with different sets of numbers (seven and three, six and four). Try it with sweets.

Play the same game, another time, this time asking which has less. Remember, the word 'less' will take a lot longer to learn.

The remainder of this programme looks at each new activity under separate headings:

Shape
Size
Position
Time
Counting

Shape

Everywhere you look there are shapes, but children will not notice them until an adult draws their attention to them and talks about them. The kitchen alone has many shapes - round lids, square boxes, tiles, etc, rectangular doors, books and so on. From time to time, we should draw attention to the shapes of these things and name the shape.

Useful Vocabulary

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<td>circle</td>
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Cut out large cardboard shapes and let children have fun playing with them. Watch how they play, and you will be surprised at the discoveries made. You can join in later. You can begin by talking about the names of these shapes. Your child might like to match the shapes that look the same.

Work on one shape to begin with. Let the child pick out one shape this time. Tell the child the name of the shape. For example, if she/he picks the circle, look out for things that are round - ball, orange, plate, rim of cup, wheels of different toys, traffic signs and lights, road signs etc. Similarly with square shapes - building blocks, tops of boxes, window panes, and rectangles - door, table-top, different boxes, television screen and triangles, - patterns on jumpers, roof, road signs, top of pencil, etc.

Make pictures using all the shapes: Your child might like to talk about shapes she/he is using. She/he might like to colour in shapes that you draw for her/him. Let her/him cut them out if she/he wishes but don't expect straight edges!
If your child has a set of building bricks of different shapes, she/he can use them for some of the games.

Remember: The ability to draw shapes is sometimes slow to develop but it is not necessary to be able to draw shapes in order to enjoy learning their names or properties. Only basic shapes have been mentioned here - your children will love looking for all kinds of different shapes - leaves, clouds, puddles - the world is full of shapes.

Size

Adults are generally careless about how they use their vocabulary. We use words like "big" when we really mean 'tall' or 'long' - for example, we talk about the big train, when we really mean long train, and the big giraffe, when we really mean tall giraffe. We should try to be more accurate for the sake of the young learner.

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you may think of others.

Look at two objects of different sizes, e.g. a match box and a cornflakes box. Ask the child which is big and which is small. (Encourage the child to reply in a full sentence). Let the child try this game with you.

Put out three objects of different sizes. Ask the child which one is the biggest and which is smallest. Take the middle-sized one and ask the child to find something smaller and something bigger than it.

Give the child something small, e.g. a match-box or a yogurt lid. Show her/him how she/he can fill or cover it with the smallest objects she/he can find from her/his own collection, (e.g. buttons, smartie-tops, lego...).
Find pairs of things that look alike but are of different weights, e.g. an empty bottle and one full of water, a tennis ball and a sponge ball, a football and a balloon.

Ask your child "Which one is lighter?"..."which one is heavier?"

Don't forget to talk about heavy and light when using the kitchen scales, bathroom scales and on the see-saw.

Show children pictures of objects. Ask them:"- Which is the bigger - a cup or a saucepan? - a glove or a cardigan? Let them ask you some questions. Next time round, ask "Which is smaller - a cup or a saucepan?" Children are particularly interested in observing and comparing the size of the different members of their own family and their belongings. For example, they will say "Daddy is the biggest", "The baby gets the little cup". There are so many opportunities to introduce appropriate size words so try not to miss them!

Position

Children's vocabulary and ability to express themselves adequately is greatly helped by words which denote the relationship of people, places or things to each other. For example,

- the boy is first in the line
- the shop is behind Granny's house
- the spoon is under the table.

Parents often think "My child knows those words". But are you sure? Note that if you say "Put the spoon IN the drawer" the child may put it in the right place because she/he knows that is where the spoons are kept - and not because she/he understands the word 'IN'. Therefore you get the child to put the spoon in some place it usually does not go. Watch what happens. As well as learning important words, you and your child will have lots of fun playing these word games. Remember to keep to the words she/he knows until she/he gains confidence.
Useful Vocabulary

in on above over right
inside on top of below under left
before first beside underneath middle
after second outside up start
third upside finish down

Some of these may not be understood until children are a good bit older.

Things To Do

Play a game of hide-and-seek. The parent hides teddy (in an obvious place) and calls "Where is the teddy?" Encourage your child to answer in a sentence. "The teddy is ON the window-sill". Make up lots of games using slightly harder words each time. Let the child hide the objects sometimes and you describe where it is.

Put out a number of small toys and empty containers on the coffee table. Encourage your child to follow simple instructions. For example, "Put the block beside the tin". "Put the car underneath the box". As she/he gets good at this game, introduce two instructions (this will not be easy!). "Put the spoon in the box under the table". Don't forget to take your turn at following your child's instructions.

When out walking or driving along in the car, notice things which are in front of or behind or beside you. When tidying the toys talk about putting away the small toys first, the big toys next. You and your child will find lots of opportunities to 'play' with these words. Enjoy it!

Time

One of the more difficult ideas for a child to learn is that of time. Both 'the telling of the time' from the clock and also an understanding that an hour, day, week, month or year really may take rather a long time. In fact, a child may reach seven or eight before any real understanding of these is mastered. Young children hear time language being used by their families and may repeat as if they understand. They hear a parent say things like - "Next week it is John's birthday". "You start school next September". "Mammy will be home at 6 o'clock". "I'll be with you
in a minute”.

A child will soon learn the routine of the day through parents talking about such landmarks as Dinner-time, Tea-time, Bed-time and others.

**Useful Vocabulary**

days of the week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>today</th>
<th>morning</th>
<th>fast</th>
<th>minute</th>
<th>week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yesterday</td>
<td>afternoon</td>
<td>slow</td>
<td>second</td>
<td>fortnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tomorrow</td>
<td>tonight</td>
<td>quickly</td>
<td>hour</td>
<td>month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now</td>
<td>later</td>
<td>slowly</td>
<td>soon</td>
<td>year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Things To Do**

Certain things will happen at the same time each day which could be noted on the clock. For example, when the hands show 2 o'clock it is time to go to school to collect Mary or, at 6 o'clock Dad comes in from work.

If the child shows an interest you might wish to talk about the big hand and the little hand of the clock, and the way they move. Don't expect the child to understand - just be pleased she/he is interested.

A calendar may help children to understand how time moves on. Let the child stroke off another day. Talk to the child about Today, Yesterday, Tomorrow, Next Week etc. in a very natural way.

A weekly routine chart will help a child to learn the names of the days and the ideal of time passing. It provides an opportunity for learning vocabulary of time Before, After, Next, Two More Days and so on.

A jig-saw clock makes an excellent gift for children of around four onwards. As the child gets older she/he is fascinated by the idea of the numbers going round. This helps the child get to know the Clock-wise.
Direction of Numbers
Show your child pictures of daytime, night time, summertime, winter time. Talk about night, getting dark, the moon, stars etc. Talk about day, what will we do today, today is a sunny day, a wet day etc.

Most children's stories refer to time and the passing of time. The passing of long periods of time, and the changes this must bring about, can be gained beautifully from story-telling. Ideas of high speed and long distance are also likely to be met through stories. Follow up some stories with questions which include words such as Fast, Quick, Quickly, Slow, Long, Long Ago.

Counting
Counting is something we all need to be able to do. It is the way we answer "how many?" and "how much?" Children become aware of numbers as they learn to speak, but it is important to remember that understanding develops much later. For example, to the child 'five' may mean fingers, and 'one, two, three' the start of a race or 'blast-off. She/he may even be able to rhyme off the numbers up to ten but this is no indication that your child understands that 'three' is three somethings, or 'four' means four somethings. If your child enjoys rhyming off the numbers that's good - but not essential.

Useful Vocabulary
One, two, three, four, five (numbers up to five is sufficient)

more little none most another
less a lot several least as many as
some many more enough same amount
few all more than lots more than...

Nursery Rhymes and simple poems are an excellent source of number language, and when accompanied by actions or looking at pictures, can assist in learning to count. Read the following rhymes to yourself and think of the range of number language:

One, two, buckle my shoe............

100
One, two, three, four, five, once caught a fish alive....
Two Little Dicky Birds........
Three Blind Mice.....
This Little Pig Went to Market....

Let your child help you in the supermarket and around the house on days when you are not in a hurry and the mood is right. This is where real counting is learned.

For example, when setting the table say to your child "How many for dinner today - mummy, daddy, Susan, John and Louise - that makes five". "Now, there is a knife and a fork for Susan - you put out enough for everybody else". (Help them with this activity).

However, do remember, it's only a game - not a Maths lesson! Your child may learn more from the things she/he gets wrong because it gives you a chance to say things like "one more here", "too many spoons", "one cup missing", "enough now" and so on.

A few minutes to let your child help you when you are - .......baking .......sorting the cutlery drawer .......unpacking the shopping .......pegging the washing on the line .......sorting the socks into pairs - it is time well spent.

Let your child find things in the supermarket. For example, "Bring me two toilet rolls (that's one - good - now one more)." "Ask for three chops please. This may require patience and a little extra time, but it is very valuable!.

Back at home, when you take five minutes to sit with the children, you could try these games. It will be essential to use a variety of odds and ends from the collection box. It is the handling of these real objects that brings counting alive.

Put out a row of similar objects: bricks, plastic saucers, toy cars. Say to the child - "Show me a brick"... "Show me another one". Say to the child - "Give me a car"... "Give me another one". If he understands
'One' and 'Another One', then he is ready for "Give me two saucers".

Continue with this game if the child is enjoying it. "I have one block. Give me two more. How many altogether?" If the child says the right number without Counting in Ones all the better.

Take picture cards (or playing cards) and mix them up. Ask your child which card has one/two/three.

Give the child a saucer - put two bricks on it. Take a saucer yourself. Call to the child "Now, give me the same number". Again, she/he doesn't need to count to do this. All she/he has to do is to match set for set. Don't interfere if she/he wants to count, but don't insist on counting either.

Body parts are useful for counting and reinforcing the number two. (Two hands, arms, eyes, ears etc). Play 'O'Grady Says' ... put your two hands up... put your two hands down.... touch your two eyes... cross your two legs....

The most important thing about all these games is to have fun. Stop when (or before) the child loses interest.

THE RENFREWSHIRE PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMME

It is worth noting that many of the activities described above are included in the Renfrew Pre-school Programme which has been operating in the UK for three years in eight Renfrewshire primary schools and one nursery. This programme prescribes materials likely to be found in virtually all homes and deals with general vocabulary, simple number, relationships of time, space and size and emphasises classification as a crucial category. The results have been encouraging and the programme is now being offered widely.

A PROGRAMME FOR PARENTS: TODDLER STAGE, WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD, NORTHERN IRELAND

This programme is also similar in content to the programme included in
this chapter. It provides ideas which extend the learning experiences of preschool children and includes activities which link directly with those in which the child will be involved at primary school.

The INTO, in its publication "Your Child and the Primary School: Tips for Parents (1997), provides guidelines to parents of pupils who are attending school for the first time. The booklet was distributed free to parents of all junior infant classes, since 1994. The following issues are addressed:

- Preparation for learning
- Preparation for school
- Making life manageable for the junior infant
- The First Day
- The School Day
- Health and Hygiene
- Healthy Eating
- Bullying
- Homework
- Home-School Communication
- The Primary School

Extracts from the section on "Preparation for Learning" are outlined below:

Children learn from birth from their parents and from their environment. Parents are often anxious to begin to see some results of formal learning soon after the child starts school. Children will start to read and write at their own pace. Just as they walk and talk at different ages - they also read and write when they are ready to do so themselves. It is not necessary for children to be able to write or recognise letters before coming to school - it is far more important to prepare them and this can be done informally by parents.
Key pre-requisites for learning

*Positive Attitude*
If children are positively disposed towards learning then they will endeavour to become involved in the learning process.

*Curiosity*
Children should be continually encouraged to ask more questions.

*Self-Confidence*
If children are confident about their abilities and capabilities then they will be more willing to take on new challenges.

*Listening*
Instruction and directions are given continually at school so a child needs to be a good listener.

*Interacting with Others*
Children need to learn how to be sociable, how to share and take turns.

*Independence*
In order to take part fully in school life a child needs to have developed a good level of independence.

*Play*
Children learn through play and should be given ample opportunities to: act out roles, play with objects, engage in physical play

*Language*
The role of language in education cannot be overemphasised. Language is an essential pre-requisite to reading and writing and is also essential for the social and emotional development of children.

*Reading*
Read to your child regularly. This encourages a love of books and creates an interest in reading.
Writing
Young children need to develop the right muscles in their hands before they can begin to write properly. You can help this development by encouraging them to do things which involve using their hands such as drawing, cutting paper, using play dough etc.

Basic Maths
You can help your child become familiar with the concepts they will need to understand when they are introduced to basic Maths in school.

Development of Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem
If children are confident about their abilities and capabilities then they will be more willing to take on new challenges.

The Use of Language in Promoting Self-Esteem
A crucial factor in the development of the child's self-esteem is the nature of language used by parents. The numerous interactions which parents have each day with their children provide children with feedback in relation to who they are. It pays dividends.

Paired Reading
Paired Reading is a way to help children with reading and is especially useful for parents to do at home with their children. One child works alongside one adult. The adult and the child both read the text out loud together. In this way the adult provides the child with a model of correct reading.

Paired Reading helps the child to read more text independently and to progress in reading accuracy and comprehension. It also prevents parents reverting to teaching their children in the way they remember being taught, e.g., sounding out each word.

The most important feature of Paired Reading is that it facilitates parents and children to move away from an emphasis on failure to emphasising the strengths of a child.
Research and Paired Reading

In 1978 Roger Morgan and Elizabeth Lyon of Cambridgeshire County Council Social Services and Kent County Council Psychological Services decided to try Paired Reading with four reading retarded children. Before the project started the children took a Neale Analysis test and the results showed that the pupils varied from 0.7 months to 3.8 months below in reading accuracy score and from 0.5 to 2.11 months below in their reading comprehension.

The parents of these children were introduced to the procedure of Paired Reading. Before the experiment began the parents were asked to demonstrate their usual method of helping the child to read. In all cases the amount of positive reinforcement was almost negligible - mothers typically listened to their child read and reacted only to errors. The parents then received a 3 - 4 week training of half an hour a week to enable them to move from negative to positive help. As the tuition progressed, it became obvious that the child read more text independently and that the pace of the reading increased.

At the conclusion of the period of the research (6 months - 6.25 months) all four children had progressed in reading accuracy and comprehension. The average increase for reading accuracy = 11.75 months in 6 months and for reading comprehension = 11.5 months in 6.25 months. There was no indication that the children made any similar progress in spelling.

The researchers pointed out that this was only a pilot study and as the sample was so small it was not possible to draw any firm conclusions from the study but it did indicate that Paired Reading may be a useful technique especially with children who had little reading confidence.

This work was taken up by Kirklees Psychological Service,
Huddersfield, England. They have encouraged this method in many of their schools and an excellent description of their work and training pack are obtainable from Kirklees.

Points to be discussed with Parents

(a) Preparation for Paired Reading
It is not as easy as it sounds. Most parents require careful and specific guidance concerning this method. With Paired Reading the following factors should be noted:

1. If the child gets the word wrong... the adult must give the correct word and get the child to look at the word, then say it after them. Remember it is not at all helpful to ask the child to sound it out (this is what parents remember from their school days).

2. When the child gets the word right the adult should always give praise. Critical remarks destroy confidence.

(b) Procedure for Paired Reading

1. The child, perhaps with guidance, chooses a book to read.

2. Adult and child sit together and begin reading out loud together. The child always sets the pace.

3. The child must pronounce all the words correctly. If the child gives an incorrect word the adult gives the word and the child repeats it. Then both continue reading as before.

4. If the child wishes to read a little on his own some non-verbal signal is given, e.g., a knock or a nudge.

5. During independent reading the adult gives constant praise and encouragement, especially if errors are corrected by the child.

6. When the child is reading independently and is stumped by a word
the adult must give it and then join in again. Paired Reading then continues until the child signals to go on alone.

7. The adult should be encouraged to stop and talk about the book. This could be by looking at the illustrations and discussing them/ or by trying to guess what is going to happen on the next page. It could also be through relating the story to the experiences of the child.

It is essential to remember that progress is uneven, some days the child might be stumbling over every word and the next reading fluently and fast. This may be due to the variation in the level of the book or if the child brings a lot of knowledge to the text and is really interested she/he can read as much as two years above her/his natural level. If the subject is completely new she/he could be reading as much as two years below her/his natural reading.

(c) When to do Paired Reading
Parents should try to find a time that suits them and their child and as far as possible the same time each day. This then becomes a habit and the children accept that this is something they do and enjoy in that time. If the time varies considerably from day to day the child begins to associate reading with time taken 'from her/his best television programme' or 'always when I want to play with my friends'.

(d) Why does Paired Reading work?
1. Perhaps the most important thing that Paired Reading offers to parents and children is the shift away from an emphasis on failure to emphasising the strengths of a child.

2. It offers parents a structured programme with clear do's and don'ts.

3. It is simple, speedy and positive.

4. It concentrates on extracting meaning from the print.

5. Children are given regular personal attention from an adult and Paired Reading eliminates the possibility of failure.
6. The parent demonstrates to the child how the words should be read and the child also receives help with speed and intonation. In this way a child is both looking at and hearing words at the same time.

7. Above all it encourages fluent, meaningful reading.

Dealing with Parental Problems

Teachers do need to set aside a particular time to deal with problems that occur in the early stages. Parents often raise questions about - 'Should I point to the words?', 'When should I talk about the story?'; 'Should I ask my child to retell the story every time?', 'What should I do if she/he doesn't understand the story but can read every word?'. It may be very difficult for parents to come to the school and raise these questions. Some schools have overcome these problems by providing a note book in which the parent, teacher and child can write to each other with questions and comments.

Guidelines to Parents

(a) What book should you use?
The child should choose the book she/he wants to read but if she/he chooses one that is far too difficult, read some of it to her/him and try to persuade her/him to find a more realistic one the next day. This judgement comes with practice and again is not an easy decision. Children often surprise us by reading difficult text because they are really interested.

(b) How long should each session take?
To start with 5 minutes a day, for 4 days a week, is probably realistic and this could build up to 10 to 15 minutes. Any longer than that should only be at the strong request of the child.

(c) How long should you continue to do Paired Reading?
Work in West Derbyshire suggested that it was easier to maintain a commitment if the parents did it for short intensive periods, e.g., for 6 to 8 weeks. Other people have found that as the child becomes more independent the amount of Paired Reading decreases and independent
reading takes over. If you think it is time to phase out Paired Reading do consult the school.

(d) Where should you do Paired Reading?
Do try to find a place that is quiet and comfortable. Children are easily distracted and find that they cannot concentrate when there are lots of interruptions or the television is flickering in the corner.

(e) After Paired Reading - What next?
As the child becomes more confident she/he will want to read more and more on her/his own. Eventually you may find that you have only to provide help for words that give problems. Finally the child asks to read alone. Don't let them go for too long without showing some interest. Encouragement will establish a lifelong reading habit.

(f) What if my Child doesn't like Paired Reading?
If she/he doesn't enjoy this activity don't do it. All children vary not only from each other but from day to day. If she/he or you prefer reading independently then this is what you should do. You may prefer to take it in turns to read from the books or you could read the story first and then your child could have a go at reading it to you. Remember to help with the words that give difficulty, to talk about the story and give genuine praise whenever you can.

Supplementary Material for Paired Reading
For schools who are interested in introducing Paired Reading activities, Appendix V includes information about resources such as videos which support parental involvement in reading, as well as a bibliography. The appendix also provides sample handouts, which provide a procedure which can be adapted by schools for the design and implementation of a Paired Reading project.
Parental involvement in the education of their children cannot in today's world be viewed as an optional extra for professional teachers and effective schools. It is clear that parents want to be positively and productively involved in the life and work of their children in school and that positive parental attitudes to education are an important influence on children's educational development and subsequent life chances. Teachers therefore have a professional obligation to create and nurture structures that will support and develop positive parental involvement and participation in the life and work of schools.

There are compelling reasons why teachers should undertake and be facilitated to undertake such tasks. Parents need professional assistance to enable them to form true and realistic educational expectations of their children. Many require professional help, guidance and encouragement to support their children's learning which can best be provided by teachers. It cannot be assumed by teachers that the aims, objectives, ethos, values and overall work of the school can be readily understood by non-professionals and therefore the teacher has a professional obligation to communicate and make clear these issues to parents. Should teachers and schools fail to involve parents in the education of their children they risk creating the impression that schools alone determine educational success or failure and will have to accept blame for educational failure when in reality many of the reasons for such failure lie beyond the responsibility and influence of the school.

There are significant potential rewards in terms of outcomes to be gained from endeavours to involve parents more closely in their children's education. A school is more likely to gain the support of parents for its endeavours if it offers a range of involvement opportunities to parents, two way communication procedures that include making sure that schools are aware of parental opinion on issues of concern and the provision of professional responses to those
concerns. There is great potential for further extending and enhancing parental trust in the work of the teacher leading to a greater appreciation of the teacher as professional.

In planning, structuring, developing and implementing individual initiatives or complete programmes that promote parental involvement teachers have a professional responsibility to ensure that:

- the individual child and her/his optimal educational development remains central to the work of the school;

- a caring professional education service is provided by schools which takes account of, meets or exceeds parental needs and expectations;

- there is a commitment in each school to quality assurance and improvement which will mean that reliability, consistency, predictability and dependency are central to the work of the school and its dealings with individual parents and its body of parents;

- there is a commitment to the ideal of teamwork based upon collegiality that will transcend other concerns;

- professional discretion is guarded and strengthened through the process of collaborative school planning.

Chapter One - The Evolution of Parental Involvement in Schools

Great progress has been achieved in the area of parental involvement in the life of schools particularly over the past two decades. The virtual exclusion of parents from schools has been replaced by an involvement in management boards, the development of structures at national level to provide a voice for parents and the evolution of local structures such as parents' associations and/or committees in schools to provide for the support and development of parental involvement in a positive manner. In addition there is an increasingly widespread recognition of the benefits that can accrue to teachers, parents, schools and above all to
the children from positive parental participation.

1. The INTO welcomes the establishment of new managerial structures in schools that provide for equal representation for teachers, parents, patron and the wider community as a first step in the democratic management of schools. Promised education legislation must enshrine this principle.

2. To be effective Boards of Management require a great deal more than the voluntary dedication and enthusiasm of persons involved in or connected to the school. To function effectively members of Boards of Management should have access to quality training to enable them undertake an audit of the duties associated with the effective management of schools and to develop the skills found to be necessary. The INTO recognises that different Boards of Management will have different collective skills and talents and consequently will have a range of training needs which will have to be considered. In view of this diversity of need the INTO recommends that a training grant be provided for each Board of Management to enable members to undertake suitable development training.

3. Government support for the establishment and development of the National Parents' Council has enabled the collective voice of parents to be heard on issues of educational concern. In spite of the short time that this representative body has been in existence it has made numerous valuable contributions to educational debate and decisions. The INTO recommends that such financial support continue until such time as the National Parents' Council becomes a self-financing body.

4. The need to develop positive home school links has been long accepted by all of the partners in education yet to date little has been done to define a clear policy towards this end. The INTO urges the Department of Education to establish a committee representative of all interests in education to devise and publish guidelines on the promotion and development of good home school relations.
5. The development of quality home school linkages requires the provision of incareer development opportunities for teachers. If aspirations are to be translated into reality provision must be made for the design and delivery of quality inservice courses. The INTO demands that the Department of Education enter into discussions with the organisation regarding this issue.

Chapter Two - Teacher Professionalism and Parental Involvement.

Change in education is inevitable but improvement is merely one option from a range of potential outcomes which may result. As professional teachers committed to seeking not simply change in education but the development of quality and needed improvement we must actively explore all developments in education that offer possibilities for progress. There is clear evidence that parental involvement in the work of schools offers such opportunities. The INTO urges its members to manage and direct developments in this area at local level and to support initiatives that will establish positive linkages between home and school designed to benefit pupils and extend and develop parental trust and confidence in the professionalism of teachers.

The INTO is of the opinion that initiatives which aim to increase parental involvement in schools have the potential to transform schools into organisations where the work of teachers is recognised, valued and appreciated. However, and the Organisation recognises that teachers have many valid reservation and concerns about many developments in this area. As a consequence the following recommendations are made.

1. Every school should develop its own policy on the development of positive home school links and the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children. Such a policy should seek to maximise the use of available resources to ensure that quality communication procedures result.

2. The Department of Education should devise in consultation with the
partners in education, guidelines to facilitate good operational relations and communication procedures between Boards of Management, teaching staffs and parents' associations in schools.

3. The INTO urges its membership to reject the conceptualisation that parents on behalf of their children are merely the consumers of a service which teachers and schools provide. Such market driven ideology has little to contribute to the provision of quality in education and as a consequence teachers and schools should seek to cooperate with parents in collaborative activities for the benefit of pupils.

Chapter Three - Issues in Parental Involvement

Positive parental involvement in schools requires the development and implementation of structures and strategies to enable parents to play their part in the education of their children. Effective communication between the school and the home is central to this process and is demonstrated through a range of activities including homework, assessment and the reporting of results, parent teacher meetings and numerous in school and out of school activities.

1. Homework serves an important purpose in engaging the parents in the formal education of children; it is linked to the idea that teachers and parents are joint educators. (Lyons 1992) Consequently, each school should develop a clear policy on the issue of homework that might incorporate details concerning the issuing and marking of homework, the variety of forms such homework might take and the expected time to be devoted to homework. Such policies should not be such as to overly restrict the professional autonomy of the individual teacher to make decisions for the benefit of individual children or the class group but should serve as indicators of good practice in this area. Account should also be taken of concerns that have been raised by parent representatives concerning the weight of children's schoolbags.

2. Financial assistance should be provided to schools to facilitate the
provision of storage facilities such as lockers for the safe keeping of children's books in schools.

3. Parental attitudes to homework are an important influence on their children and their responsibilities in this area must be made clear. Guidelines should be drawn up by the Department of Education in consultation with parent and teacher representatives and issued to all schools.

4. Each school should devise and implement its own policy on the assessment of pupils, the recording of information and the communication of assessment results to parents. Teachers should ensure that the results of assessments should be clearly communicated to parents and as professionals should ensure that the results are interpreted in order to assist understanding by non-professionals.

5. Parents as individuals and groups require extra assistance at times of transition and as a consequence each school is advised to develop its own policy in relation to the intake of pupils and the transfer of pupils to second level. These policies should have the objective of the provision of as much information as possible to parents to enable them to make informed decisions in which they can have the maximum confidence.

6. Parents as a group have a range of talents, abilities and skills that have the potential to enrich and extend the educational opportunities provided by a school. Effective school organisation demands that all available resources are exploited to the full for the benefit of pupils. Each school should devise and communicate its own policy with regard to the involvement of parents in the work of the school.

Chapter 4 - Teacher Perspectives on Parental Involvement

The INTO recognises and commends the range and quality of initiatives that have been undertaken by individual teachers and school staffs to
develop positive and productive linkages between home and school. The lengths to which teachers have gone give an indication not alone of the importance teachers attach to good relations between home and school but of their commitment to developing a range of strategies to develop positive parental involvement.

Positive parental involvement should be an integral part of every school and as a consequence each school should develop a clear and comprehensive policy on home school links. However most primary schools are hampered in this regard by a lack of expertise, funding and time. As a consequence the INTO makes the following recommendations.

1. An annual grant should be provided to each school to assist in the development of effective home school linkages and the maintenance of positive relations between teachers and parents.

2. Inservice education be provided for teachers who require assistance in fostering and developing links between home and school so that the full the potential of the school and the home can be exploited to the benefit of the pupil.

3. Each school should in the context of an overall plan for the development of home school links make clear its policy in relation to formal and informal parent teacher meetings. Such a policy should make clear the type of information that should be exchanged by both the parent and the teacher.

4. If meaningful home school relations are to be developed and extended then it is essential that a time provision is made for such activities. To date such activities have been facilitated by local initiatives and there is a lack of clarity surrounding the issue. The INTO urges the Department of Education to enter into discussions with representatives of teachers and parents with a view to seeking an agreed provision of time for parent teacher meetings.
5. The INTO is of the opinion that the participation of parents in the work of the classroom within the context of agreed structures and arrangements as part of the school plan has potential benefits. However, parental involvement in the work of the classroom must at all times remain at the discretion of the principal teacher and the individual classroom teacher.

6. Where parents are involved in classroom work it is essential that procedures are understood and agreed in advance on a range of issues including confidentiality, the nature of parental assistance, disciplinary matters, time commitments and teacher control and direction of parental input.

Chapter 5 - Teacher Education

The INTO has previously examined the issue of teacher education and has called for a comprehensive review of all related structures and processes. The issue of parental involvement in the life of schools is an issue that brings into focus the need to develop new structures that will enable young teachers to develop the necessary professional skills to play a full part in this respect. The INTO therefore reiterates its demand for such a review to be established as a matter of priority.

1. The present three year B. Ed. course has become overcrowded due to a number of reasons but among which can be counted the continual addition of course elements to enable young teachers to deal effectively with a range of issues that relate in the main to changing times and circumstances. The INTO demands the immediate commencement of negotiations with the relevant bodies regarding the establishment of a four year B.Ed, degree course.

2. Induction procedures in Ireland are ad hoc and incomplete at present and demand urgent and radical reform. The issue of parental involvement in school and the development of positive and productive parent teacher relations bring this issue into focus. Many young teachers have not yet developed the necessary assertiveness skills and professional confidence to engage in the range of activities
that is involved in the promotion of positive home school links. Induction procedures need to be developed that would enable the period of transition from the world of college to the world of work to be supported by a more experienced and specially trained teacher mentor.

3. Given that the majority of teachers teaching in Irish primary schools received their initial teacher education at a time when there was little parental involvement in the life of schools it is essential that serving teachers be provided with inservice education to enable them to develop the necessary skills. The INTO calls on the Department of Education to fund as a matter of urgency the development and delivery of such inservice courses.

4. In its document *An Chomhairle Muinteoircheanta* (1994) the INTO outlined the positive contribution that such a structure would make to all aspects of teacher education in Ireland. Therefore, the INTO demands the establishment of a Teaching council on a statutory basis as a matter of urgency.

Chapter Six - Parents' Associations

Parents' Associations where they are established in a school provide a means by which direct communication can be initiated and developed with the general body of parents who are linked to the school. In the past the role and function of such an association has been regarded by both parents and teachers alike as limited to fundraising activities for schools. Sadly due to inadequate government funding the reality remains that for most schools this remains the case.

The INTO considers that in addition to this role a parents' association offers an opportunity to promote parent confidence in the work of the school through the establishment of regular channels of communication and the building of positive relationships. The issue of the establishment and continued functioning of a parents' association is primarily a matter for the parents of children attending the school. However, it is possible that the establishment of Parents' Associations
will be placed on a statutory basis in forthcoming education legislation.

1. Relations between the school and the Parents' Association where established should be considered as part of the school plan for the promotion of parental involvement.

2. It is desirable that regular processes of communication between the teaching staff and the parents' association be devised and agreed by the teaching staff and the Parents' Associations.

3. The INTO is of the opinion that Parents' Associations where established provide an opportunity to develop and extend the range of positive contributions that parents can make to the education of their children. As a consequence programmes should be developed on a range of issues including child development, parenting skills, good nutrition, equality issues, assisting with homework and the development of self esteem in children to assist parents in their role as educators of their children.

Chapter Seven - Initiatives in Parental Involvement

The benefits to parents, teachers and pupils of the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme have been recognised and valued. Activities such as home visitation, development courses for parents including self-development courses, parenting courses, classes in the primary school curriculum and leisure courses have impacted positively on school ethos and practice. The evaluation of the scheme pointed out that schools changed to becoming more accommodating of parents, providing a wide range of services for them and allowing them to participate more actively in the work of the school and the classroom. The INTO pays tribute to the contribution made by its members to the success of this scheme.

However the benefits of this scheme should not be confined to the small number of schools where schemes have been established. The information and experience gained from the project has the potential to enrich all schools whether designated disadvantaged or not and
responsibility rests with the Department of Education to ensure that this expertise is exploited to the full for the benefit of all schools.

1. The INTO demands as a matter of priority the extension of the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme to all schools that are designated disadvantaged.

2. The work of participants in the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme has facilitated the development of a range of new skills and expertise among teachers and parents that has impacted positively on the work of individual schools. This talent has the potential to provide the human resource for in-career development opportunities for teachers. The INTO urges the Department of Education to utilise the expertise gained by teachers through participation in the scheme in the design and development of inservice courses for teachers.

3. The INTO demands that sections of the evaluation report on the HSCL Scheme that describe the development and effectiveness of initiatives undertaken be published in edited form and distributed to all schools.

4. The Early Start Project comprises a substantial input from parents of children attending schools where the classes have been established. The INTO demands the dissemination to all schools of information that relates to this issue in conjunction with recommendation 3 above.

5. The INTO demands the extension of the Early Start Pre-school scheme to all primary schools.

Chapter Eight - Programmes to Promote Parental Involvement

The programmes presented in Chapter Eight are intended to be representative of the range of programmes that have been developed to promote and extend the participation of parents in the education of their children. The INTO is aware that many individual teachers and schools have developed and implemented programmes of this nature.
There is a need to research such projects and make the findings of this work widely available to teachers and parents.

1. The Department of Education should, as part of a policy to promote positive home-school links, draw up guidelines to assist teachers and parents in this work. As part of this project the Department of Education should research practice in schools. Submissions should be sought from teachers and schools which relate to initiatives that have been undertaken and results of these submissions should be published and distributed to all schools.
1. Parents as Partners

Partnership for parents in education is a policy aim of the Government. Through the Programme for Economic and Social Progress the Government and the Social Partners have formally recognised the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children as an essential strategy of educational policy and practice. This Circular is concerned with ensuring that partnership for parents is positively pursued at a local level by each national school.

2. School/Family Relationships

The Department endorses the view of the National Parents' Council-Primary, expressed in its recently published booklet, Parents' Associations - Making Them Work, that parents should be involved in their local school for two main reasons:

"The school is regarded as an extension of the home and an active partnership between parents and teachers makes this a reality, especially in the eyes of the young child, who is the central figure.

"Research shows that parental interest and attitudes to school, to books and to education are the single most important influence on a child's learning."

These reasons are supported by the findings of the Primary Education Review Body.

"The Department recognises that school/family relationships are particularly important at the primary level of education. As the recognised primary educators of the child, parents have a right to
be assured that the child's needs are being met by the school. It follows that parents should be given as much information as possible on all aspects of the child's progress and development. Parents, as a body, are also entitled to know whether the school and the education system are meeting children's needs".

3. Parents' Associations
It is important that, where none exists, an active Parents' Association be formed for each individual school in order to promote and develop effective and positive participation by parents in education at the school level.

Circular 7/85 issued by the Department of Education in January, 1985 urged school authorities to have a Parents' Association formed in association with every National School.

While much progress has been made since then, there are still national schools which do not have a Parents' Association. The Department sees a Parents' Association as essential for

"developing partnership for parents in education at the level of the local school, and

"supporting and encouraging individual parents to become more involved in the education of their children".

The Minister for Education now requests each Board of Management to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that a Parents' Association is formed in association with its school. The Board should actively promote all means of effective cooperation between the school and the Parents' Association.

4. Forming a Parents' Association
As a first step, the Board should call a general meeting of parents for the purpose of the parents forming a Parents' Association where one does not already exist. It would be desirable that the Board arrange with the National Parents' Council-Primary to have a representative present to
advise the parents.

The booklet entitled *Parents Associations - Making Them Work* will be of particular assistance to schools in promoting parental involvement. A copy is being sent to the Chairperson of each Board for this purpose. Further copies may be purchased from the National Parents' Council, Hogan House, Hogan Place, Grand Canal Street Lower, Dublin 2, price £2.00.

It is in the best interests of the school that positive and effective communication exists between the Parents' representatives on the Board and the Parents' Association. To this end, parent representatives should be ex-officio members of the Parents' Association Committee.

5. Developing Partnership with Parents

Further developments will be necessary in order to bring about genuine partnership at school level.

Each national school will be required to establish as part of its overall school policy/plan, a clearly defined policy for productive parental involvement. The Department in consultation with the partners in education will draw up guidelines for this process. The guidelines will take account of the recommendations of the Primary Education Review Body on relations between parents and Boards of Management and teachers which, in general, the Department accepts.

In conjunction with the guidelines, the Department will prepare an information booklet for parents on the educational provision being made for their children and on the operation of the national school system.

6. National Parents' Council

Each Parents' Association should strongly consider affiliating to the National Parents' Council, Primary Tier. Such affiliation affords parents the opportunity and the mechanism for having a voice in decision making on primary educational issues at a national level. The National Parents' Council provides representation for parents, as partners in
education, on various Government-appointed educational bodies. Through its representative function, the Council is making a distinctive and valuable contribution to central planning and policy development in education.

C.N. LINDSAY,
SECRETARY.

MAX 1991.
APPENDIX II
CPSMA/INTO: HOME/SCHOOL LINKS

The INTO negotiated on the basis of the conclusions and recommendations contained in a policy paper adopted by Congress 1982, an agreement with CPSMA on Home-School Links.

The following is the text of the agreed statement-

The Catholic Primary School Managers' Association and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation are agreed that good relations between home and school play a critical role in ensuring that every child derives maximum benefit from his or her time in school:

1. Boards of Management should encourage and promote the development of links between parents and teachers.

2. Boards of Management would also find consultation with parents helpful in the management of the school.

3. The teaching staff should plan the most appropriate form of home-school links to meet the educational needs of the pupils.

4. The Board of Management should be advised of the details of this plan. In accordance with the Rules for National Schools, the Board of Management should approve the details of this plan.

5. A teacher may not be required to participate in home-school links activities outside of school hours.

6. The times and dates to be arranged for meetings between parents and teachers should, as far as possible, be convenient for parents and teachers alike.

7. The Department of Education should promote home-school links by authorising Boards of Management to allow teachers to dismiss their
pupils from school for the purpose of meetings with parents during school hours.

8. The Board of Management should encourage the development of good channels of communication between the teaching staff and local schools' medical and psychological and social service personnel who may be in contact with the homes of the children.

9. In large schools, the duty of organising a home-school links programme may be assigned on the establishment of a post of responsibility. This would not remove the responsibility from any class teacher for having an individual home-school links programme.

10. The Department of Education should appoint an additional assistant to each special school and to each school in an area of socio-economic disadvantage in order to facilitate the development of home-school links programmes in those schools. This additional teacher should provide opportunities for class teachers in those schools to meet parents, and if necessary, visit homes during the school day. In the longer term, this principle should be extended to all schools on the basis of additional assistants in the larger schools and peripatetic teachers for groups of smaller schools.

11. The Department of Education should encourage programmes of home-school links by ensuring that every school has a suitable interview room, free from the noise and interference of the classroom, in which teachers may meet parents.

12. In order to encourage the highest level of participation by teachers in home-school links and to try to ensure that they do not suffer any personal financial loss due to such participation, an expense allowance should be sought for teachers.

Tuarascail
March 1983
The topics listed below were included in the semi-structured interviews/questionnaires used by the INTO Education Committee when seeking submissions from teachers about current parental involvement in Irish primary schools.

1. Provision for parents in the School parents room, tea/coffee making facilities, furniture, other resources.

2. Plan for promoting parental involvement school plan, responding as issues arise.. responsibility for promoting parental involvement

3. Finance to support parental involvement from school funds, from Department, from other sources...

4 Special Projects undertaken paired reading projects, library, Art week.

5. One to one parent teacher meetings initiated by the school initiated by parents, formally planned meeting, incidental meetings.

6 Information Meetings evenings new intake, class group meetings, special issues such as drugs awareness or relationships...

7 Special Events sports day, open day, concerts, Cor Fheile, slogadh, school tours and outings..
8. Written Reports
9. Parents and Management
   interest and levels of involvement
10. Parents Association/Council
    Activities undertaken, NPC involvement (if any)
11. Newsletter, Notes, L.letters
    frequency type
12. Home School Community Liaison
    history and development, current activities
13. Parents and school discipline
    involvement in drawing up, reviewing or working of code, support.
14. Remedial Teaching Policy,
    Special Needs, Referral
15. Parents and Sacramental Preparation
16. Parents and External Agencies
    Social workers, public health nurse...
17. Parents in the Classroom
18. Other
APPENDIX IV

SAMPLE A - X National School Parents' Association

Name: The name of the Association will be "The Parents' Association".

Aims: (a) To promote and strengthen the spirit of the school.
(b) To ensure the continued welfare and development of the school.
(c) To promote better understanding between parents, teachers, management and children.
(d) To assist the school where help is required.
(e) To encourage and facilitate parental activity in the life of the school.
(f) To keep parents informed of school policies, plans and activities.
(g) To raise funds in support of foregoing aims.

Membership: Membership is open to parents and guardians of pupils of the school, together with any person who, in the opinion of the Committee, would be desirable as a member with a view to fulfilling the aims of the Association.

Structure: The Annual General Meeting of the members is the governing body of the Association.

(1) A Committee of not less than 10 (ten) and not more than 20 (twenty) which should be held between 30th September and 31st October in each school year. The Committee will have full power to act for the Association, subject to the Constitution and the Decisions and Authority of the Annual General Meeting. The Committee will have the power to co-opt two
further members to assist them in the pursuit of the aims of the Association.

(2) The Committee will elect from amongst its members a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, and Treasurer. Each year at least one third of the outgoing Committee must resign and shall not be eligible for re-election for a period of one year. For the first 3 years, the persons to resign will be chosen by lottery and thereafter it will be on rotation.

Co-opted members shall not be eligible to hold officer posts and their term on the Committee expires at the AGM following their co-operation. The Committee shall meet once monthly during the school year.

(3) Voting on all motions at the AGM to be by a single majority of those present.

(4) Teachers and members of the Management Board are entitled to attend all meetings.

(5) The Quorum for Committee Meetings will consist of 50% of the members, plus one.

(6) The Committee may set up subcommittees for specific purposes.

(7) Meetings shall be called by the Chairperson and several days notice of each meeting must be given to each member of the Committee, to the School Principal and to the Chairperson of the School Board of Management.

(8) A report of the proceedings of each meeting be made available to the Chairperson of the School Management Board within 7 days of the meeting.
1) **Name**  
The Association shall be called "The Parents' Association".

2) **Membership**  
Membership shall be open to all parents with children in the school. There shall be no membership fee.

3) **Aims**  
The aims of the Association shall be as follows:  
   a) To promote general interest in the welfare of the school.  
   b) To run functions for parents and pupils of educational and social value.  
   c) To run functions which will provide finance to improve facilities in the school.

4) **Committee**  
   a) The Committee shall consist of fourteen members who shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting.  
   b) Of the fourteen members seven shall be men and seven shall be women.  
   c) Of the total of fourteen at least two and not more than four shall be from A and B Parish.  
   d) The Manager, teachers in the school and the Rector of any Parish affiliated for the purpose of schooling shall be ex officio members of the committee but shall not be officers of the Association.  
   e) No husband and wife shall serve on the Committee at the same time.  
   f) Committee members shall not serve for more than two years in any four.  
   g) To preserve continuity, the outgoing committee shall nominate two men and two women from that committee to service on the new committee for the coming year. Rule F may be waved if no other committee members are eligible.
5) **Election of Officers**
The Committee shall elect officers for the Association from its own members at the earliest opportunity following the Annual General Meeting. These officers will consist of a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer.

6) **General Meetings**
a) the Annual General Meeting of the Association shall be held in the September of each year.
b) At the Annual General Meeting the chairman shall read a report of the year's activities and the treasurer shall present a financial report.
c) Extraordinary General Meetings may be called if the committee consider it necessary and two thirds of the full committee consent.

7) **Changes in the Constitution**
This constitution may only be changed by two thirds of the ordinary members present voting in favour of such a change at an Annual General Meeting of the Association or at an Extraordinary General Meeting called for that purpose.
APPENDIX V

SAMPLE PAIRED READING HANDBOUTS

The following material introduces Paired Reading to parents and explains how to put it into practice. The materials are produced in the form of handouts which may be useful to a teacher or school designing and implementing a Paired Reading project. This material was obtained from Northern Ireland, but the original source is unknown.

HANDOUT 1

PAIRED READING - KEY FEATURES

READING MOTIVATION Turning children 'on to' books.

'REAL' BOOKS
Not structured "Readers"
Choice of Books. No. of Children x 3 Books.
Availability of Books - Library, Book Fairs.
Maintenance of Books - Book Folder.

APPROACH
Informal Contact - Children writing to parents.
Newsletter.
Time Line - Thinking through.

LAUNCH
Initial Meeting - Social Occasion.
Welcome to parents, grand-parents, minders, children.
Introductory Speaker/Video - Principal or Other
Supply of books available for practice.
Contract between Readers, Parents and School.
Paired Reading Booklets for Parents and Children.
Refreshments.
MONITORING AND TROUBLE-SHOOTING

Keep Record Sheet or Booklet
Hold Review Meeting - 2 weeks after Launch to check on Technique being used.
Involve children and helpers.
Home visiting - Where suitable and possible.
Newsletter/Bulletin
School-based Visits - by Appointment.
Paired Reading Notice Board in School.
Have Book Reviews.

FINAL MEETING

Another Social Occasion!
Certificates and Badges awarded.
Making commitment to continue with Paired Reading.

HANDOUT 2

PAIRED READING

WHY BOTHER?

1. The child benefits from a short period each day of quiet, uninterrupted attention from either parent.

2. Parents are given an easy, structured and enjoyable way of helping children, so confusion and strain are minimised.

3. Emphasis is on enjoyment of the story and praise and encouragement for the reader.

4. Books are seen by both parents and children as important and enjoyable.

5. Because the child has control of book choice and the pace of reading, failure and criticism are minimised and interest and confidence are increased.
6. Paired Reading gives children a better understanding of what is read, a better example of how to do it and greater opportunities to increase continuity and fluency.

HANDOUT 3

TEN STEPS TO PAIRED READING
READ TOGETHER

1. Child CHOoses Reading Material with parent's help. (Not School Reading Scheme)

2. Parent and child find a QUIET and COMFORTABLE place where they can read together undisturbed for about ten minutes each evening.


5. Parent waits five seconds (Count of 5) if child MIS-READS or STUMBLES over a word, then offers HELP as follows:-

* HELP !!! Parent points to word and reads it correctly.
  Child says word correctly.
  Parent and child continue reading aloud together.

6. Parent PRAISES child for reading correctly.

READING ALONE

7. While parent and child are reading aloud together, child may feel confident enough to wish to READ ALONE.

8. Child NUDGES (Gives signal to) parent who praises child for signalling and now follows text silently
9. Child continues to read aloud, alone, increasing span of correct reading and self-correcting when necessary. Parent praises child.

10. If the child mis-reads or stumbles over a word both parent and child return to step 5 at *(HELP !!!), follow correction procedure and continue to read aloud together following subsequent steps.

   REMEMBER P aired
   R eading
   A dds
   I nterest
   S uccess
   E njoyment

HANDOUT 4

PAIRED READING
MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SCHOOL PAIRED READING PROJECT

1. Who will lead the project?

2. What difficulties may be encountered
   (a) in the school?
   (b) in the community?

3. Which group or class of pupils will be involved?

4. What will the staffing implications be?

5. Where will suitable books be obtained?

6. How will the interest and enthusiasm of:
   (a) the parents; (b) the project leader; (c) the staff be aroused and sustained?
7. How and when will:
   (a) the staff; (b) the parents be instructed in the technique?

8. Which reading tests, for evaluation purposes, will be used at the beginning and the end of the project?

9. How often and in what form will training meetings take place?

10. What form of reporting-back and follow-up will be needed?

11. How can continuity and development be ensured?

HANDOUT 5

PAIRED READING - ASKING THE RIGHT TYPE OF QUESTIONS

In PAIRED READING an important part of the technique is to ask questions, this checks out if the reader is understanding the story being read. There are various types of questions which could be asked. These sheets supply some basic types of questions which could be used. Although each story will have a range of events and characters which cannot be fully covered by the questions below, hopefully you will be able to form some general ideas about what questions to ask, once you have reviewed these sheets.

Questions become harder to answer whenever you ask the reader to go beyond simple comprehension. For example, descriptive questions, asking "Who chased the boy?; or "What was the character wearing?" are easier to answer, than questions which require opinions to be made i.e. "How would you feel if you were the bank robber who was captured?

The list below gives some leads on the types of questions you might ask. Remember to start with the easier questions and build up gradually. Give some help to the reader if she/he can't answer, but try to leave a little for them to answer even if you give some clues!
QUESTION TIME SOME EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS

Easier 1. Noting Details  Who was involved?  
Questions What happened?  
                     Where did it happen?

2. Use of context  Often clues are given cues about the  
      story, which tell you a little, but  
      expect you to fill in some details  
      from general knowledge. For instance,  
      a book titled "The Boy With the Bronze   
      Axe" expects the reader to know what "Bronze"  
      is! Younger readers may not know.

Getting 3. Catching the  What is the main story about? If it is  
Harder Main Idea  an adventure story what is the main  
        theme-skydiving, rock-climbing  
        etc.

4. Remembering  Before you continue reading the  
      story, ask the reader to tell you what  
      has happened so far!

5. Predicting  What will happen next? Outcomes -  
      Give some 'alternatives' yourself at  
      first, asking the reader to choose  
      one. Then read on to see if you were  
      correct.

Very Hard 6. Opinions of the  How would the reader feel,  
Questions Story  if she/he were in the same situation  
      as the main character?

Was the story interesting/funny/sad. What made it so for the reader?

Other materials needed
  • a contract for signing.
  • a paired record card
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON PAIRED READING

Videos Available to Support Parental Involvement in Reading
•Children Learning to Read
•Reading and Language Information Centre. Reading University
This video has been made by the Centre in local schools. Firstly, it shows many practical ways parents can pave the way to reading and the enjoyment of books. This is followed by school activities which develop children's reading ability. The only bias in this video is on children and adults enjoying books together.

Helping your child to read
•BBC Enterprise
A rather long tape but it is divided into four sections.
1. Getting them off to a good start.
2. Reading for pleasure.
3. Reading and learning.
4. Developing reading skills.
This has value if it is used in small chunks but is far too long to use without constant interruption and expansion.

Learn with Ladybird
All of us want to do the best for our children's learning, and we know that our encouragement at home is vital. This video is short and excellent for showing to parents. It is also inexpensive.

Paired Reading Training Tape
Kirklees Paired Reading Project
Oldgate House, 2 Oldgate, Huddersfield HD1 6QW
Examples of "Paired Reading" situations with child and adult and peer situations. It is not recommended that the whole tape is watched at one sitting. Useful for in-service training.

Partners in Literacy
IDA, Duke St, Wisbech, Cambs PE13 2AE
A 70 minute video, photocopiable parents' booklets. A good resource
but definitely needs to be used selectively.

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CHAPTER TWO - TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT


CHAPTER THREE - ISSUES IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT


CHAPTER 4 - TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The INTO wishes to acknowledge and thank members for their contributions to this section of the report.

CHAPTER 5 - TEACHER EDUCATION

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The Irish National Teachers' Organisation wishes to acknowledge the assistance of St Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra, Dublin and Mary Immaculate College of Education Limerick for the details of courses supplied as material for this chapter.

The organisation also thanks Fiona O Donoghue B. Ed. for her account detailing the impact of college learning regarding parental involvement in education on preparation for subsequent professional experience.

CHAPTER 6 - PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS


Department of Education Circular Letter 16/73.


**CHAPTER EIGHT - PROGRAMMES TO PROMOTE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

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The INTO is unable to source the material used in Appendix V.
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