

REGIMES OF TRUTH

**Gender, Achievement and Parent Participation
in New South Wales Public Schools**

By

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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**To my husband, Martyn
My children Andrea and Nicholas**

**My Parents and Siblings overseas
My In-laws in Australia**

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material either in whole or in part for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signed

Astrid Perry-Indermaur

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ABSTRACT

The participation of parents in the schooling of their children has become a central policy objective of the education sector in Australia as well as other parts of the developed world. The discourse of parent participation emphasises a need for parents to be involved in order to maximise the benefits to their child's education. Parent participation includes such practices as parents and schools working as partners to improve the well-being and achievements of an individual child to formal participation of parents in decision-making forums. This thesis approaches the issue of parent participation through a study of parent advocacy bodies as they deal with policy issues and interface with parents at the school level and governments at the policy level. The policy area of gender equity is used as an illustrative example to analyse parent advocacy bodies' structures and ways of operating.

As a result of the empirical work that involved semi-structured interviews, observation techniques and extensive use of archival material, this thesis revisits the theory of positional goods as it reflects the notion and understanding parents have broadly, that is, education is positional in that only few can achieve the highest levels of education and hence effort is exerted in ensuring their child achieves as highly as possible. This thesis argues that gender equity is caught in this thriving to capture a positional good that is elusive for most, but that, it appears, may be enhanced by the use of adequate gender equity strategies. Thus, the action of parents within parent advocacy bodies reflected the fight over scarce resources that were perceived to be enhancing educational outcomes for girls at the expense of boys.

This thesis is theoretically grounded in the social reproduction theories of Bourdieu utilising his concepts of habitus, cultural capital and symbolic power to argue that actions of parent advocacy groups and the broader society, as reflected in this instance through the media and political debates, respond to education within a framework of cultural reproduction. In order for advocacy groups to be heard and heeded they use symbolic power and cultural capital that are embedded within regimes of truth, a Foucauldian concept, to influence power holders. In this case the idea of participative democracy can be seen as a regime of truth that is the underlying principle that advocacy groups engage widely to establish their credibility with their

members and power holders in turn. The idea of the education market is another instance of a regime of truth that applies in this case where schooling is perceived as a positional good that is potentially purchasable. This thesis then examines actions and interactions within advocacy groups and outside with their wider audience.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACSSO	Australian Council of State School Organisations
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
DEET	Department of Employment Education and Training
DET	Department of Education and Training (formerly known as Department of School Education)
DSE	Department of School Education
DSP	Disadvantaged School Program
FOSCO	The New South Wales Federation of School Community Organisations
HSC	Higher School Certificate (New South Wales)
LEA	Local Education Authority (United Kingdom)
MCEETYA	Ministerial Committee on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEP	Participation and Equity Program
P&C	The Federation of Parents' and Citizens Associations of New South Wales
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My interest in the topic of parent participation and gender equity was triggered by a few incidents, which occurred at the local public school my children attend. One significant incident related to single sex classes for girls, which had been trialed at the school for six months. In what looked like a well meant gesture of asking parents their opinions, the school principal circulated a short survey to all 300 odd parents of the school in which one question asked; whether parents support single sex classes for girls for mathematics and science at year six level. Six parents out of three hundred replied to the survey, two of whom I knew, apart from myself. These two parents told me that they did not answer this particular question regarding the single sex classes as they had children in Kindergarten only. I answered the question in the affirmative, that is, I approved of single sex classes for girls for certain subjects. Thus, half of the very few respondents did not answer at all or answered in the affirmative. Yet, the single sex classes were cancelled on this unrepresentative response.

Even if the other three parents agreed with cancelling the classes the sample of respondents is incredibly small when at least sixty girls would have been affected by the cancelling of the classes. These were the girls in the single sex classes at the time and those who would have been attending the classes in the following year.

Subsequent questioning of the process revealed that the survey was the only attempt to gauge the opinion of parents and that students were not consulted. It appeared that these classes presented economic and organisational issues as they seemed to be too costly and difficult to organize. The confirmation of the decision through parents by using, in this case, an unsuccessful survey method, was an excuse to justify action.

Another area of concern to me was the basis on which merit awards were made. My daughter's very first merit award was for folding up the nurse's uniform neatly. I considered this a gender-based decision. It caused me to look at the merit list published each week more carefully and I did notice that often academic achievements were attributed to boys and girls were rewarded for friendly manners,

being a helpful class member and so on. Discussions with other parents revealed that they did not share my ideas and concerns about gender biases and the school's lack of taking gender issues into consideration at times.

For me these incidences raised many questions, which spurred my interest in researching parent participation in decision-making especially as it related to gender equity issues. I asked myself, to what degree and in what form should parents have decision-making power over education issues directly at the school level, often without being comprehensively informed about the advantages and disadvantages. Moreover, on issues such as gender equity, which permeates the whole society, people may have opinions, but they are likely to be based on their perceptions, values and beliefs, rather than on informed debate.

My interest in parent participation in decision-making in schooling is also related to the increasing trend of parents being asked to be central decision-makers in schools. In Australia and overseas there have been a number of moves to devolve decision-making to schools mainly for political expediency and to save costs to education departments (Soliman, 1991; Chapman and Dunstan, 1990; Golby, 1989). Yet, parent participation can also be costly as demonstrated in the example above of printing 300 surveys and when considering that suggestions need to be implemented in order to give credibility to meaningful input. Thus, there is a contradiction here with parents being encouraged to participate for economic reasons, but they are also often ignored for economic reasons. There are questions to be raised, in my view, in terms of whether parents are equipped to make decisions on behalf of all children in a school, when they have clearly a vested interest in the well-being of their own child or children. Thus, for me, there is a potential conflict of interest in the decision-making of parents at a systems level of schools. By 'systems level' I mean the formal structures, which are in place to influence decision-making at school. This is not to say, that there are not other ways parents can directly influence a decision, for example, by seeing a teacher or principal and thus persuade them to change their strategies on whatever issue they are discussing.

My focus of research then is parent participation in decision-making and my starting point was looking at structural opportunities for parent decision-making. This led me to examine formally constituted parent organisations. These organisations are formed and managed with representation from parents, who generally have children or grandchildren at public schools, with the aim of giving parents as a whole a voice in education. My focus is on public schools only and within that more so at the level of primary schools at least in terms of the local focus. At primary school parents interact with the school more closely as parents often attend assemblies and drop and pick up their children from the schoolyard. Also, at the time of starting this research my children attended primary school.

This thesis is concerned with two NSW public school parent organisations and briefly outlines how they feed into an umbrella parent advocacy organisation nationally. One is the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales whose affiliated members are the Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs) of local schools. The other is the Federation of School and Community Organisations (FOSCO) whose affiliated members are the Mothers Clubs. They were formed at a time when infants' schools were separate from primary schools. They tend to meet during the day while P&C Associations meet at night. Few schools now have Mothers Clubs left and those that do have clubs which primarily focus on fund raising rather than educational issues. Over recent years many schools have established School Councils with tri-partite participation: parents, teachers and student representatives, where appropriate. School Councils are not part of the focus of this thesis as there is a formal link from the P&Cs to School Councils, with the P&C being the key organisation that represents parents' opinions on the School Council and thus is the primary body for parent decision-making in schools.

In the process of focusing on parents and decision-making a related question arises, that is, whether parents are the right group to represent consumers of education, when in fact children are the beneficiaries of education or perhaps society is, in the reformist sense? In the Human Rights Convention of the Rights of the Child it was spelled out that parents are the guardians of the child and therefore, have the responsibility to act on behalf of the child and make decisions accordingly (The

Council of Europe, 1952). This convention is based essentially on biological determinism, which assumes that the biological parents, a priori, have certain rights over their children. Yet, it is entirely possible that society or a group of individuals decide over what is best for the child, seeing children as a common good. An example of that would be a Kibbutz in Israel where decisions regarding the children of the collective are made to some degree by the board, which is heading the Kibbutz, made up of members of that community, including parents. Questioning of parents' rights to speak on behalf of their children is also justified in the light of parents not always being capable to act in the best interest of the child as evidenced through the existence of a Children's Commissioner, Kids Help Lines, Youth Refuges, departments concerned with child protection and so on. For schooling, to question the rights of parents for decision-making appears to be also reasonable, in the sense of whether society per se has a claim to be the consumer of education, in so far, as society funds education through taxes it is assumed that there is a broad social benefit of schooling. In addition, the children will constitute the future citizens of society and thus greatly influence the kind of society we live in. Indeed, there are a number of ways institutions such as the State and churches have over time abrogated the rights of parents to make decisions for their children. One topical example here would be the removal of Aboriginal children from their families in the fifties. Schooling is institutionalised in the sense that there are limitations as to which decisions parents can partake in. For example, education is compulsory, there is a compulsory age range within which a child has to start school and can terminate schooling and there is a chronological pathway of progressing through school. However, to come back to the difficulties in decision-making of parents in schooling, I also acknowledge that a large percentage of members who constitute a society are also parents and thus, questioning parents' representativeness of children's needs is a circular argument, when policy makers and power holders are in fact parents themselves. As such the potential for conflict of interest in decision-making on the issue of parents and children's rights is difficult to resolve. Yet, the State in its forms of intervention, has unduly focused on controlling the working class and intervening in working class families more so than others (Gittins, 1998), thus not necessarily providing a viable option to speak on behalf of children either.

GENDER EQUITY AND SCHOOLING

The case study example I use to analyse decision-making processes is gender equity in schools, an issue that affects all children and a variety of areas within schools, that is, curriculum, social interaction, access to resources. Both, gender equity strategies and parent participation mechanisms, I see as being implemented for the benefit of children in schools, who in turn seem to me to be the objects of education, as discussed above. Thus, parent participation, gender equity and children are linked as follows for the purpose of this research: Parent participation in decision-making is the subject of investigation, gender equity in education provides the research example to focus on to make the research manageable, while children are the potential beneficiaries of both parent participation in decision-making and useful gender equity strategies and in fact education as a whole.

Apart from my personal reasons, I chose gender issues as a field of study because I have had an interest in this area of study throughout my academic work. But, moreover, I think that the relative undervaluing of gender equity and other policies, as not 'key business' of education, is worthy of consideration. Some parents feel that education should be limited to 'core subjects' such as learning to read, compute, gain formal knowledge about the world and acquire credentials, which allow for maximum use of job opportunities (parents interviewed and personal interaction with parents). Yet, others assign a duty of care to education to produce individuals who will function well within society as in functionalism (Parsons, 1961). Some believe that education also has the potential to emancipate society (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry, 1997; Beattie, 1985). Gender equity policies and strategies are clearly aiming at the latter emancipatory aspect in that they look at changing gender relations or at the very least they look at gender not being a base for disadvantage within education and its related opportunities. In the broader sense, gender equity strategies could change society towards less discriminating gender practices by socialising children accordingly.

Broad reading of the literature in gender and education revealed that there was quite a public outcry in 1994 after Higher School Certificate (HSC) results revealed that

girls had topped the boys in terms of their academic achievements (the HSC in New South Wales (NSW) is equal to matriculation examinations in other countries). The media, foremost, made full use of these figures and asked questions as to whether boys are being disadvantaged by the advantages provided to girls through applying gender equity strategies to enhance their educational opportunities. This circumstance then provided me with an ideal area of study. Parent organisations, while debating these issues already, also took strong public action to advance the issue of boys' education. This limited the period of my research then to 1994 and onwards, at least initially.

This research is significant because personal experience and literature (Limerick and Nielsen, 1995; Davies, 1993) suggests that there are major difficulties in ensuring meaningful parent participation in decision-making as a limited number of parents participate and the input provided by these may or may not be taken seriously. Even so, parent organisations have the means to interact with governmental decision-making and they have been able to access the media quite well to air their views. It is important then to examine on what basis their decisions are made, do they in reality represent themselves, a certain strata, a demographic area. It contributes to an understanding of advocacy organizations and research on parents and decision-making in schools is relatively scarce despite an environment where governments are more and more interested to devolve decision-making overall to the local school (Whitty, Power and Halpin, 1996). This research also looks at two major sites of reproduction, the family as in parents and children, and the school environment. As such it can enhance the sociological understanding of where parents see their roles and the role of the education system.

As analytical tools to analyse the gender equity aspects of this thesis, I chose the ideas of positional goods and positional economy (Marginson, 1997; Hirsch, 1977) to reflect market theories dominant in education, cultural capital and habitus to reflect on cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1984) and regimes of truth to examine power relations (Foucault, 1980) after having observed the complexity of parent organizations and identifying that many parents operate from a basis of improving educational opportunities (position) for their children, while others come from the

basis of children's rights to a comprehensive education, preparing children for a successful life in broad terms, that is, civic development. Cultural capital, with its linked concept of habitus, and regimes of truth as a concept of power relations, assist in examining the underlying conditions that influence educational outcomes and that produce forms of truth in parent organisations, in this case, as embedded in the system of education and society broadly speaking.

Looking at it sociologically this thesis then is located in conflict and cultural theory in that it looks at ideology, interaction with dominant groups, the dimensions of power in determining educational policy in parent advocacy groups, utilising the concepts of regimes of truth and dimension of cultural capital associated with gender equity that influence educational outcomes and occupational attainment. Using theorists such as Bourdieu, and Foucault clearly embeds this thesis within the theoretical area of cultural reproduction and power relations, but it is also combined with an economical analysis to reflect the thinking of the broader population and to expose the regime of truth around education as an institution, a discipline and a field and parent advocacy groups.

SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO EDUCATION

Universal public education systems only arose in 19th century Europe where previously education was reserved for the privileged classes mainly through monasteries and church related schooling (Allen, 2001:48-49). Sociological perspectives of education examine functionalist ideas, that see education as a means to produce individuals that enhance the purpose of society to provide an integrated system that enhance the organic functioning of society, thus supporting continuation and existence of collective interests. Schools then are to be socialising agents that act as a bridge between the family and society, producing a well adjusted person that functions in adult society to create 'social solidarity' to use a Durkheimien term (Allen, 2001:50; Ritzer, 1988). Functionalists see schools reflecting society in a miniature format using similar standards and approaches as society including valuing of the merit principle for achievements and setting standards that reflect the broader standards of society. Critiques of the functionalist approach claim that functionalists

have not considered the kind of values that are being transmitted by the education system such as ruling class values, for example and that they lacked an analysis of power relations in society assuming that the structure and standards of society are self-evidently appropriate and do not need critical reflection.

The liberal perspectives, while not a sociological perspective as such, according to Allen (2001) is important here as it can be linked strongly to market environments, which is quite a central dimension in this thesis. The liberal view is that education is primarily responsible to develop the potential of each individual in terms of their life chances and their success in society. The individual is to develop their full potential that then can be used to negotiate the best position within a market environment. From that point of view liberals sought to reduce inequality between people by providing good education for all that makes an individual competitive on merit principles. It is within this perspective that arguments supporting equity principles were put forward, a perspective that liberal feminists used as their premise to argue for change, as elaborated on within the chapter on gender equity. The social democratic view following the liberal sentiments of achieving on merit pushed for equality of opportunity arguing that measures have to be implemented to address inequality among different strata in society and that one cannot assume that each child can equally develop their potential, regardless of their social position in society (Taylor, et.al., 1997). However, attempts to address inequality did not have the expected results and critiques put forward that apart from poverty, there are other determinants that influence occupational attainment, such as gender, ethnicity, religion (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett, 1982).

Conflict perspectives look at the different interests in society and their interplay. This perspective is closely linked to Marxist theorists that analyse the dominant groups in society and how they dominate and interrelate to other institutions and shape social phenomena. They claim that schooling has a hidden curriculum that produces well adjusted individuals that can cope with submitting to hierarchies, bring along skills that are needed in the labour market, are subservient and accepting of the current structure of society and they learn to be motivated by external rewards (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Illich, 1971). This perspective was criticized for not considering that

the working class and teachers, for example, are actively involved in shaping inequality and educational outcomes and that schooling alone is not determining life chances and success. A modified approach by Giroux (1984) proposes to see schools as sites of ideological struggle where many different debates are occurring at many levels. Poststructuralists followed these arguments through with their analysis on fields of power and interaction between various players within a field, and their analysis of how children are being made to think of themselves as members of society as male/female, as worthy/unworthy, as pupils, as children and so on (Allen, 2001:51). As such they examined the discourses used to shape meaning and reproduce understandings of roles different people play in a system, in this case the education system, which sets 'conditions of possibility' of what a child might become rather than directly influencing a person's identity (Allen, 2001:51).

Increasingly, education is also subject to market principles as well as individuals' feeling the pressure of labour markets, as has been analysed substantially within Sociology through Weber's concept of life chances and Marx's theories on capitalism (Ritzer, 1988; Parkin, 1982). The idea of a market in education and education providing cultural capital that assists with negotiating the labour market, is central to this thesis because the concerns of parents about outcomes for boys is intrinsically tied up with market principles in that parents want to offer the best education they can negotiate, so that their children have the best chances to gain jobs that have high rewards and these, in turn, are in high demand.

EDUCATION AND THE MARKET

Markets and education are related in two ways. One, the institutional education sector is increasingly encompassing market principles in the way schooling operates and is promoted to parents; two, education provides the credentials that are being used in the labour market as one variable to gain a privileged position. Thus, education is tied up within a market discourse that sees educators and parents using phrases such as 'education is an investment', 'consumers of education', 'shopping around for the best school' and so on. Discourses, in a Foucauldian sense, permeate a culture in such a fashion that underlying principles are accepted unquestioningly

(Foucault, 1980). Within education there is evidence that the trend towards adopting market principles is reaching a state of this kind of immersion where there is no questioning any longer about the rightfulness of such underlying principles. In Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) words "tacit approval" is provided to something that is really a 'cultural arbitrary', a discourse and belief that has grown over time and is believed to be the rightful course of action, in other words the 'truth'.

To promote a market environment it is necessary to convince parents to subscribe to the liberal democratic notion of the individual having to develop themselves to be able to survive and prosper in society. As stated above, the individual and his/her needs are central to liberal ideology, which encompasses concepts such as freedom of choice, self-fulfilment, everybody has the potential to achieve if they want to and are given the right support, that is, the support parents choose on behalf and as advocates for their children (Goldsmith, 1998). The words used in the previous sentence sound quite reasonable, even to those who subscribe to a social justice position. Yet, for liberal proponents to use similar terminology as social justice advocates have used for years, that is the terminology or discourse of having rights to decide over one's destiny and participate in decision-making, shows the power of language, its power of persuasion. Thus, it is easy, in time, to make parent participation a concept and tool employed in the promotion of markets and consumer behaviour. Though, the word 'participation' had quite a different meaning to parent activists who were looking for true participation and sharing in decision-making (Beattie, 1985). The language of free choice is powerful, it opens the way to consumerism, which generally implies commodification, and both public and private schools are in fact sellers in an environment where there are buyers.

One of the fundamental aspects of free market principles is competition between service providers, and freedom of choice by consumers to choose their preferred 'product'. Britain was one of the first countries to advocate for freedom of choice in education as illustrated by Golby (1989) who provides an extensive analysis of why market principles in education have arisen as part of a political concept of freedom of choice people ought to have. He says, that the whole idea is embedded in conservative politics, and the rhetoric with regard to education is put aptly by the

Secretary of State of Education when presenting a new British Education Bill in 1987:

(the Bill will)... create a new framework, which will raise standards, extend choice and produce a better-educated Britain... We must give the consumers of education a central part in decision-making. (pp.771-2)' (Hansard 1987, December Column: 780, in Golby 1989:63).

The British example resembles the changes brought in by the NSW Liberal/National coalition government when it came into power in the mid 1980s (Limerick and Nielsen, 1996). In fact, the New South Wales 1990 Education Reform Act (part 6, section 34) reflects this thinking when it allows for children to be enrolled in any public school provided the school can accommodate the child and the child is eligible in terms of its age and achievement (in the case of selective high schools). This means that parents can freely choose their school of preference. The school in turn has to take local children within a certain geographical area, but apart from this condition is free to take any children. As a consequence competition in the sense of a free market increasingly arises as schools compete with each other to maintain their operations by attracting pupils and their parents. By promoting the importance of choice in schooling for children, ensuring parents have made the right decision by their child, that is, they chose a school, which will ensure the best outcomes for the child, an incredible burden is put on parents in an environment where

For all parents, the welfare of their children was 'at increased risk in a climate of intensified competition' (Jonathan 1990, pp. 122-5) in which tension and stress were endemic. And the ambitious self could never be fulfilled. There was always higher to reach, the terms of the game were shifting, risk was the only certainty, and no positional choice was ever conclusive (Marginson 1997:204).

The notion of best outcome for children, while understandable, is fraught with problems in that one would have to define what actually constitutes a good outcome within education. To have choice notionally is also not always realistic in practise as will be illustrated later. The rhetoric of 'consumer', 'freedom of choice' and 'free market principles' influence parents so that they perceive that one has to take care personally for the schooling of one's child rather than trusting in the teacher and forming partnerships in the interest of the child and with a firm commitment to the school. It is this aspect of personalised education, which Brown (1990:67) describes

as “a major program of educational privatisation under the slogans of 'parental choice', 'educational standards' and the 'free market'”.

David (1993) describes the changes she has observed in parents' behaviour in an environment where free market principles promote the concept of parents as consumers. She claims that parent participation has shifted from a model of ‘meritocracy’, which refers to the concepts of equality of opportunity and achieving under merit conditions to ‘parentocracy’, which refers to the notion of parents as consumers interacting with the school to get their needs satisfied as consumers. Her conclusions are that parents now are much more concerned with the education of their own child and that increasingly we are looking at privatised forms of education which are dependent on parents' circumstances and initiatives as opposed to the ability and achievements of the child. Moreover, Crump (1996) suggests that in the context of free market principles there should be an opportunity for increased consideration of parents' needs as the school otherwise risks losing enrolments. This assumption, while reasonable, has not yet been borne out, but may well be a positive outcome for those schools that attract those parents who are able to make the choice of moving their child into another school. But, for those schools with children with lesser opportunities for choices, positive parent relationships would be less of an imperative.

Embedded within the element of choice is the assumption that between schools there are considerable differences in the way they provide education and more importantly educational outcomes which are highly valued, so that there are different options to choose from. The reality, however, is that this assumption is a myth. Research overseas (Glenn, 1996; Apple, 1998) and in Australia (Reid, 1998) has shown that there is potentially less diversity in schools under free market conditions because schools try to appeal to the same target group, namely the parents, who they perceive as being relatively conservative in their approach on what they expect of a school, that is, high academic achievement. Schools cannot necessarily afford the risk of alienating some parents by offering an unconventional program. Hence, as there is little difference between schools decisions are more likely to be based on: glossy brochures, word of mouth recommendation, reputation which is fed by rumours

fluctuating from day to day. Many schools have now produced a prospectus and schools with larger funds employ community liaison and public relations officers to attract students (Marginson, 1997:187).

One of the controversial issues to demonstrate differences between schools has been the national testing of children to produce and possibly publish results of individual schools so that parents could make comparisons and informed choices. The publishing of these so called league tables has been strongly resisted by parent organisations and teachers unions as it has a clear potential for ruining the reputation of some schools. An example of these kinds of tests is the Australian Basic Skills Test, which is applied to all children in Grade 3 and Grade 5. At this stage the NSW Government has agreed not to publish the results of these tests of individual schools.

As pointed out above, for choice to be effectively promoted, there needs to be a perceived difference between schools in terms of quality of service, in this case education. To establish a close link between the services the school provides and what consumers want from a school, decision-making was increasingly to be vested in the consumers, that is the parents, in the form of committees and school councils, (see Chapter Four: Setting the Scene). However, Beattie (1985) asserts, that at a structural level devolution of decision-making and acting according to free market principles plays into the hands of politicians and governments. There is the potential that school community participation results in an: 'increased support for the existing political system by evolving new forms of citizen activity which will distract attention from the fundamental distribution of power' (Beattie, 1985:21). This local responsibility for decision-making is also criticised by Soliman (1991:54). It is said to be achieving two things: 1) the central agency can concentrate on key decisions only, ie. policy making, fiscal and managerial control and thus save funds, and 2) it can redirect parent/community demands on education departments to individual schools, which are then blamed for the decisions taken. This proposition is also confirmed by Whitty, Power and Halpin (1998) who researched five countries (United States, England and Wales, New Zealand, Sweden and Australia) in terms of free market principles operating in education. They conclude that the state shifts the blame for educational inequality to individual schools, their staff and parents.

Private schools can also be counted among the winners of a market in education. As a market evolves in public education, an ideological shift occurs which plays much more into the hands of private schools than the idea of equal education for all and being able to achieve on a merit basis. In a system where everybody looks for individual advantage and considering the rhetoric of choice, it is a short way to thinking, 'what is the best I can afford of essential goods for my child', educational qualifications being essential in the job market. This would be cost effective for the government as private schools subsidise their income through, at times, hefty fees. Already, the state has approved many applications of small private schools, some with only fifty students, when public schools generally would not be operated at such low levels, unless it is a country school. For example, between 1986 to 1996, 394 new private schools were approved which had to have only a minimum attendance of fifty students (Marginson, 1997:203). It can be proposed that there is an increasing threat to public schools and therefore teachers, through the increasing focus on market principles and competition for producing best outcomes, in a time when more money than ever before is going into private education while public schools suffer funding cuts, and when parents increasingly subsidise schooling through coaching of their children outside school hours (Sloane, 1998).

It appears possible that ultimately the state is interested in having a privatised education market, where parents use vouchers to place their children in the school they can afford, thus potentially the state will not need to run a school system, but rather put schools out to a private tender and anyone can apply. Broad guidelines on curriculum and safety standards may be in place to ensure the state takes some responsibility for the education of the new generation.

The parent organisations I have been researching, are opposing the development of an education market as they believe it undermines the successful delivery of effective and comprehensive public education, because those who could afford to move children around or put them in private schools will do so and local schools will be left with more disadvantaged students whose parents have less options to invest in education. Although, discussions were quite intense at a parent organisation's

conference, when deciding over the issue of being able to choose the school one's children go to. However, the main concern of many parents was that being against choice would effectively abolish selective and gender specific public schools. The final vote, however, condemned free market principles being applied to public education. Local comprehensive and neighbourhood schools were instead being promoted as ideal. A survey of four hundred parents, published in the *Daily Telegraph* (1999), also revealed that most parents believed that public school education should be fully funded by government and approximately 50% felt that private schools should get no public funding at all (*The Daily Telegraph*, 9/9/1999). Instead, the trend is in the other direction, that is, not enough funds for public schooling and an increasing trend towards spending public funds in private schools.

Having outlined the trend towards a market environment in education one has to also point out that the idea of free markets is limited in this case, as students are obliged to partake in formal education and the government is obliged to take some responsibility for providing it (Marginson, 1997:33). As such, the costs are subsidised and not fully deregulated, as a market environment would normally propose. Also, the opportunity of shopping around for schools is limited by geographical hurdles such as distance, although within a large city this hurdle is quite easily overcome. Nevertheless, a limited form of competition indicative of market environments is certainly identifiable and an implementation of a voucher system would certainly free up the issue of price competition considerably, although it would not address the issue of increasing homogeneity, thus the whole idea of choice is false.

The question of education as a credential in the labour market is aptly described by Weber (1968:1000 in Parkin, 1982:101) when talking about social closure and how education is increasingly taking the place of descent and lineage. He said:

If we hear from all sides demands for the introduction of regulated curricula culminating in specialised examinations, the reason behind this is, of course, not a suddenly awakened 'thirst for education', but rather the desire to limit the supply of candidates for these positions and to monopolise them for the holders of educational patents. For such monopolisation, the 'examination' is today the universal instrument – hence its irresistible advance.

Within this thesis the question of the importance of credentials in education is central and the key issue for parents was the lack of achievement of boys vis-à-vis girls in exactly those examinations that are vested with such importance. Yet, research shows that many more variables determine long term achievement in terms of one's career and occupational attainment (Department Employment, Education and Training, 1993; Marshall, 1998). As such the questions of the market, positional goods and cultural capital that enhance long term educational benefits is dealt with in the theoretical chapter.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS TO THE THESIS

Having established the relationship between education and the market environment and its link with level of attainment in education, as one variable that can influence one's career, some of the parents' actions in terms of gender equity meet with understanding. Having read Marginson's (1997) book *Markets in Education* in which he argued that education is a positional good where those who have more education are pitted against those who have less, I feel that the theory of positional economy by Hirsch (1974) may be useful as one tool of analysis and theoretical focus of my thesis. The theory puts forward arguments that there are two types of economies, that is, a material economy and a positional economy. Positional goods traded in a positional economy are those goods that are scarce in absolute terms and are organised hierarchically so the enjoyment of these goods is affected by whether or not other people have access to them too: "with a fixed number of positional goods at each level of advantage, one person gains position only at another's expense" (Marginson, 1997:40). So, in the case of education, the importance of education is dependent on the amount of education other people have to offer also, which includes the notion that levels of education vary. To enhance economic value of the positional good of education, the ones with more education are depended on their status as highly educated persons to be exclusive so that their value in the market place is increased, as there are fewer of them who can offer these levels of education.

Treating education as a positional good is reflective of where parents and broader society are at, within an environment that emulates a market system and is influenced

by the rhetoric of the market, as outlined above. Thus, my use of positional goods theory reflects a phenomenological insight of parents' thinking, that the most important thing is the achievement of high marks. The positional goods idea as linked to a market environment give parents the impetus to fight for positioning of their child. This thesis then takes as its first step of analysis what seems to be the obvious message (phenomenological, based on ethnographic research methods) coming from the subjects interviewed, observed and considered in the context of the parent organizations and from the analysis of media responses.

The next step examines the positional goods idea for its shortcomings leading to the suggestion that cultural capital with its accompanying mechanism of habitus provide answers as to variables that determine educational success also, within the sphere of job markets. The concept of regimes of truth is then being utilised, as it is the power of creating the truth, for example the importance of examinations that is perpetuated by the institution of schooling, which consistently measures in more or less numerical terms success of individuals against each other, to compete in the market.

Having established level of education as a positional good and the parents desire to ensure that their child brings into the market place the relevant cultural capital, parents subscribe to the idea that educational credentials are achieved on the basis of merit, that is, people deserve the outcome due to hard work or ability. This thinking is historical and based on the idea of achieving on merit and the ideology of equality of opportunity that has been a prevailing fundamental premise in Australian and Western school systems for the past few decades, see section on gender equity. Yet, in reality the merit principle is based on a myth in that there are many other variables that influence a child's achievements, many of which are related to cultural capital and the condition of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). The idea of cultural arbitrariness by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) can explain the perception of education being based on merit. Cultural arbitrariness basically means that there is nothing intrinsically right and inevitable as to the way the education system functions, teaches, produces outcomes and shapes pupils. This idea of the cultural arbitrary, a concept of Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), is complemented by Foucault's concepts of regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980) that looks at the kind of truth created by power

holders and the concept of surveillance (Foucault, 1977) with professionals ensuring that myths and dominant ideologies are perpetuated and the focus of parents remain on the individual's success rather than challenging the system or institution as a whole. Currently, the system of schooling is primarily embedded in the liberal idea of the individual rather than the collective benefit and as such in the agency of the parent in negotiating the agency of the system. Moreover, the system itself has interests in maintaining the myths of merit as it will ensure funds are invested in education to achieve this alleged potential of transformation of the child's educational outcome. Yet, parent organisations with their advocacy actions by and large try to make the myth of achievement based on merit come true for all children. Calls for gender equity strategies for boys are based on this myth also, girls' success can be seen as evidence that supports the myth, in that the merit principle has the function of supporting the hegemonic perception of education that all can achieve the best that their person is able to sustain, if necessary with some intervention through equality of opportunity strategies.

Parent participation is much linked with principles of democracy and as such is subject to a regime of truth created around the value of democracy. It is subject to another cultural arbitrary that assumes that advocacy and participation are positive, necessary, desirable and inherently good. In fact, a case could be made that democracy is embedded in the habitus of people that have grown up in an overtly democratic country such as Australia. Part of the notion of democracy is a belief that change is possible and as such advocacy groups are imbued with democracy and its participatory principles, which they use to advocate for their members and their interests, in this case, parents and their children. Parent organizations and their work is influenced by overlapping disciplines or fields such as education and politics. But, at the micro level there are issues of representation and constitutional powers as in presidents, elected leaders and so on. In some ways, advocacy organisations can be also be seen as a surveillance structure that monitors the education department, yet their role is used to appease the conscience of power holders in education in that a belief of equality and partnership is created, that in reality is very limited, in that real change as a result of parent organisations' intervention is rarely achieved. For example, in one meeting a parent said: "it has only taken 40 years to finally take

action on this issue and then it wasn't related to anything we did as an organisation". Generally, staff and parents are disillusioned about the rate of success they have in interaction with the department (my observation and comments of interviewees).

In terms of relevant definitions for this thesis 'discourse' is used in the Foucauldian sense where a discourse is a type of language that is constructed through a series of discursive statements and ideas that together form and represent an understanding about an institution (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000).

Cultural capital and habitus are two concepts of Bourdieu, the first referring 'literally' to forms of capital that can be invested to achieve better outcomes. These generally relate to benefits one acquires from one's class position such as a taste for high culture, elaborate language and so on. In the case of education, credentials such as diplomas and degrees are cultural capital used to negotiate position in the labour market. Habitus is a condition that is acquired over time by being immersed in a society, one's surroundings, and one's class. It affects what individuals are thinking, how they act and how they perceive the world. Habitus is able to change and incorporate new information and as such it is in constant flux, responsive with its own conditioning to any situation (Bourdieu, 1984).

The interests of the child are subjugated to an adult and the child is a cultural product that is invested with a sense of future for society but also in terms of its potential for reproduction of the family. As this thesis is concerned with the education of the child, in fact the shaping of the child into an adult that will be successful in terms of its career and make the best out of its life, Bourdieu's (1984:231) sentiment of cultural products is relevant:

A cultural product...is a constituted taste, a taste which has been raised from the vague semi-existence of half-formulated experience, implicit or even unconscious desire, to the full reality of the finished product, by a process of objectification which, in present circumstances, is almost always the work of professionals.

The professionals in this case are the teachers and the institution of education. Within this thesis the dimensions of teacher and child and also the relationship of the child to the parent is not further explored as the focus is primarily on the actions of

the parents as enacted within parent organizations. Yet, the sense of the child as a cultural product that deserves investment in is much felt throughout this thesis due to the actions of advocacy that bear witness to the importance of the child and its education, an education that is a cultural product also.

In this thesis the term parent participation relates to decision-making activities only as opposed to being involved with schools as a parent in activities such as canteen duty, remedial reading or organising fetes. The parent-school relationship in terms of assisting one's child with reading at home, for example, is also not considered.

Gender equity strategies are forms of intervention that seek to address disadvantage on the grounds of gender. Within this thesis these strategies relate to education and its settings only. But, they do not only relate to intervention directed at people, but also looking at such constructs as gendered curriculum, gendered activities and so on.

The use of the word 'parents' is used as a general description of parents that have children in public schools and in the context of who the parent organisations represent. The words 'parent organisations' are used to represent formally constituted parent advocacy groups, mostly those researched in this thesis. While empirical work was undertaken with two organisations I concentrated in this research primarily on the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales (P&C) because it is a much larger organisation that appears to represent many more parents than the New South Wales Federation of School Community Organisations (FOSCO) that incidentally has folded since due to lack of involvement of parents.

In attempting this research a considerable difficulty I experienced in contextualising for myself, and others, schools and schooling, is being a parent of children who attend schools. I felt, as Connell (2002:12) explained: "One of the most difficult tasks in social research is to take a situation that everyone thinks they understand, and illuminate it in new ways." Subsequently, whenever I talked about my thesis, stories were recounted by other people of experiences they had with schools, which

gave me an impression that broadly speaking parents have considered issues of participation and by and large have made a decision to not concern themselves significantly with parent participation mechanisms in schools. This I then had to juxtapose with the work I was undertaking reminding myself regularly of the need to approach the thesis with a sociological imagination.

The thesis is organised as follows: Chapter One provides an overview of the work as a whole and examines the institution of education in an environment of market principles encroaching on public education. It also provides an overview of the major issues and theoretical concerns of this thesis.

Chapter Two examines the notion of educational successes through an examination of the economic concept of positional goods via a structural analysis utilising the concepts of habitus and cultural capital by Bourdieu and an organisational analysis using Foucault's concept of 'regimes of truth'.

Chapter Three provides the methodological foundation of this research, which is multifaceted and uses an ethnographic approach primarily incorporating a number of research methods, such as document analysis, observation, participant observation, and interviews which aimed at informing tentative conclusions drawn from observation and document analysis.

Chapter Four introduces the two major foci for inquiry of this thesis, that is, parent participation in school decision-making, and gender equity in education. The first section provides a background to parent participation in decision-making in public schools, from an international, national, and finally a state (New South Wales, NSW) perspective. The second focuses on situating gender equity in education and examines theoretical paradigms gender equity policies are based on.

Chapter Five provides an overview of the two key parent organisations I worked with, including their structure and operations. It explores the different forums decision-making takes place in and an ethnographic account of their key representative decision-making forum, the Annual Conference. Brief reference is

also made to the national parent advocacy organisation that both state organisations are affiliated with.

Chapter Six examines decision-making processes in the organisation and juxtaposes them with the ideals of participatory democracy, an idea based on principles of community participation that are embraced by parent organisations who believe that they are highly democratic and consider people's views in their operations.

Chapter Seven is the key section of the thesis that deals with gender equity, parent organisations' position on gender equity, the events and debates that have occurred around this issue and the situating of the debate in terms of the theories around positional goods and cultural capital. It explores parent organisations' actions and relationship with the media around the contentious issue of gender equity.

Chapter Eight draws together the themes explored throughout this thesis. It offers some reflections on regimes of truth, actions of parent organisations and raises questions as to the relevance of these organizations and their current ways of operating.

Lastly, some reference needs to be made to my sources. I have had extensive access to archives of both parent organizations and subsequently much of the material I have used are from that source. One organisation taped their conference proceedings, thus transcripts appear word for word, but for reasons of privacy no names of speakers or schools are revealed. As it was not necessary for analysis purposes to know the identity of a speaker on a continuous basis and many speakers are reflected in the thesis, I refrained from using pseudonyms. I am indebted to the organisations for granting me such extensive access to their time and archives.

In the end, I have examined an area of interest to many in society and cast some reflections on schooling, its decision-making practices through the eyes of parent advocacy organisations, which revealed much 'food for thought' to myself and may provide some opportunities for reflection to parent organisations and policy makers in education departments.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY

A hegemonic understanding of gender assumed that girls and boys have a predestination for certain occupations such as caring professions for girls and science based professions for boys, for example Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Connell, (2000). This assumption was challenged by feminism, and gender equity strategies appear to have successfully addressed the disadvantage of girls in the school system, in so far as girls are now performing to at least the standard of boys. This chapter examines the notion of educational success through an examination of the economic concept of positional goods (Hirsch, 1977) via a structural analysis utilising the concepts of habitus and cultural capital by Bourdieu and an organisational analysis using Foucault's concept of 'regimes of truth'. Much of the discussion centres on the question of markets in education. I shall argue that the concept of 'market' is relevant within education as part of habitus, the idea that education can be described in 'market' terms is largely cultural.

I have chosen positional goods theory, as it seems to best reflect the thinking of those parents who are engaged in a struggle to ensure that their child achieves the highest educational outcomes as possible. The positional goods theory provides an analysis of the value of non-material goods in the market place and how their value changes over time as a reflection of supply and demand. While it appears that positional goods theory applies to education, its value and the struggle around gender equity strategies as reflected in the actions of the parents and the media, it does not go far enough in explaining the process of negotiating position in the market place through educational achievement. This is where Bourdieu's (1984) notion of capital is useful. 'Capital' by Bourdieu includes several forms, not just economic, that affect outcomes in the market environment. Bourdieu's concept of habitus further explains how different life experiences interact within a person to enable success in education. Embedded within these concepts, is the possibility of change through the interaction of cultural capital and habitus.

Cultural capital and habitus are also concepts relevant to an analysis of the ability of parents to argue their case successfully in the parent organisations. However, these

organisations and their practice are embedded in a discourse of participatory democracy that is influenced by the field of education and politics, which within themselves are subject to ‘regimes of truth’, a construct by Foucault, that essentially explains how certain truth and understandings are formed. I would also argue that highly structured organisations such as the parent organisations create their own regime of truth through the power relations within the organisation in that the highly structured hierarchical environment that overtly works under democratic principles influences others and their thinking. This chapter then explores these concepts theoretically as a foundation to further chapters.

THE THEORY OF POSITIONAL GOODS AND EDUCATION

Hirsch’s theory of positional goods

Hirsch frequently employs education to illustrate what he means by a positional goods economy. *Social Limits to Growth* (1977) is written in the context of liberal capitalism, which Hirsch saw as a regulatory system that affects social organisation also and not only the economic sphere. It is in this context that Hirsch recognises that some goods cannot be regulated through a materialist market only and that some goods are affected by what he calls ‘the law of positional economy’, which is an economy that works with a zero-sum concept where the benefits for one are to the detriment of another, and primarily because the availability of benefits is limited (Marshall, 1998:247). Hirsch’s work is an attempt to inject some notion of the social and cultural into the idea of economy; before *Social Limits to Growth* (1977) positional economy was not identified as a separate sphere of economy.

Hirsch (1977) argues that there are two types of economy, that is, a material economy and a positional economy.

The positional economy, which is the basis of Harrod’s oligarchic wealth, relates to all aspects of goods, services, work positions, and other social relationships that are either (1) scarce in some absolute or socially imposed sense or (2) subject to congestion or crowding through more extensive use (Hirsch, 1977:27).

Positional goods, then, are characterised by their desirability and usage, and their limited availability. In Hirsch’s words, there is a ‘hierarchy of wants’ (1977:59).

Positional goods differ from material goods in the sense that once one possesses a material good, the desire for it is satisfied. Positional goods, on the other hand, are more or less attractive according to their availability: the greater number of people who possess the good, the less value it has, and the less enjoyment or benefit it provides. Bourdieu's notion of capital (1984) identifies, besides economic capital, other forms of capital or value such as cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. He outlines how these forms of capital are related to economic capital in the sense that they are often supported and nurtured through financial means and that, on the other hand, possessing cultural, social and/or symbolic capital enables the person to achieve a better position in economic terms. As such Hirsch's notion of a positional economy and Bourdieu's notion of capital are complementary, one explains the mechanisms of how positional goods and non-economic forms of capital are operating as a positional economy and the other focuses on the kind of investments made and the actual forms of capital that enhance one's position in society.

Two examples by Hirsch illustrate the concept of positional goods in a positional economy. Example one, relating to the case of 'leisure land' (Hirsch, 1977:32): People like possessing a cottage in the country so that they can enjoy privacy and tranquillity. But, an increased number of people who want to live in the country will diminish the desired attributes of living in the country, thus, peace and tranquillity will be disturbed. In addition, living in the country would not be a rarity any longer and therefore, for both of these reasons, the more people enjoy the good the less desirable it becomes. As a result a positional economy arises which drives the real estate prices higher for such localities to preserve the attributes and ensure that it remains a rare possession, in other words the market responds to the positional desirability of this good. Thus, it becomes subjected to economic principles and a market.

Example two: The better the general level of education in the population, the higher the level of qualification an individual needs to be able to gain access to the highest jobs, in pay and status, as there are only few of those available. Thus, again, the consumption of the good by many decreases individual enjoyment.

Positional goods are finite, limited and socially scarce. In the field of education, however, this limit is not clear cut: “Education enjoyed in its own right is capable of indefinite extension; as an instrument for entrée into top jobs, it is not” (Hirsch 1977:59). This assertion echoes that of Max Weber who argues that education increases life chances, in Parkin’s (1982:101) words: “Weber saw the educational system as an especially refined instrument for guarding and controlling entry to the charmed circles”, and that of which Bourdieu in his analysis of education as cultural capital claims that it provides a means for exclusion of other classes (Bourdieu, 1984). Both theorists’ analysis (Hirsch 1977; Bourdieu, 1984) included the aspect of desirability of certain educational qualifications in the market as one determinant that assists in negotiations of economic opportunities.

Positional goods relate to market forces and wealth in that access to positional goods is largely governed by access to finance. Price is particularly the regulator when a positional good is governed by “‘pure’ social scarcity” (Hirsch, 1977:28), that is where satisfaction is derived from the scarcity of the good in itself. For example, where only few people in the world can enjoy the most expensive car. The car in itself does not bring additional benefits in comparison to another luxury car, but to be in possession of the rarest car provides satisfaction by possessing a rarity. The price of that car can be infinite as indicated by auction results of very expensive goods, such as unique paintings, for example. In that sense, price does not reflect economic inputs such as labour and material, instead it reflects rarity. Thus, ‘price’ in the positional economy is determined socially rather than economically.

The extent of possession of positional goods is based upon the possession of economic capital as Hirsch recognises: “...goods and services sharing some or all of the characteristics of positional goods attract an increasing proportion of family expenditure as family income rises” (Hirsch, 1977:28). This can be seen as linked to education in Australia where an increase of education conducted through private schools has become possible due to the disposable income of Australians having increased over the past thirty years and the importance of educational achievement becoming more and more paramount.

Positional goods and education

Based on Hirsch's theories (1977), Marginson (1997) claims that "by far the most important commodities produced in education are positional goods" and he provides the following definition:

Positional goods in education are places in education, which provide students with relative advantage in the competition for jobs, income, social standing and prestige (Marginson, 1997:38).

By 'places' Marginson means the opportunity to gain a University or other higher education institution qualification. Particularly, this relates to the scarcity in the educational system of this qualification. A place to study Medicine in a well-respected University is one such opportunity. According to Marginson the production of positional goods includes all areas where it facilitates different levels of access to the labour market or other desirable prestigious places. Therefore, it includes higher education places, professorships, political positions, which are often influenced by where one was educated and who one mixed with socially (old boys' network), a sentiment closely linked to cultural capital, and highly paid positions in the labour market. At all these levels there are processes in place that ensure that the positions remain exclusive and accessible to only a few. Often the gate-keepers are those who are already incumbents of the position and have an interest in maintaining their status. The exclusion mechanisms are varied, and change according to the threat that is posed by an increasing number achieving the credentials necessary to enter coveted positions. The more there are of the latter, the more pressing it is to ensure that the goods remain available to only a few. In Marginson's (1997:41) words: "Positional goods by their nature are interdependent, because more investment in education by one person reduces the value of the positional investments of others." This can be viewed as a kind of inflation (Grenfell and James, 1998) in that, for example, undergraduate degrees are no longer sufficient for entrance to academia.

The investment in gender equity strategies for girls and the response from the boys' 'camp' once girls began to achieve at a similar level to boys, may be seen in this light, in so far as one was perceived as suffering due to the gains made by the other. The education provided to boys was acceptable when girls were 'left behind', but the

quality of education for boys became problematic once girls seemed to 'catch up'. This problem has been confounded by the fact that gender is no longer as important in governing access to high paid positions as it once was. Since the introduction of anti-discrimination laws in 1977 (New South Wales, 1983), overt exclusionary practices are not easily justifiable. For girls, this then enhances the value of education as a positional good as it now appears to be neutral, value free and high achievement more widely acceptable, now that gender delineation in the economic environment based on patriarchy appear to decrease. Hirsch's analysis explains that girls' higher achievement just means that education credentials increasingly suffered from crowding. But, for parents this translated into a loss of opportunity for their boys, a situation, that is grieved for because of patriarchy, the perception that boys foremost need to be the breadwinners in the family, a perception that still holds true today (Summers, 2003). Parents on the one hand accept that outcomes need to be based on merit principles and thus girls, if they deserve it through achievement, need to have access to the jobs, and on the other hand parents want to ensure, under patriarchy, that their boys do not lose their educational advantage. It appears then that gender ought to be identified as a cultural good, not that it can be acquired in terms of being the one or the other sex, but in terms of how gender is valued in society. Depending on the sex of a child, different expectations are transmitted to the child through the mechanism of habitus, expectations that are influenced by patriarchy. Thus, boys inherit different cultural capital to girls. They are more likely endowed with cultural capital that assists their life chances in a positional economy. Hence, gender is crucial, but it is not a positional good as it cannot be traded, but rather it is endowed with cultural capital. It appears then that the concern with education hides the real problem, which is that of patriarchy. Good marks alone will not give girls an advantage in the market place, when by and large a patriarchal doctrine supports the notion of boys needing to achieve. Accordingly, boys' success and girls' lack of success in terms of long-term career structure may well be largely unrelated to education, but rather to cultural capital that boys are endowed with by society. As such, education is the scapegoat used to try and impose change, so that other underlying structures do not need to be examined such as patriarchal male dominance.

The importance of education has been spelt out above in terms of achieving the few coveted jobs and positions in society. However, the limited availability of these high level jobs and the association with education has been present in Western society for several decades, yet the investments in education by individual families has increased particularly over the past fifteen years (Sloane, 1998). Social scientists (Whitty, et. al, 1998; Marginson, 1997) cite a number of reasons for this: consistently high unemployment numbers: change in the labour market with unskilled and trades labour disappearing; increased consumer thinking that has instilled in parents a sense of having to determine their own destinies and that of their children; increased disposable income through both parents working and so on. To that end, some argue, that an education market has been evolving since the eighties, with coaching costs and funds spent on private education being an increased financial burden to families. The demand for this perceived market ensures that the link of education with the positional economy is then maintained, if not advanced constantly. Education has become a highly emotional subject that influences parents and children's lives enormously, not the least so, because it is vested with cultural capital that is linked to status and success in a stratified society. The pressure on children to achieve is incredibly high as parents want to see their investments pay off. "The extension of the 'chain of necessary intermediate consumption' means that the unit costs of education as a social selector has increased" (Marginson, 1997:43).

Having established that high status jobs are finite in number and education provides, together with other cultural capital, access to coveted jobs, there are three areas that positional goods theory could be applied to gender equity issues outlined in this thesis: 1) there are only two cohorts; male and female; only one, as a group, can be higher achievers, 2) gender equity strategies can be perceived, and were perceived by some parents, as being able to provide added value to the positional good of education and a pathway to achieve a high level of education 3) Funds for gender equity programs are limited and finite and thus they themselves become positional goods that parents were arguing for. Gender equity strategies are designed for schools to enhance the achievements of credentials by implementing strategies that benefit certain groups, in this case either boys or girls. In this scenario gender equity strategies become the positional good that is desirable, and suffers from congestion and crowding as follows: Gender is associated with the sexes of male and female,

even though one can argue that gendered behaviours are observable in the opposite sex in that, for example, a perceived masculine trait may well be displayed by a female (Connell, 2002:5). Nevertheless, gender as an expression of one's sex is played out in a binary setting, which lends itself very easily to a zero-sum evaluation of outcomes. If boys as a group have higher educational outcomes, then girls as a group necessarily have a less favourable educational outcome and the other way around. As education is very highly valued as a positional good and suffers from crowding as pointed out above, to be the loser in this binary scenario is perceived as detrimental to pupils' lives. The link of education with positional goods and the perceived impact gender equity strategies had on girls' achievements explains why gender equity as an issue in education became emotionally charged to a degree that the public and parents reacted with a sense of moral outcry (see Chapter Seven: Analysis of the Gender Equity Debate). Yet, one has to examine the underlying reasons for the outcry, given that no similar outcry was heard about the under-achievement of girls a decade or so earlier. Many would argue that the moral outcry is linked with the 'battle of the sexes' syndrome, where generally men are defending a position of superiority that women are trying to challenge more or less successfully. As one parent interviewed believed, gender equity and the boys was only such an issue because it challenged the perceived superiority of men, as outlined before. Using Foucault's work one can argue that the perceived superiority of men is part of a regime of truth that created a sense of truth that males are superior (see discussion below).

Marginson (1997) put forward the idea of 'value added goods', which are elements that assist in enhancing the value of the positional good. Using his view, gender equity may be the value added to the positional good. Thus, if school grades are the desirable good that determine qualification and ultimately jobs, then a value added good would enhance these grades by offering additional goods that are sought after also and that will enhance the value of these marks. In the case of gender equity a value added good linked with gender equity could be assertiveness and high self-esteem in girls. In fact, much thought and programming has been invested in this area of development for girls (Kenway and Willis, 1990). These are characteristics that would assist girls in getting access to higher positions, provided that they have the educational credentials. Looking at this example with a critical eye though, one

cannot help thinking, that the assertiveness needed, is an emulation of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, as Dale Spender (1989) concluded, males have been perceived as the universal human being, upheld as a model to aspire to, rendering girls as such invisible. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital and Connell's (2000) work on hegemonic masculinity more usefully explain why girls with higher educational credentials than boys, may not be successful at gaining access to higher level jobs (see Chapter Four: Setting the Scene). It begs the question, whether masculinity as such is a positional good? It could be argued that certain forms of behaviour associated with hegemonic masculinity might well be a road to success. Liberal feminists, in particular, have sought to encourage girls into traditional male professions so that they would have a competitive advantage in the market place, because jobs coveted by males have a higher value attached. However, hegemonic masculinity may be better viewed as cultural capital, rather than a positional good, as it is linked with expectations of society and thus culturally shaped and reproduced (see Bourdieu's theories below). Here the cultural capital theory of Bourdieu and Hirsch' positional goods theory converge in that the positional goods are the educational grades achieved and gender equity strategies provide 'added value'. Assertiveness, for example, is part of cultural capital and the programme, which enhances this for girls also gives them access to this hitherto closed off source of cultural capital and in turn enhances their position in the market place of economic opportunities, driven by a positional economy.

A positional situation exists also by the somewhat finite funding for gender equity programs, thus both groups argued for funds where a win for one group means a loss to the other. This research illustrates some of these dimensions and the response of the bureaucracy and policy makers were policies that responded to the crowding situation, by making gender equity broadly available to both sexes in a fashion that neither of them overtly stand to benefit greatly. In other words the policies were watered down in effect. In the case of parent organisations, instead of targeting one or the other sex, statements included the word 'student' thus encompassing both sexes and other statements included 'boys and girls' in an attempt of signalling equality (see Chapter Seven: Analysis of Gender Equity Debate). This is reflective of the phenomenon called crowding by Hirsch (1977), that is, the more individuals enjoy the goods, the less anybody benefits as a whole. As shall be demonstrated,

leaving policy statements formulated so broadly facilitates favouring one sex over the other, in undertaking social action, in that it provides the freedom to advocate for one more than the other without breaking with agreed principles. The actions of departments and parent organisations demonstrate the resistance to the opening of access to cultural capital for fear of undermining the positional advantage gained by one over the other. Instead, policies were designed to appease parents and advocates for gender equity strategies for boys by widening access, with the effect though that actual intervention became piecemeal and was once more left to the powers that be, as to whether girls or boys were seeing a focus on their well-being in school. History under patriarchy would indicate that boys stand to win in an environment that is designed to limit access to coveted positional goods and cultural capital.

As outlined in Chapter One: Introduction, parent organisations were very concerned about gender equity issues in particular when boys' achievements seemed to be challenged by girls' improvements in education results. The merit principles much hailed by recent decades in schooling influenced parents into wanting to ensure that a 'level playing field' is established for their children. The ideology of a 'level playing field' is the foundation for much of the actions of parent organisations that see themselves as addressing shortcomings in education on the basis that all children need to have equal opportunities. Being advocacy organisations, for the parent organisations then, the communal response to education is very important and their conduct has to be seen in that light. They recognise that "the preferred outcome may be obtainable only by collective action" (Marginson, 1997:41) in that they strive to achieve a level playing field in the belief that individual children will then have the best opportunities to achieve. However, as I will now demonstrate, the playing field is not level. Hirsch contends

The positional sector ...in its nature is the sphere of individual competition. It is the sphere of the traditional bourgeois ethos, of boundless individual striving for rewards and prizes that only a few can obtain: of opportunities for distinction, for service, for leadership. Here it is possible only to rise above one's fellows, bourgeois style, rather than along with them, proletarian or communal style. Collective advance, the traditional growth process of the mass, has no place in this sector (Hirsch, 1977: 6).

BOURDIEU'S APPROACH TO EDUCATION - ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

Bourdieu (1984) with his concept of cultural capital argues that there are other forms of capital than educational achievement that influence educational outcomes and success in the market place. Bourdieu also analysed the actual process of acquiring values with his concepts of habitus and cultural capital as linked to education and the market place, both of which are subject of discussion in this section. Bourdieu approached education through his concept of field, that is “a structurally identifiable space which marks out the sphere of social activity” (Grenfell and James, 1998:19). Not unlike Hirsch, he likens it to a game, and in some sense a market game, because he talks of products with certain values, purchasing power, price, inflation and capital. Bourdieu (1991) recognises three major forms of capital: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers to physical wealth that can be used to buy products, social capital refers to a ‘network of lasting social relations’ and cultural capital refers to “a form of value associated with culturally authorised tastes, consumption patterns, attributes, skills and awards” (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002:x). In this case cultural capital refers to the product of education, in a broad sense though, rather than just confined to formal education one may experience through the institutions of education such as schools and universities. With education Bourdieu means the ‘academic market’ that consists of three distinct forms; 1) the educated individual character in terms of their accent, ways of learning, ways of operating in a social field; 2) connected to objects such as qualifications, books, technology and 3) connected to institutions of learning such as universities, schools, technological institutes and so on.

Similarly to Hirsch and his positional goods analysis, Bourdieu reasons that the value of capital in the market place changes according to the ‘players’ actions in the ‘game’. If more players are able to accumulate capital that buys goods in the market place the more likely it is that the products will be devalued and a ‘qualification inflation’ will occur (Grenfell and James, 1998:20). He claims that all products and actions in the field have value because there is a constant renegotiation of the price and that value is based on a base rate “expressed on the basis of the proximity to and

distance from the present orthodoxy or the legitimate” (Grenfell and James, 1998:20; Bourdieu, 1991:50). This compares with Hirsch’s notion of middle line in the zero-sum concept in that value fluctuates up and down affecting the value of other goods relative to what is the currently favoured and valued, may this be an educational qualification or a behavioural trait. For example, for girls to achieve equal or better matriculation results than boys is too close to the orthodox perception that boys are academically better than girls in the subjects that count for occupational success and that they certainly need to have access to well paid jobs more so than girls. As a result new variables would be introduced that will distinguish boys and girls once more, these variables will have an enhanced value relative to the benefits they bring in achieving a positional edge over others.

Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and social capital and their role in education have received much attention by sociologists (Grenfell and James, 1998; Reay, 1998; Connell, et.al. 1982) in that they recognised that the individual educated character brings already social connections and forms of knowledge to school that are related to their class background, upbringing and gender that within them produce cultural capital of a nature that is favourably complemented by educational institutions, like building blocks set on top of each other. Bourdieu outlines that this capital is influencing people’s actions and capacities via a mechanism that he terms ‘habitus’. Habitus is

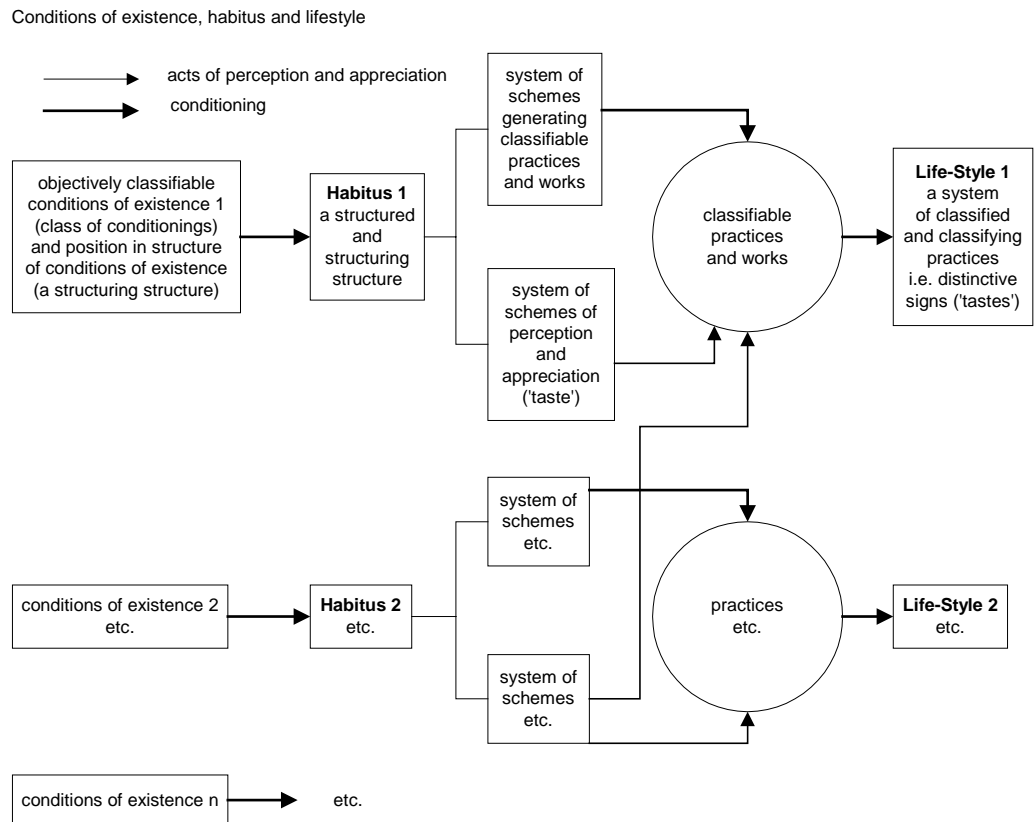
a durably installed set of dispositions (it) tends to generate practices and perceptions, works and appreciations, which concur with the conditions of existence of which the habitus is itself the product (Bourdieu, 1991:13).

In terms of education, it provides a cultural disposition that has the following effect:

The most privileged students do not only owe the habits, behaviour and attitudes which help them directly in pedagogic tasks to their social origins; they also inherit form, their knowledge and savoir-faire, tastes and a ‘good taste’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964:30 own translation by Grenfell and James, 1998:21).

Habitus is seen as a structuring structure that influences actions of individuals and reproduces structures in that fashion. Figure 2.1 following Bourdieu (1991:171) illustrates schematically how habitus interacts to create behaviour that in turn is affected by habitus again, which is linked to life style, and as such constantly adjusts and re-adjusts.

Figure 2.1: Conditions of existence, habitus and lifestyle



Habitus is therefore a mechanism by which behaviour and thinking is influenced, shaped and produced and reproduced. All experiences and conditions are absorbed into habitus which in turn takes into consideration previously learned conditions, thoughts and so on.

There is every reason to think that the factors which are most influential in the formation of habitus are transmitted without passing through language and consciousness, but through suggestions inscribed in the most apparently insignificant aspects of the things, situations and practices of everyday life (Bourdieu, 1991:50).

Habitus differs from cultural capital in that cultural capital is value that can be invested for certain purposes, for example, in the market place. Cultural capital is related to habitus in the sense that habitus is involved in reproducing cultural capital and absorbing the experiences gained of using cultural capital. For example, the language of middle class people assists in schooling in that it matches up with the middle class terminology of the teachers and text books and thus it constitutes

cultural capital, yet experiences gained through the use of such language will be absorbed by habitus giving the message that this language is useful and will be utilised accordingly and maybe even embellished.

In terms of the conditions of producing habitus, Bourdieu claims that we are looking at a three-dimensional space that is defined by “volume of capital, composition of capital, and change in these two properties over time”. (Bourdieu, 1984:114) Yet, he says, that the primary differences of these “derive from the overall volume of capital, understood as the set of actually useable resources and powers - economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital”, concluding that those with most capital, for example, financial resources, high educational credentials and extensive social connections may succeed the most in acquiring a high status in society, by way of having their habitus shaped by these resources. It is clear from Bourdieu’s work, particularly in *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984), that he talks of social classes and the way society is divided into classes and class factions. In terms of academic capital, a form of cultural capital, this is what he concludes:

Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family). Through its value-inculcating and value-imposing operations, the school also helps (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the initial disposition, i.e., class of origin) to form a general, transposable disposition towards legitimate culture, which is first acquired with respect to scholastically recognised knowledge and practices but tends to be applied beyond the bounds of the curriculum, taking the form of a ‘disinterested’ propensity to accumulate experience and knowledge which may not be directly profitable in the academic market. (Bourdieu, 1984:23)

Reay (1998:55) argues that habitus is gendered and cultural capital reflective of one’s class background differs along gender lines. She outlines how the relationships of one’s mother to education influenced the parents’ interaction with schools, according to class lines. She observes how the parents’ cultural capital allows them to work with the teacher on a level that is more likely to have successful outcomes for the child depending on the closeness of matching of the parent’s and teacher’s cultural capital. She further identifies how the schooling experience of parents influenced the behaviour and support mechanisms that parents used to further the education of their children. As such parents operate within a field of power, the institution of education, utilising their cultural capital and habitus to negotiate

favourable educational outcomes for their children. This assertion is also supported by the example of a black family that was able to utilise cultural capital attributed to middle class white families to negotiate a favourable outcome for their child (Lareau and McNamara Horvat, 1999). Furthermore, as can be seen from the dialogues used by parents in this thesis to argue for improved recognition of boys' educational needs and from excerpts of decision-making forums in parent organisations, parents' differential habitus and cultural capital serve them in different ways in negotiating the field of power of parent organisations and the institution of education. Hence, a gender equity programme for all schools will not have identical results in all schools, because cultural capital is a major determinant of success.

Given this scenario of knowing how to behave, having been exposed to a cultural environment that is conducive to achievement in education and having the necessary finances to expose pupils to situations that enhance learning, one can come to the conclusion that this highly stratified environment will tend to disallow achievement for less or differently culturally endowed people. And indeed, the concept of habitus has been criticised for being deterministic and appears to leave no choice for actors in a given situation (Grenfell and James, 1998:16). This assertion can be somewhat challenged by the example of gender equity strategies that seem to have improved girls' responses to the education system, even though as girls they were not culturally endowed to achieve similarly to their male counterparts in that they did not perceive themselves as being high achievers in maths or science, for example. Their habitus or perception of themselves was reshaped in such a fashion that many were able to achieve similarly to boys, albeit still within the cultural setting inherited through their families. In contrast, lower class girls still did not achieve at such higher levels, despite gender equity strategies.

Having covered the cultural capital inherited from the family and how it interacts with habitus I now move on to schooling as an institution. Bourdieu with his analysis of pedagogic authority in a field of power (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and Gramsci (1971) with his concept of hegemony show how the dominant classes are able to influence the education system, by use of ideology and cultural capital, in such a fashion that it appears that schools are neutral, getting the best out of children regardless of class, gender or ethnic background. Bourdieu claims that there is tacit

agreement that outcomes of education through the practice of formal education are achieved by legitimate means, legitimated by this tacit agreement that there is 'natural' distinction in the sense of some having been endowed with natural talents that entitle them to high educational outcomes produced through the medium of successful schooling. This supposed legitimacy is a 'misrecognition' according to Bourdieu and the institution of education is based on the 'cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:5-31). He claims that the rules of the game are not necessarily known and recognised, that they are played out in a field of supply and demand and that "an instruction, or an action, or a usage is legitimate when it is dominant and misrecognised as such, that is to say tacitly recognised" (Bourdieu 1980c:110 own translation by Grenfell and James, 1998:20). Misrecognition means that the underlying operations of how symbolic capital is gained and negotiated within the field is not recognised as such. As Bourdieu said:

It must be asserted ... that capital (or power) becomes symbolic capital, that is capital endowed with specific efficacy, only when it is *misrecognised* in its arbitrary truth as capital and *recognised* as legitimate and, on the other hand, that this act of (false) knowledge and recognition is an act of *practical* knowledge which in no way implies that the object known and recognised be posited as an object (Bourdieu, 1990:112).

To use an example, parents assume that if their child is not achieving it is related to the child's academic inadequacies because parents view the schools as an authority in the field of education, value free, and equitable in its approach to students, and authorised to undertake the actions it does undertake. However, Bourdieu's contention is that the authority and the culture of educational authority is arbitrarily exercised, that is, nothing is inherently inevitable about it, it acts in such a fashion that ordinary parents do not recognise that the education system is influenced by the dominant groups in society.

Bourdieu uses concepts of symbolic power and symbolic capital to reveal the underlying meanings and understanding that legitimise actions, beliefs and values transmitted through education. The means used to instil the cultural arbitrary truth and legitimate the action is symbolic power – a power, which constitutes

the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained by force.....the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining

or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them (Bourdieu, 1991:170).

The latter are often specialists legitimatised by the system to exercise symbolic power from what is misrecognised as a neutral position (Bourdieu, 1991:169). In education there are many positions endowed with such power. For example, principals as educational leaders, academic specialists in the field of education, bureaucratic staff employed for being specialised in the field and more recently parents are proclaimed to be the expert with regard to their child (see Chapter Four: Setting the Scene). The latter is a good example of building a belief that parents are able to influence the educational outcome of their child in partnership with the school. This belief is based on a regime of truths that assists in engaging parents in schooling, which in turn has a number of political benefits. For the system to claim that the parent is an expert is using symbolic power that appeals to the notions of consumer representation and participatory democracy, to make the parent believe that his/her authority will be recognised in the education system. This belief has the added benefit of making the parent feel inadequate if they did not succeed at eliciting benefits for their child. Thus, making them feel guilty over their lack of success in eliciting an adequate response rather than asking the system for an appropriate response. Symbolic capital is expressed in the utterance of leaders (in this case the State) in the sense that they speak with a (falsely) legitimated authority and thus their speeches are symbolic capital, that is, they are believed by others to be endowed with authority.

The symbolic efficacy of words is exercised only in so far as the person subjected to it recognises the person who exercises it as authorised to do so, or, what amounts to the same thing, only in as far as he fails to realise that, in submitting to it, he himself has contributed, through his recognition, to its establishment (Bourdieu, 1991:116).

In terms of the gender equity issues addressed in this thesis Bourdieu's ideas of symbolic capital and symbolic power are useful in that they serve to explain how the 'boys' camp' have come to believe that gender equity strategies would be suitable to enhance the learning of boys. In fact, the argument over whether boys need additional resources and an increased focus on their needs is based on the misrecognised cultural arbitrary that educational intervention is the answer to educational failure. As such this represents also a 'regime of truth', that schools are an absolute authority when it comes to education, yet Bourdieu's work clearly shows

that schools are agents of the dominant classes and that cultural capital embedded within habitus is more likely to or equally likely to lead to educational success (Bourdieu, 1984:105). In fact, other reasons could be named for the change of balance between girls' and boys' academic results, success of girls in languages, subjects that boys do not enrol as much in, higher enrolment of girls and so on (Teese, Davies, Charlton and Polesel, 1995).

Furthermore, in terms of cultural arbitrariness the misrecognised authority of institutions can also be applied to the idea of the education market and the ideas of market and consumer behaviour in general. In my view it is appropriate to consider markets in capitalist society as being part of habitus, which shapes one's thinking and action towards managing one's life, including the management of education of one's children. The idea of a market is so entrenched and insidious that it would be difficult to counteract it because of its embeddedness within habitus in a consumer society. In the context of parents in Western society, their behaviour is reflective of market behaviour because they have been conditioned to respond in certain ways to the concept of competition, which in the case of girls versus boys is a major issue, as expressed through Hirsch's zero-sum concept. In terms of parents in parent organisations they used their own cultural capital, forms of symbolic power and the political field they operate in as a way of achieving a change of approach in the education of boys. I would argue that parent organisations were challenging the cultural arbitrariness of the institution and questioned the systems actions or inaction in this case, towards boys. They challenged the legitimacy of actions using the cultural and symbolic capital available at their disposal, a capital that is formidable and powerful in this case as many parent advocates in these organisations are endowed with considerable cultural capital themselves as the majority are academics, teachers and other professionals. Their arguing concentrated on improving competitiveness of children in the market place assuming it to be neutral, which is another regime of truth and a cultural arbitrary truth endowed with much symbolic power through consumerism, as the market itself is controlled by the powerful that are selecting the workforce.

In the case of parents wanting to improve educational outcomes for boys they used a number of strategies that can be analysed with Bourdieu's theories. Their outrage is

based on the recognition that they cannot ‘reasonably rely’ on boys doing better than girls any longer, now that their results are similar, which in turn affected the positional goods in education so much coveted by parents for their children. People tend to act according to what they reasonably expect to occur (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:226).

Some parents questioned the prevailing authority that gender equity strategies need to continue to focus on girls and they used the cultural capital of being recognised as a representative body that legitimately has a claim to argue with the authorities, to put forward their claim. They were able to do so using the symbolic power attributed to pressure groups, such as linguistic competence, understanding of the political roles of pressure groups in a pluralist society (Bourdieu, 1991).

Parents argued that the opportunities to gain this cultural capital of educational credentials, need to be available on an equal basis and that boys are being disadvantaged in the competition for this cultural capital or what also amounts to a positional good. However, as one parent pointed out, this perceived disadvantage only applies to middle class and upper class girls, as lower class boys and girls are disadvantaged as a whole within the system of education. In this case, the parents legitimised the cultural arbitrary of equality of opportunity in putting forward a blanket claim that assumes all girls and all boys are affected similarly, thus concurring, possibly unconsciously, with the belief that the education system is equitable and can be applied to all equally, even though there are clear differences in educational outcomes along the lines of class and ethnicity (Connell, et.al. 1982). Foucault would call this myth a result of a ‘regime of truth’ that makes one believe that equality of opportunity will lead to equitable outcomes.

Parents, along with some scholars (Alloway and Gilbert, 1997) lamented that the habitus required for school success has changed and that the habitus of girls suits current education styles better. For example, girls sit quietly, are on their best behaviour, examinations are based on literary skills in which girls tend to be more efficient in and so on. Contained within that argument is the perception that schools can change the stakes and implement strategies that will suit the habitus of boys better, while in the same time arguing that education needs to be part of influencing

habitus in that they have to work with the boys in such a fashion as to increase their success rate, that is, improve their inclination to read more often. This focus is not surprising, as gender equity for girls has included similar arguments. However, with boys there seems to be a stronger sense that boys will be boys and schools have to change how they work with boys (Australian Government, 2000.) Interestingly, parents and proponents of education for boys did not argue that society needs to review how boys are brought up from birth, but rather argued that boys have certain attributes, which are not easy to change, hence the educational approaches need to be changed (Biddulph, 1994). A review of early acquisition of habitus is not suggested, nor a review of the appropriateness of cultural capital that boys bring to school, that is kicking a football versus more quiet activities such as reading, using computers, visiting of museums, indeed caring for younger siblings or appropriate housework.

As mentioned above, girls' gender equity strategies did indeed focus on changing habitus to improve girls' views they had of themselves and their abilities, because educational leaders, precisely argued with the knowledge they had gained of such renown sociologists as Bourdieu:

In order for a destiny, which is the objective product of the social relations defining the female condition at a given moment of time, to be transmuted into a vocation, it is necessary and sufficient that girls (and all those around them, not least their families) should be unconsciously guided by the prejudice – particularly acute and thriving in France...- that there is an elective affinity between so-called 'feminine' qualities and 'literary' qualities ...Thus, the apparently most deliberate or most inspired 'choices' still take into account (albeit unconsciously) the system of objective probabilities which condemns women to professions requiring feminine disposition...(Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:78).

Feminists, in attempting to improve girls educational outcomes, actively worked towards breaking this causal relationship that was, and at times still is, perpetuated by the way girls and their families perceive the future of girls and how the system responded to accommodate more 'feminine needs', the latter being a misrecognised cultural arbitrary position, in Bourdieu's terms.

In summary, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital describe aptly how such gender based habitus' are formed throughout childhood instilling expectations of oneself and ensuring that how one acts in any given situation is predestined through one's habitus. Because habitus is acquired over time it is influenced by history and it in turn shapes history (habitus is) "the product of social conditioning,

and thus of a history” (Bourdieu, 1990:116). I claim here that what parents and education professionals have learned from the recent success of girls in the education system is that habitus can be transformed to such a degree that educational responses can be improved in pupils and therefore educational success also. Hence, parents asked the education system to change its forms of intervention to change or respond to the habitus and cultural capital of boys to make them and the system more amenable to achieve educational success. The fight for gender equity did not challenge the regime of truth that schools are the authority that determines educational success, despite the notion of cultural and social capital that links educational success with class background. In contrary, it confirmed it by clearly laying responsibility for education outcomes within the realm of schools.

The next section looks at relevant theoretical constructs that explain how parent organisations negotiated a position towards gender equity strategies and that their relationships within the organisation are driven by regimes of truth, habitus, cultural capital and symbolic power of representative organisations.

FOUCAULT’S CONCEPT OF SURVEILLANCE

In his work *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault outlines his idea of surveillance that enables power holders to survey the actions of the subjects, but also influences behaviour in such a way that subjects survey themselves so as to keep their actions within the sphere of the acceptable. In other words, there is the ‘power of the gaze’ (Danaher et. al., 2000:56) through which people are monitored and by which people monitor themselves. He also talks of ‘dividing practices’ and ‘disciplinary technologies’ and the role the evolving discipline of Social Science had in developing instruments that allowed for measuring and dividing people and their behaviour into categories, allowing for comparisons and classifications, thus applying an air of knowledge and truth about such things that may not actually be measurable with numbers and statistics. Yet, the general acceptance of positivistic notions of Social Science made it difficult to challenge a ‘regime of truth’ of which Social Science is probably one of the most excellent examples, with its drive of wanting to be able to explain matters ‘social’ similarly to natural sciences (Bourdieu,

1991). In examining Foucault, Shumway (1989) confirms that "...examination allowed pedagogy to become a science of pupils" (Shumway, 1935 :1989). Further, he elaborates on forms of discipline, that Foucault claims, prevail in schools that are able to set groups hierarchically against each other by measuring performance and providing awards and a hierarchy of achievement:

In classrooms, students become to be positioned by their ranks and distributed in an orderly fashion among different sites for learning different lessons. The ordered rows of benches or desks are an empty grid upon which the students are distributed according to their significant difference, and which makes possible both individual instruction and the supervision of all (Shumway, 1989:125).

This form of control and measurement one can observe occurring today when DET monitors schools' performance through various means, one of which, is global testing at year 3 and year 5 on basic skills, thus establishing where schools sit in a continuum of results that are streamed from high achievement to low achievement. This process resembles the idea of disciplinary surveillance that records all details of relevance to manage institutions such as schools (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991). Not only does this allow for surveillance of individual schools' success, but also a comparison of achievements between the sexes and a comparison of achievement among socio-economic and geographical areas students are drawn from in individual schools. These comparisons are powerful tools of surveillance or at least they are perceived to be a powerful tool in assessing schools' and teachers' performances as exemplified by the fact that the NSW Teachers Federation, and in this case the parent organisations also, have successfully prevented these results from being published in the media. The motivation of parents though was somewhat different from that of teachers, because parents wanted to prevent a school falling victim to disgrace through unexplained facts, while teachers needed to protect their standing as professionals and their jobs. Instead, parents advocated that a school must disclose results in these tests to an open parent meeting within their school (Discussion at P&C Conference, 1998).

Academic disciplines function in the same way as a body of knowledge that legitimises some forms of knowledge and not others thus monitoring, surveilling and judging those forms of knowledge or ideas that do not fit the discipline (Shumway, 1989). However, disciplines are also in constant flux as no-one has ultimate truth,

and power to influence is exercised through all involved, albeit some have more power than others to influence direction. Regimes of truth and bodies of knowledge are created, according to Foucault (1980), through dominant discourses that serve the interests of those that gain from the discourse, yet, power works in such a way that people take the dominant discourse as acceptable truth and as such become compliant in reinventing and reinforcing the discourse, analogous to Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony which explains how the dominant classes are able to influence belief systems through perpetuating ideologies in such a fashion that all classes broadly embrace the ideology. The mechanism by which ideas remain within the sphere of acceptable discourse is surveillance. Kenway (1990a) outlined how she sees that Foucault and Gramsci complement each other in analysing, in this case also, actions in the field of education that managed to shift the perception and understanding of education and its purpose in relation to where it sits in the spectrum of political positioning.

Within school education this means that there is a dominant discourse, for example, that high marks are the most important single outcome of education and therefore, much of the actions of schools is explained in terms of academic achievement or the potential to increase academic achievement. For example, one interviewee suggested that if their school had not streamed classes, nobody (in their right mind-my emphasis) would send their child to that school. As Bourdieu explained, there is often tacit approval of the cultural arbitrary, for example 'marks are most important', that matches the habitus that works towards achieving high results, of those so inculcated by the dominant ideology which says, 'everyone can achieve if they work hard at it', meaning by implication that if you do not achieve you must not be working hard and therefore do not deserve to achieve highly.

The fact, that schools also produce well adjusted pupils for the workforce that are used to produce a day's work and who accept to be subordinates in hierarchical systems, is not featured in the dominant discourse, nor that some students will not have equal chances to achieve because of their class background, rather than any attribute related to their talents or abilities (Bourdieu, 1984; Connell, et al. 1982). Similarly, the discourse around education for girls and the dominant discourse around education of boys is shaped through surveillance and discourses that are

embedded within regimes of truth about gender perceptions, as is illustrated in Chapter Four: Setting the Scene.

FOUCAULT'S 'REGIMES OF TRUTH'

Foucault further developed this concept of surveillance and its relation to truth and power putting forward the idea of regimes of truth, a mechanism by which the formation of truth is explained as a product of power relations that determines what is 'rightfully' constituted as truth. In other words, truth is not related to anything inherently true or false, but rather to what a given society can accept as truth or has 'learnt' to perceive as truth, as such, this concept corresponds to some degree with the concept of the cultural arbitrary by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) outlined above.

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1980:131).

This point is illustrated by an allegation, I came across in my research, where a journalist and some representatives of a parent organisations claim that the department and its bureaucrats had a bias towards girls and gender equity issues and therefore was not prepared to accept any other findings or forms of knowledge that challenged their position and by that they, by virtue of their power, did not allow for discussion about boys to occur (see Chapter Seven: Analysis of Gender Equity Debate). Jane Kenway (1990a:184-185) in her article on Foucault and the 'Educational Right', called *Education and the Right's Discursive Politics*, aptly outlined how those subscribing to 'rights' politics similarly criticised teachers in the state system and departmental staff of education departments as being biased towards Marxism and Socialism, accusing them of undermining the very nature of a competitive society and in fact democracy, which would give people the right of choice. Both of these examples claim that debate is being stifled through the ability of power holders to avoid certain debates from arising in any formal manner that would allow it to be debated openly and shape discursive practice. As I will illustrate in the results chapter on parent organisations, parent bodies equally practise ways of avoiding 'truth' to emerge, which is, they are equally disposed to creating regimes of

truth. I believe, that the conditions in the above quote apply to organisations also that are run with a formal structure of power and that have adopted underlying philosophies to frame their organisations, although, Foucault would say that all interaction is framed within regimes of truth and discursive practices. As such, interactions in parent organisations are also influenced by notions of democracy, the discipline of education, conceptions of gender relations and so was the debate on gender equity for that matter, as gender equity is very much part of a democratic focus, given its close links with principles of participatory democracy and feminism, which in turn resulted from the civil rights movement.

Foucault further claims that the ‘political economy’ of truth displays five characteristics:

Truth’ is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it, (2) it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power, 3) it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); (4) it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); (5) lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (‘ideological’ struggles) (Foucault, 1980:131-132).

The debate over whether boys suffer disadvantages in schools reflects this struggle over the truth of whether they are the new disadvantaged, whether girls have achieved their full potential, whether the differences in marks is a measure that justifies intervention and so on. It illustrates clearly how positivistic scientific methods in forms of statistical measurements are thrown into the fray, that it is played out in a field of power and politics as girls’ success is seen as a threat to the status quo of males being perceived as bread winners, with a ‘justified’ need for highly paid jobs. The debate reflected a search for truth with warring parties claiming the truth for their side and all within the discipline of education, which is already loaded by way of being an institution that creates forms of truth as an instrument on behalf of power holders. Apart from market, positional goods and cultural capital arguments, this might be one of the other reasons why debate was so heated, that is, the expectation (or the symbolic power) of the education sector being able to determine the truth. As such it involved a whole political debate and struggle within

ideological positions with its culmination in a federal Inquiry on the Education of Boys (Australian Government, 2000).

In a sense parent organisations with their debate on the girls-boys issue tried to come to grips with the truth they can put forward as an organisation, recognising that their representative structure needs to put forward a single position to policy makers. As such they tried to detach “the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (Foucault, 1980:133). In terms of an argument, such as the call for gender equity strategies, this is inherently tied up with economical questions, because what parents were asking for is for a focus on boys which would mean an allocation of funds and resources redirected to the issue of boys’ education. As such they tried to convince power holders of their ‘truth’. Yet, they were not united in that voice and hedged a bet each way, by adding ‘boys and girls’ into their policy statements, thus essentially watering down the effect of their policy similarly to positional goods where the making available of a good broadly decreases the effect of it being a positional good, thus rendering a good, or in this case, a policy ineffective or open to abuse as will be illustrated in Chapter Seven: Analysis of the Gender Equity Debate.

I perceive links here between Foucault’s concept of regimes of truth with Bourdieu’s conception of the cultural arbitrary which really is a form of ‘negotiated’ truth over time that has been accepted and met with ‘tacit approval’ by a population influenced by mechanisms of hegemony, thus tying together theoretical constructs of Foucault, Bourdieu and Gramsci, at the risk of this not sitting well with Social Scientists that may like to perpetuate the categories that they have created to be able to categorise and create their forms of truth about where certain theorists sit within the spectrum of theoretical discourses.

REPRESENTATIVE POWER

The concepts of regimes of truth, symbolic power and surveillance can be utilised to examine parent organisations’ role vis a vis the institution of education, but also in terms of how the parent organisations themselves operate within the field of

representative advocacy groups. Bourdieu provided in his book *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) an examination of the mechanisms of empowerment of the leadership by the delegates who confer powers to their leaders by electing them into the position of office bearers, managing committee, in some sense a 'bureau' or in Bourdieu's (1991:216) word an 'apparatus', which in turn symbolises the existence of a group (Bourdieu, 1991:205). The leader(s) in turn claim to speak on behalf of the organisation asserting their authority of delegated powers to represent parents of public schools, in this case. Bourdieu claims that there is an 'oracle effect' that ensures that the group is recognised and the group recognises itself within their leader and the leader in turn is recognised for speaking truth on behalf of the group they represent, in the sense that

The oracle effect is the exploitation of the transcendence of the group in relation to the single individual, a transcendence that comes about through an individual who in effect is to some extent the group, if only because nobody can stand up and say 'you are not the group' unless they establish another group and get themselves recognised as delegate of the new group (Bourdieu, 1991:212.)

The concept of symbolic power is useful here again as it explains that certain powers are attached to those who are called 'president', for example as they are seen as leaders of the group and it is assumed that they speak on behalf of the group, whether they are indeed competent to do so and regardless of whether they have checked with any other representatives of their organisation that their utterances reflect a majority view:

as the personification of a fictitious person, of a social fiction, he raises those whom he represents out of their existence as separate individuals, enabling them to act and speak through him as a single person (Bourdieu, 1991:248).

The discourses used to represent organisations are also interesting in that a style of language is used that symbolically ensures that the leader is seen as part of the group, for example, the use of the word 'we' as opposed to 'I', thus giving the impression that the assertion has been debated with members before being put forward. Within the parent organisations' studied there were a number of incidences where the group broke away from the leadership because the leader signalled that, at times, she was speaking from her own point of view rather than from the group's point of view. This immediately led to a rift as the symbolic power of being a representative that represents a whole group and not themselves, was violated.

While Bourdieu outlines his thinking here more in relation to political parties and the field of politics there are certainly parallels that can be drawn with advocacy groups and Bourdieu (1991) himself refers to other groups such as churches. Parallels that I saw relate to the fact that members have to earn their status within the group and have to be seen to put the well-being of the group first; how procedures and discipline ensure that members follow the leaders by using complex and overtly fair procedures, if only, not to feel uncomfortable by abstaining from voting or being against a motion, but mostly to ensure that there is a sense of justice and democracy as to how decisions are arrived at.

On the other side, the leaders operate through an apparatus that has been endowed with certain implicit or explicit powers through symbolic power. The apparatus though has its own interests also, and at times these interests subsume the interests of the group as a whole and as such the apparatus is interested in maintaining the status quo by choosing followers that are not undermining operations and that are supportive of how the organisation is run currently. In other words, they look to reproduce the apparatus and its role as they have determined, by virtue of having been elected into the position of president and office bearers. The process of justification and power is circular as follows:

The power over the group that is to be brought into existence as a group is, inseparably, a power of creating the group by imposing on it common principles of vision and division, and thus a unique vision of its identity and an identical vision of its unity” (Bourdieu, 1991:224).....”The spokesperson is the person who, speaking about a group, speaking on behalf of a group, surreptitiously posits the existence of the group in question, institutes the group, through that magical operation which is inherent in any act of naming (Bourdieu, 1991:250).

In observing the parent organisations there were a number of examples that show the interests of the head office machinery rather than the interest of the group as a whole, some of which were directly related to the issue of gender equity. Some of the operations of the apparatus are geared towards reproduction in such a fashion that those who are not favoured by the leadership have little room to make themselves known and others who are favoured by the leadership are given opportunities to expose their skills to scrutiny by the membership, for example, the opportunities to profile oneself awarded by the president to those that ‘deserve’ patronage.

It is easy to see how through the means of empowering of the president (and office bearers) and delegation of power that is invested with symbolic capital, regimes of truth can develop, if only in the sense that individuals can no longer follow by which means and with what rationale currently endorsed 'truth' has been arrived at. And indeed parent organisations are complex with many diverse interests intersecting and people having different cultural capital and different habitus' that they can draw upon and use to contribute to debates.

One can thus say both that certain kinds of habitus find the conditions of their realisation, indeed of their blossoming, in the logic of the apparatus; and conversely, that the logic of the apparatus 'exploits' for its own profit tendencies that are inscribed in the different kind of habitus (Bourdieu, 1991:200).

Yet, truth finding in these organisations occurs through processes that are complex, and therefore open to manipulation, creating forms of truth by many means. To reveal some of these mechanisms, which operate to shape truth within parent organisations, is the object of Chapter Six: Parent and School Decision-Making.

In summary, positional goods theory, cultural capital and a regime of truth around education and its ability to prepare pupils for a market driven economy are relevant concepts to analyse the gender equity debate since the early 1990s. This work illustrates how parent organisations as advocacy bodies for parent and their children have used these concepts in debating gender equity in their organisations as well as with the wider audience.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines how I grappled with some of the questions posed by research methodologies in terms of what I wanted to achieve, the methods I used to do so, conducting research in a complex environment and reflections on myself as a researcher. The methodological foundation of this research is multifaceted using an ethnographic approach primarily incorporating a number of research methods, such as document analysis, observation, participant observation, and interviews which aimed at informing tentative conclusions drawn from observation and document analysis. As such there is a dimension of ‘grounded theory’ with questions being reshaped depending on what has been learned through observations, texts and early interviews (Kellehear, 1993:38).

CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic research focuses on directly observing subjects and the field that they operate in, learning from the experiences of those studied and being “interpretative of the flow of social discourse” (Geertz, 1973:20). It is linked to introspective research techniques due to its valuing of the perspectives of individuals and the ‘natural’ field setting. The method generally uses participant observation as a research tool with the understanding that relevant insights can be gained by participating and observing real life situations. However, in accordance with a symbolic interactionist understanding, one has to be sure that what is observed reflects the meanings of what was intended by those who are part of situations rather than the meaning as understood by the observer because of “the ways in which meaning is always emergent, fluid, ambiguous and contextually bound” (Marshall, 1998:658). Hence, this research used semi-structured interviews to gain access to meaning.

Feminist methodology added an additional dimension of understanding to ethnographic as well as other research in that it postulated that research methodologies as a whole have tended to look at subjects, situations and results from a focus of male experiences, so called “malestream”. “At the core of feminist ideas is

the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of knowledge” (Spender, 1985:5), Feminist researchers, therefore, value the point of view of the individual and personal experiences highly.

In important ways feminists’ questioning women’s experiences being viewed from a male dominated culture has contributed to the postmodern debate as to whether there is any ‘truth’ to be discovered through research and whether the notion of truth is a valid one. Instead, postmodernists suggest that there are many interpretations of any event and that no-one can gain access to ultimate truth. Postmodernists (among them Foucault) suggest that there are discourses within which meaning is embedded and they operate as qualifiers of what is being observed. This is also confirmed by Silverman (1993:46) who claimed:

We only come to look at things in certain ways because we have adopted, either tacitly or explicitly, certain ways of seeing. This means that, observational research, data collection, hypothesis-construction and theory-building are not three separate things but are interwoven with one another.

For myself the issue of multiple discourses has been reflected in the oscillations I experienced as I repeatedly discovered myself looking for indicators that are conclusively illustrating what was occurring in parent organisations and the policy area of gender equity, realising that many discourses are operating simultaneously and are influencing decisions taken at any of the meetings observed and that positivistic inclined answers are inadequate.

In line with postmodernist challenges, the influence of the researcher on subjects and research outcomes has been questioned and therefore the question of how Sociologists can ever shed their own cultural perspective that bears on how we observe any situation and whether the subjects themselves can look at their situation in any other way than what is predetermined by their own culture, remains. For Bourdieu the answer is self-reflexive research where the purpose of the research is clear, subjects are informed of the processes used to reflect their contributions and the researcher frees themselves from preconceived notions with regard to subjects and the research area “The difficulty, in Sociology, is to manage to think in a

completely astonished and disconcerted way about things you thought you had always understood” (Bourdieu, 1991:207).

Given that the site of this research is parent organisations in NSW and how they shape and act on a particular policy area, in this case gender equity in schools, I needed to gain a greater understanding of parent participation mechanisms at all levels from the local to the national representative organisations including an analysis of the operations of organisations themselves. Utilising a particular policy area as a focus enabled me to narrow my research into an area of interest both personally and academically.

The complexity of public policies and advocacy organisations meant that research methodologies had to offer tools that enabled me to understand how structures operate, how people interact with each other, what mechanisms are used to make decisions and how decisions are enacted to achieve the goals set out by the organisation. Ethnographic-inductive research with its empiricist focus (Kellehear 1993:27) uses qualitative research methods that assist in researching and analysing complex organisations and human interaction at the level of both written and verbal conversation.

For the observation phase Silverman’s (1993:36) five phases for observation studies were useful as a guide as it emphasised the need to look, as well as listen, and make broader links that may become useful at a later date. Accordingly, I moved from having few notions of important variables to observing a complex network of interactions and relations that started to emerge. I looked at activities, personalities and their positions in the organisations, their actions and who was speaking on what issue, the framework used for their arguments and the response of the audience.

I utilised my observations and document analysis as studies of social practises observing the rules that govern interaction, for example, in meetings, identify power relations by observing and reading in documents who spoke, using what kind of argument. This in turn linked with social categories such as gender, positions of power held in an organisation, social background of the person and so on. These

categories have meanings and implications that have been researched extensively in social science (Kellehear, 1993).

Written documents played an important role as both organisations produce extensive materials from their meetings which allows for identification and following through of issues that the organisations have worked on. They also allow for identification of pathways of individuals in terms of how they personally contributed to discussions as all motions are recorded with speakers who spoke for or against them. As in line with Silverman (1993:61) I was mainly interested in the social organisation of these records. They provide a historical account of consistency in this case as the Executive Officer was in the position for many years, but they have to be seen also in the context of a field of practises that enables the researcher to get an understanding of what is important to these organisations. Thus, documents I had access to enhanced and confirmed my understanding of the operations of the organisations, the activities of participants over time and how they support the ideological underpinnings of the organisations.

For a qualitative researcher semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions are a key research tool as it allows the subject to freely express their understanding of the themes under investigation. The flexibility, reflectivity and explicatory power of semi-structured interviews lends itself as an ideal tool for this research project as the parent organisations, their functions and the policy issues they deal with are incredibly complex and effective exploration would be difficult and unsatisfactory through questionnaires or standardised interviews. Having a schedule of questions though allows for the themes to stay within a given framework and facilitates the process of finding consistent conclusions across themes. This, in turn, addresses the issue of validity of the researcher's interpretations as it can enlighten a situation from the subjects point of view across subjects, and in comparison to the researcher's interpretation. Observations and semi-structured interviews complement each other as the researcher can explore certain areas to shed light on the themes observed, while the interviewee can ensure that the subject area is understood as the actors in it see and experience it. "The respondents are experts who provide valuable information. They are as important as the researcher and not just a source of data"

(Sarantakos, 1993:188). However, I am also aware that meanings assigned by subjects are not infallible and that subjects themselves are not necessarily aware of the context and multiple realities their experiences are set in. Silverman (1993:54) suggests that the pursuit of meanings must also be looked at in the context of practises and social phenomena as identified and used in theories of social science otherwise ethnography becomes a “purely subjectivist sociology”.

In this regard, Silverman (1993:154-5) critiques the feminist position for its strong stance on the experience of the individual because he argues that focusing on experience undermines “what we know about the cultural and linguistic forms which structure what we count as ‘experience’” (Silverman, 1993:154). For my own research design this question of validity was resolved by using independent ‘triangulation’ (Silverman, 1993:156-8) in form of using documentation, both written and audio, which at times reproduced events in its full complexity in the case of taped records, to complement interviews. In fact, documents informed the research before interviews were conducted, but in the process of transcription the original tapes served to re-evaluate the transcript of interviews. The broad spread of interviews conducted offered a diversity of insights as people were also interviewed that operate on the periphery of parent organisations, such as departmental officers and teacher representatives. But, more importantly the second and smaller parent group acted in some way as a control group as they operate within the same policy field, with similar formal structures, yet the *modus operandi* of their organisation differs. This enabled me to gather insights that were quite independent from the other organisation and my own immersion with its interviewees. Additionally, the P&C organisation had a research officer, which I often used to bounce off ideas. As an employed staff member and a person that had not been at the centre of debate in terms of gender equity issues he was a valuable source for validation of what preliminary conclusions I came to and to enhance my understanding of the ‘field of practise’. My research design uses Denzin’s (1970) suggestion of using multiple sources in conducting field research that “simultaneously combines document analysis, respondent and informant interviewing, direct participation and observation and introspection” (Denzin, 1970:186). Hence I consider, my research design was

robust enough in terms of the insights I gained and the conclusive statements I have put forward.

RESEARCH IN A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

I decided to study parent organisations at the head office level because of their direct contact with key policy makers and them being recognised as advocacy organisations for parents of school children. As such they constitute the formal arm of parent participation in the State. One organisation is very large and has quite formal ways of operating the other is much smaller, but also keeps detailed records of proceedings. Research in such an environment meant many hours of observation, reading of much literature and arranging interviews at times and venues appropriate to interviewees. The organisation and operation of parent organisations is presented in Chapter Five: The Parent Organisations.

Access to Environment and Interviewees

I gained access to organisations through formal approaches of courtesy phone calls, followed by a letter on University letterhead and ethics approval documents. Permission was granted to access materials and meetings unless explicitly excluded. Subsequently, I have been on their mailing lists from 1997 – 2001 receiving reports, minutes and publications from both organisations. Both organisations granted observer status, however, one allowed for participation in discussions. I utilised this offer sparingly and only when asked as a parent so as to minimise my influence on discussions. Both organisations are used to having observers present and my presence would have had few implications in the beginning. However, as my presence became more regular I was included in many conversations of a more confidential nature with a content that amounted to ‘gossip’ at times. In this research then I took parent organisations as the setting in which various agents interact shape and reshape policy and the organisation itself.

Access to information on gender equity issues was complex as points of discussion only arise over years and are included in documents in the form of records kept on a

time schedule rather than grouped according to themes. In other words, details were found in minutes and taped records of meetings as they occurred at a certain date. Gender equity is not one of these policies that recur at regular intervals or in most meetings because

gender reform is always a subordinate discourse in Australian education systems and schools. In schools, the dominant discourses are associated with the profession and culture of teaching, but these and gender reform are increasingly being redefined according to the logics which dominate systems in the 1990s—that is, those associated with economic rationalism, corporate managerialism and technical rationality. (Kenway and Willis, 1997:xxi).

Having conducted my research through the nineties has in fact meant going back to early 1990s record where gender equity issues were higher on the agenda. Interestingly, the debate was renewed, but with less vigour, according to parent organisations, in 2000 when the federal government called for an Inquiry into the Education of Boys (Australian Government, 2000).

Apart from the peak organisations, I observed a number of local primary school Parents and Citizens Association meetings to ensure all levels of parent participation received consideration. These groups were identified through delegates I had met when observing meetings at the head office and they in fact invited me to the meetings and gave me a phone number of the chairperson so that the chairperson could seek permission for my attendance in writing from the larger group. Letters were also sent to local schools in the area I live to meet some groups who were not particularly tied in with the parent organisations I studied. This strategy was part of a methodological control mechanism to see whether debates differed at schools where there is no parent representative that attends meetings at a head office level. These schools were recommended by the local district office as schools, which either had a good parent group operating or had a school council at their school. In other words, they were progressive schools. Six groups spread out throughout Sydney were observed, including two in my local area. Topics discussed were of a similar nature at all six schools and I did not pursue this path any further as there was very little discussion of education policy issues, an observation that has been confirmed by other researchers (Limerick; 1995). One P&C District meeting was attended for the purpose of completeness, which did reveal that policy discussions are more likely to

occur at that level, mainly fostered by the presence of the Superintendent of the District. But, many of the District groups are now defunct, which is regrettable, according to interviewees, as it assisted in the induction process of new Councillors who often were recruited from that group in the past.

Access to individual interviewees from parent organisations was facilitated by the fact that my research was formally approved by the organisations. As such a brief verbal introduction of my intention to interview generally elicited a favourable response. Those who had left the organisation were contacted by myself with permission of the Executive Officers or Presidents. All interviewees were willing after having read the introduction letter and signing consent. Individuals related to the field of gender equity in education or schools in general such as Departmental Gender Equity Committee members or Teachers Federation Representatives were contacted by phone with some persistence and in general were available to be interviewed, once their concerns were clarified in the sense that I was not interested in their organisation per se, but rather the role of parents organisations and gender equity.

Both organisations are also part of Three Federations' meetings which comprises of representatives of both parent organisations and the NSW Teachers Federation. I observed one of these meetings also.

THE FOUR STAGES OF RESEARCH

Familiarisation

To familiarise myself with the area of research a literature search outside the organisations and within was conducted revealing the complexities of information and the organisations as such. Early interviews with Executive Officers provided an induction to the field and relevant contacts and procedures for me to access information. As a courtesy I always informed organisations of my intent to visit. At times different staff were allocated to assist me if necessary. Being a parent of school children myself my induction process started with the time I visited my first parent

group meeting and others that I attended subsequently. Thus, as a researcher I had to recognise the perspectives I brought to the field of practise as outlined below. Within this familiarisation period it became clear that gender equity was in fact an issue that had caused divisions in one of the organisations some years earlier and accordingly my reception with questions was received at times with reluctance at other times with a sense of ‘this is going to be interesting’. For me as a researcher this meant to take care not to become involved and absorbed by what was seen by some as a clash of personalities by others as a difference in points of views that were negotiated in a field of power relations utilising ‘unendorsed’ positions of power.

Document analysis

The nature of documents accessed was very broad. It included minutes of all levels of meetings, tapes of conference proceedings, reports of councillors and Executive Officers, file notes, articles published on gender equity issues, media clippings on the organisations and gender equity issues. I have collected written material on debates, correspondence and minutes held regarding gender issues and policies. It confirmed my hunch, that gender issues in education are controversial and that it is tied up with the need for children to achieve highly in academic terms as opposed to what is in the interest of the child per se. A form of content analysis was used first to ascertain whether the material was relevant in terms of reference made to gender equity. The key form of analysis would have been more along the line of using thematic analysis or grounded theory in the sense of deriving meaning from the text and observations that then can be linked with theoretical themes (Kellehear, 1993:33) and generally using sociological imagination to identify trends and patterns that may be meaningful. An analysis along categorisations used in documents as described by (Silverman 1993:82-83), revealed that records in the P&C Federation record the initial and surname of the person only, thus not providing a gender dimension to the records. Apart from the annual conference, records also do not mention the school represented by the speaker. Thus, the records effectively eliminate “category-bound implications” (Silverman 1993:83) by organisations. I was able though to reproduce these categories by using other public records of the organization, which printed addresses in full. This exercise was primarily useful for identifying gender

dimensions in the organisation, however, the recurrence of names was interesting in terms of length of participation in the organisation and the regularity of people speaking in conferences thus establishing an image of them as a person in the mind of the audience which also does not change that much over the years. I have called this mechanism of speaking frequently and being visible 'profiling' elsewhere.

Documents from different meetings were compared and the most formal minutes are written of the annual conference and the least formal one's stem from the Executive committee. This coincides with the style of conversation observed at different meetings. Minutes taken at departmental meetings identify who said what in order to provide evidence of the organisation having been represented according to the spirit of the organisational policies. This again ensures successful profiling of the organisation in terms of its use as an advocate, but it also assists individuals to establish their credibility.

Listening to taped records of conference proceedings provided details and a background to the information found in minutes and file records. With the availability of audio records original proceedings were reproduced. The reception of speeches by the audience enriched my understanding of how parent delegates from schools, the grass root representatives in other words, responded to those who put forward points of views on gender equity or the operations of the organisations. The P&C Federation tapes their conferences, primarily to aid with writing minutes. Listening to tapes enriched the ability of categorising speakers, getting a clearer picture of their background in terms of gender, occupation, geographical location, experiences with schools and belief statements. As such it complemented the written records of minutes within which background information was omitted.

Observation phase

Looking and not only listening was a focus in the observation phase as the setting within the space and space itself was quite distinguished from one meeting to another and an analysis of the setting lends itself particularly to ideas of power as one can

discern the positions of power and influence from the arrangement of the seating, visible expressions in the face, expressive behaviour such as shaking head in disbelief.

Sites of observation were many and individual meetings have been described in detail in Chapter Five: The Parent Organisations. Altogether I have observed 21 formally constituted meetings and these included at least two meetings at all levels of both organisations. Some of these meetings occurred over several days. The most useful meetings were the annual Conferences, Council and Executive meetings. The latter because this is where the powerholders are meeting in a smaller environment and where debate and interaction is quite informal and the former two because this is where issues of principle are debated more widely. The annual conference is particularly important as it sets the organisations' policy for the year and policy in the making could be observed. The annual conference also includes the 'ordinary' parent from schools in the sense that many participants may not have ever been involved with the organisation at large.

The observation period for parent organisations Council and committee meetings covered 1998 and 1999, while yearly conferences were attended from 1997 to 2000, four conferences in one organisation and two in the other which translates into eleven full days of conference attendance. Outside committee meetings related to gender equity and the Teachers Federation were mainly attended during the year 2000. The content of meetings was provided by the reading material such as agendas, minutes and reports. With the smaller organisation I was included in the round table discussions and was invited to participate, as such I was sitting among participants. Lunch was taken in this setting as a group at the same premises. Interestingly, while among themselves this group had a warm rapport with the student this group was more hesitant to open up, at least in the beginning. While the larger organisation had clear demarcations during the meetings, at lunch time there was a warm openness to take me into the fold of the 'family'. This may well have been a reflection of the leadership at the time, but also a sense of being invincible, while the smaller group is clearly more vulnerable as explained elsewhere.

Both organisations' meetings were observed at all levels and extensive detailed notes were taken. With the larger organisation in particular it was easy to be an observer as they kept observers at separate tables from the meeting. There was a clear demarcation between observers and those who were participants in the meeting. However, participants of meetings were always open to talk to me and invited me to join them for lunch. I took no notes at lunch, but at times I made myself notes of what was said, after lunch.

Observation of peak meetings concentrated on understanding the formal structure of the meetings; the role played by key participants at the meeting, that is, chair, executive officer and so on; how often which people would speak, the general atmosphere of the meeting; any unusual events/arguments; purpose of the meeting; agenda items and lastly, but most importantly the form of discussion used, language used to couch arguments in, what arguments were made on who's behalf and so on.

A number of gender equity related meetings were attended to increase my understanding of gender equity issues in schools. One group of meetings related to a local initiative at my children's school where I assisted in a small research project with students. The school also organised an in-service for teachers on gender equity issues and I attended that. It gave me a good insight as to the understanding teachers have about gender equity issues. I attended a Department of Education and Training (DET) State Gender Equity meeting as an observer and interviewed one of the project members who supports the committee and who's work is guided by the members of the committee. There were several DET staff in attendance as well as a number of representatives from community organisations. These represented parents (FOSCO and P&C), ethnic communities, Aboriginal communities, teachers and principals. The purpose of the meeting was to present the Department's work on gender equity to the committee and seek the attendees comments and suggestions. The purpose of my observation was to see parents' contribution in such a meeting and to gain an insight in the Department's use and perception of parent representatives. But, also to get an indication of the work the Department is currently undertaking in terms of gender equity.

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) is the peak National parent body for public schools and it treated gender equity as a key issue in their 2000 Conference so that ACSSO could make a useful contribution to the federal inquiry into boys' education. While I did not observe that meeting myself, through the interviews an insight was gained about the sorts of issues that were debated and the final policy has been passed on to me.

Interviews

As pointed out above, after the observation period interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule which aimed at exploring certain themes identified by my observations, the perusal of documents and analysis of theoretical work as it applied to the area of gender equity and parent advocacy. First, preliminary interviews were held with key stakeholders in the gender equity field to gain an understanding of the policy area to be researched, the key groupings that exist in parent organisations, the key people that should be interviewed and so on. These interviews were just recorded in a point form as their purpose was mainly 'charting the waters'.

In large organisations such as those studied in this research it is difficult to choose respondents and one has to develop criteria that are useful to the researcher and the focus of the research, but also that can be explained to those who are not chosen and may feel disappointed because of it. Most of all it has to be on the criteria of relevance to the research project which in this case meant that it is relatively straight forward. Firstly, many key stakeholders were able to be identified through the conference tape which contained speeches about gender equity issues, that is archive material. Secondly, within the theme of decision-making it seems obvious that those who hold formal and informal power in the organisation are key informants. Alternatively, those who wield little power also have important points that need to be heard in the context of decision-making that alienates some groups from participating as part of reinforcing a power position. The three dimensional power concept of Lukes refers to some of these mechanisms (Clegg, 1998:90-91). Through observation at key meetings it became increasingly clear who needed to be targeted

for further interviews. Criteria used for targeting related mostly to participants' involvement with gender equity issues, their role of power in the organisation and their role of being excluded from the ranks of power and those who were being critical of the organisation. This latter group had different insights as to the underlying structures of power and the functioning of certain ideologies than those who participated actively in maintaining the status quo. One person was interviewed who was a councillor, but belonged to the fringe rather than being part of the more vocal group.

Overall, twenty one semi-structured interviews were conducted between 1999 and 2000, which were recorded on tape and subsequently transcribed at times in full, and at times in point form as relevance of some arguments was still obscure at the time of transcription. By the time interviews were conducted the areas of interest were quite clear, but extra material is often gained from interviews. Therefore, both processes are at work, thematic analysis and content analysis, in a qualitative sense, that is, not ticking frequency, but looking for information relevant for certain themes. Two interviews had to be conducted over the phone and notes were taken of those.

The first few interviews acted as pilot interviews in that questions were reviewed afterwards to determine if they did elicit a response that sufficiently related to the themes I was looking for or if they were comprehended without much further explanation. The interview schedule was then adapted accordingly. Also, the interview schedules used varied slightly depending on the involvement of the person and how they were situated in relation to gender equity issues.

Overall, there were thirteen women and three men interviewed from parent organisations. All of them, but three, were at some point part of the Executive committee in either organisation. Four people were employees of the organisation at the time of the research. One person was a Departmental employee. Two people were not active with the organisations any longer by the time the interviews were conducted. The occupational background of most interviewees related to education in some way; the age range was between 35 and 60; most interviewees were more than 10 years involved in the organization; they had between one and four children;

most had children still at school; a minority lived in rural areas. Overall one can say that the number of interviewees interviewed from each organisation was representative of the size of the organisation.

Five people were interviewed who are not active in the parent organisations as such, but they had significant roles in relation to gender equity and/or were knowledgeable about areas I was interested in. There was a woman who was a support person for one of the women who felt very strongly about boys in education and the woman interviewed was active at the local P&C group. There was the NSW Teachers' Federation representative on the DET gender equity committee and the staff member who is the departmental project officer for gender equity. There was a primary school principal who was able to clarify the role of the principal, the relationship he is expected to have with parents by the department and the way he deals with educational material that is delivered to schools. And then there was the person who developed a specific boys' in education program called BASIC, which is used in many schools to assist boys, particularly those with behavioural difficulties.

All interviewees were met personally, but with one a telephone interview was conducted after a Conference. Overall, interviewees were quite friendly and in most cases trust was not an issue. Nobody rejected an interview, with some people it was clear that they felt it is something they should do for the organisation. In other cases, the interviewees wanted to know exactly why they were being chosen for an interview and what the purpose of the interview was.

While in most cases material discussed was not that sensitive interviewees were often careful as to how they phrased their comments, so as not to appear to be gossiping or to damage the reputation of the organisation in any way. As interviewees would know all the other interviewees quite well, they were cautious as to how they phrased personal criticism (if any) and this is probably due to not being quite sure, how their material would be used in the write up of the research and them knowing that the organisation will have an opportunity to read the work. Thus, while confidentiality was guaranteed potentially some people would find out from each

other who had been interviewed and thus they wanted to make sure that they said nothing offensive.

Interviews provided insights, but observing the field of practise and hearing public utterances and speeches in their original form completed the cycle of checking and re-checking.

THE RESEARCHER AND THE RESEARCHED

As a researcher I bring many variables about myself to this research. I can be categorised into many social categories as a female parent with children at a public school, a migrant who did not experience Australian schooling personally and has an accent, a sociology student with a social science degree that included a major in psychology. Further I probably could be assigned the label of being of middle class background having a paying job of community worker/manager, who's parents owned a home and had a successful real estate business. Symbolic interactionism as in Goffman and the self (Ritzer, 1988) and Bourdieu's ideas of the habitus and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1984) would have much to say about these influences that my background may have on my research. My deliberations and self-reflections lead me to point out, that some of these interactions may have affected my research.

As pointed out in Chapter One: Introduction, the position I brought to the research myself was grounded in the experiences I had of participating in my local parent group and as a concerned parent I wanted to know whether parent advocacy was effective in terms of those values that are dear to me. As such I was positively surprised in terms of the professionalism of the organisations and their stance on various educational policies. But, as a social scientist, the observations initially did not reveal very much that I felt I could get my teeth into and find some intriguing social aspects that revealed something new as one would like, as a social scientist. I was influenced here by my tendency to veer towards positivism even though I understand that there is no ultimate truth and ultimate conclusions. This tendency stems from having been brought up in an age where one thought that hard and fast

answers are possible and from the fact of majoring in psychology which has a much more positivistic approach to social science. From the organisations point of view what hindered my seeing beyond the 'mundane' (Maynard, 1989:144) is related to the fact that overtly a very democratic framework was used to make decisions and my experience in the community sector and with advocacy organisations was not too different from those studied, let me be in awe of such detailed processes that seem to take account of everybody's needs. Thus, I went with Maynard's (1989:144) sentiments of looking at how the organisations and participants do things which suggests that ..."the microsocal order can be appreciated more fully by studying how speech and other face-to-face behaviour constitutes reality within actual mundane situations".

Some of the issues that are critical in the interview setting are: the choice of respondents, the interviewer bias, the interviewer's skills, the interviewer-interviewee relationship, issues of sensitivity and the fact that respondents have quite an intimate relationship with other respondents.

As Kellehear (1993:44) points out there is 'intellectual baggage' that is brought along with any theoretical approach and to any situation and as such I must look at my own baggage that I brought to the observation setting, which is likely to have influenced me in that I may have paid more attention to some interactions than others. Within my personal intellectual baggage one would have to consider the fact that I could be classified as a socialist feminist to whom gender relations and dimensions of power are central concepts in everyday life. Bias' towards feminism and power relations may have triggered some extra answers volunteered by interviewees when they may have perceived an interest or I myself may have followed up a point of interest. However, as interviews were recorded on tape, these additional information points were disregarded, recognising though that they may have potentially affected the direction the interviews took.

As a community worker, social justice ideas permeate my being and as such I would look for those dimensions as a matter of course. As a researcher this means that I have to be aware of my biases and an effort has been made to counterbalance these

through the interview questions, which allowed for interviewees to freely explore their own ideas over the subject matter. I am aware of the limitations in the latter statement as interview questions no doubt also give direction and have meaning in themselves as they are also endowed with a position or reason for asking the very question (Silverman, 1993:46).

The choice of respondents was covered in the previous section, but in terms of interviewer bias, being a parent of children who attend a public school at the point of research means that some responses can elicit particular understandings in the interviewer, myself, and it can mean that a point may have been followed up more intensely than it might have if I was entirely untouched by education policies. This in turn could have influenced the thinking of the interviewee.

Interviewees also interpret the meaning of the question and try to set it in a broader context. While the context is given by the focus of the research, which has been explained by the introduction letter, subjects nevertheless have also a propensity to search for meaning and often for hidden meaning. Depending on their interpretation of the meaning of the question they answer accordingly, as such they are actors in the interview situation (Bourdieu, 1984). This would be particularly the case in an organisational setting where people are interviewed because of their role in the organisation and/or the subject matter being researched and thus they may practise loyalty to the organisation, and indeed they have, that will inhibit them to answer questions openly and it may influence them to answer questions using some form of social desirability criteria. This is particularly the case in the situation of this study where members of the organisation are regularly reminded that their position in public must be the position of the organisation as a whole and that the reputation of the organisation is of paramount importance. This is reflected in the fact that many interviewees were quite open about the thoughts they had about individual members and actors in the organisation, but were more reluctant or using only positive sentiments when asked questions about the organisation and its structures per se. Also, many interviewees were highly educated and researchers themselves, which may have influenced their judgement of questions, and may have lead them even more so to try to identify the meaning behind my questions. At times this was made

obvious, by interviewees asking me about the inferences I had made from my research so far. Sarantakos' (1993:187) description of elite interviews applies to this research, to some degree, in that many of the interviewees were expert in their field and have key decision-making roles in the organisation.

It was difficult to establish a relationship of respect for me, as student, and them as respondents of some stature. Additionally, as explained above, many interviewees were academics, which have, by nature of their position, a particular relationship to students. Thus, interviewees behaviour and sentiments towards me oscillated between seeing me as a parent with important opinions to contribute to the organisations' debates and seeing me as a student who is there to probe them with questions. Having been probed about my understandings of educational policies and my opinions about them a 'partial identification' as identified by Mies (1991:79) occurred:

the concept of partial identification means first that we proceed from our own contradictory state of being and consciousness. That is to say, not only do the 'other' women have a problem I do too. This enables a recognition of what brings me to the 'other women' as well as that which separates me from them...Partial identification means that I also recognise what separates us.

For my research partial identification meant that I established my credibility with interviewees by my sharing of opinions about educational policy as they affect my children and their school. This did not occur because it was my intention to gain acceptance in this fashion, but it was prompted by, at that stage, potential interviewees because they needed to assure themselves that I was trustworthy. Thus social researchers have to adapt to the setting in order to elicit goodwill and thereby successfully access the research setting.

CHAPTER 4: SETTING THE SCENE

This chapter introduces the two major foci for inquiry of this thesis, that is, parent participation in school decision-making, and gender equity in education. The first section provides a background to parent participation in decision-making in public schools, from an international, national, and finally state (NSW) perspective. It presents an insight into those historical events and ideological repositioning, which have influenced the contemporary state of parent decision-making in schools and which taken together constitute a regime of truth concerning parent participation in schools. Conventionally, parent participation has been seen, by participants as well as by theorists as embedded in principles of participatory democracy. Historically, it is grounded in the era of the 1960s and its focus on civil rights. The first section of this chapter then, includes an historical account of key trends in parent participation, and suggests a theoretical analysis of the dominant discourses within which parent participation is situated.

The second part of this chapter focuses on situating gender equity in education and examines theoretical paradigms gender equity policies are based on.

PARENT PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING

INTRODUCTION, DEFINITION AND MODELS OF PARENT PARTICIPATION

A large number of existing studies of parent participation are concerned with ‘practicalities’, such as assistance with reading, working in the canteen, uniform shop and so on (Limerick and Nielsen, 1995; Hepworth Berger, 1991). Other studies focus on partnership in areas of learning such as literacy, mathematics and question whether increased collaboration between parents and teachers will elicit better academic results (Epstein, 1990; Davies, 1996). This latter is the prime synonym and measure of ‘good education’. Clearly, results and ranking are a positional good.

Another area of enquiry, which has produced extensive research, is education for special needs children. These studies concentrate on issues and practice arising from integration of children with disabilities into either mainstream schools or special needs schools. Given that these children need extra support, and given that there is only limited public funding, it is not surprising that much research in this area examines what parents can do themselves to enhance the learning of these children. Parents, in this case even more so become part of the resources available to these children. Other pupil groups that seem to exhibit special needs include children from non-English-speaking backgrounds, children of low socio-economic background, indigenous children and rural isolated children (Beckett, 1994). Girls have been included as a special needs group for some years and more recently boys have been brought into this category, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

In mainstream schooling there is an increasing tendency to position parents as 'partners in learning relationships' and this has been particularly evident over the last thirty years where the political rhetoric around education has supported the call for partnership with parents (see further sections in this chapter). Certainly, parents and parent organisations in particular were calling for partnership in education prior to 1970s, but were not given due consideration by power holders (Blakers, 1981). Nakagawa (2000:444) claims that there is a parent involvement discourse that sometimes explicitly blames parents' lack of involvement in their child's schooling for lack of educational achievement and Toomey (1996) also claimed that while children's homes are now sites of learning along side schools, many families are not able to engage with their children in such a way as to create and reproduce relevant cultural capital that enhances educational achievement.

Davies and Johnson (1996:5) suggest that the increase in interest in parent participation in schools by education departments is related to three points: 1) a convincing body of research is supporting the notion that parent involvement is closely linked to student achievement; 2) policy makers and educational leaders believe that they need to have the economic and political support of parents in order to protect and develop schools in an environment of threat to public funding, which itself arises from an increased focus on economic-rationalist analysis of public enterprises; 3) policy makers, education and community leaders contend that the

multiple problems faced by young people today cannot be solved through one institution alone, and therefore collaboration is essential. A fourth point should be added here: the growth of the private education sector. This has been a constant threat to public schools since the mid-1980s (Marginson, 1997). The push towards private schooling affects parents considerably, as it reminds them of their hegemonic role of being solely responsible for the educational outcomes of their children. Private schooling advocates the purchasing of the best education parents can afford from a private education market, which is seen as being superior to public education. To increase parent involvement may increase commitment to public schooling, as parents are given the opportunity to influence the education of their children to gain desirable educational benefits and appear to be taking their role as parents seriously.

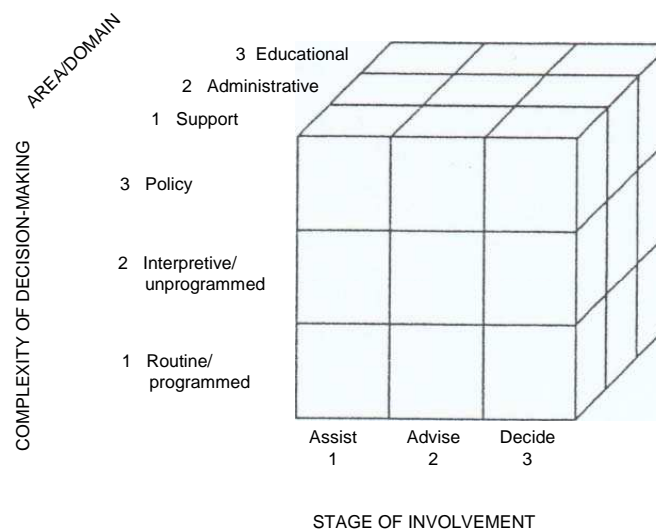
While points one and three relate to all forms of participation and relationship between parents and schools, point two has a clear reference to participation in decision-making. It is concerned, like this thesis, with parent participation as exercised through those parents who participate in parent groups, both, within schools or at the central level of parent advocacy organisations.

The academic literature concerning parent participation in schools is extensive, however, studies are often of a practical nature rather than theoretical. However, there have been a number of key studies that informed my thinking (Davies, 1996; Crump, 1996; Limerick, 1995; Hepworth Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1990; Beattie, 1985) undertaken in the area of parents and schooling, particularly school parent partnerships in learning. These studies have included the examination of children's learning and its relationship to the involvement of the parents in homework, at a structural level of schooling, or as a volunteer in their children's school. Notwithstanding socio-economic background, a variable, which considerably influences educational success, parent involvement and increased understanding about education of parents was thought to be a way of redressing educational disadvantage. In addition, in wealthy liberal democracies, parents were increasingly likely to be well educated themselves, and able to challenge the authority of teachers, thus, the social status of teachers experienced a decline, and the hierarchical barriers between parents and teachers changed also, potentially freeing up a way to consider parents as equals, or at least middle class parents as equals (Connell et. al., 1982).

Thus, in most Western countries and certainly in English-speaking ones, calls were made for educators to build links with parents and to use the untapped potential of parents for them to learn together with their child and show an increased interest in the education of their children.

‘Parent participation’ as a phrase incorporates many areas of involvement in schooling. A number of typologies and scales have been produced which have tried to come to grips with the different levels of parent participation in schools (Epstein, 1990; Limerick, 1995; Soliman, 1991). They are similar in that all include a range of involvements, from relatively simple tasks, such as canteen duties, to more complex involvement, which include participation in decision-making. For an example of this diversity see Figure 4.1 by Limerick, (1995:48).

Figure 4.1: Dimensions of school-community relations



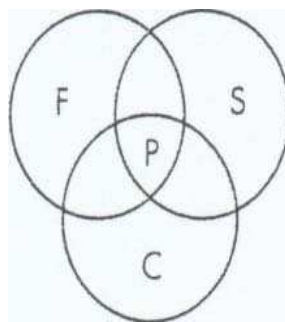
Involvement in the area of educational decision-making on a certain policy is neither unrestricted nor always welcome:

It is the interactions that occur at a policy area, that relate to educational issues and that are situated in the final decision-making stage which are likely to produce hostility and labels of ‘antibodies’ (Limerick, 1995:49).

Limerick (1995) found that the school is very willing to accept assistance which is task focused and under the direct supervision and instruction of school personnel, while decision-making at the policy level incurs most resistance from teachers who see themselves as experts in the education field (Limerick, 1995:49). Davies (1996:88) similarly concludes that internationally “ The reluctance and resistance of teachers to inviting parents into fuller partnerships appears to be universal”.

Another well-known model of parent participation is the one developed by Epstein and her colleagues (Epstein, 1990:104) as in Figure 4.2, which illustrates the importance of overlapping spheres of school, family and community in benefiting the child’s education. As this model centres on the well-being of the child, structural decision-making in school affairs is not a prominent feature, however, the idea of a partnership between the three spheres is seen as highly beneficial. This model is presented here, because it represents a common perception in the literature, that I have read, of how the benefits of partnerships for the education of the child are perceived.

Figure 4.2: Relationship of three spheres of influence on pupils’ learning and development



Large overlap = strong connections

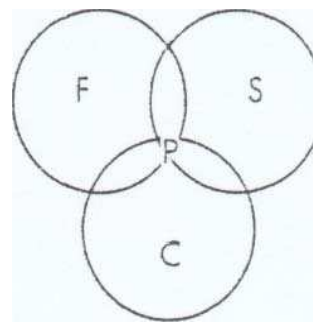
Continuous and consistent influence similar goals, values and practices coordinated activities

F = family, parents, siblings, relatives

P = pupils' learning and development

S = school, teachers, curriculum, pedagogy, classmates

C = community, culture, social institutions, mass media, employers



Small overlap = weak connections

Discontinuous and inconsistent influence dissimilar goals, values and practices uncoordinated activities

Source: Epstein, 1990:104

Definitions

The word ‘participation’ requires interpretation and explanation as it is used in the literature to variously indicate that parents have some involvement with their children’s schooling; that they have some say about their own child; or that they actually are part of broader decision-making in schools. Pateman (1970) who coined the phrase ‘participation in decision-making’, according to Beattie (1985:5), claims that the term can mean as little as: “... almost any situation where some minimal amount of interaction takes place, often implying little more than that a particular individual was present at a group activity”. On the other hand, Konrad von Moltke (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1975) summarised ‘participation’ as creating and entailing “ a consensual social process of change in education involving many groups with interlocking relationships” (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1975:88). It is worth noting that he made this comment in the context of an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members meeting which recognised the call for participative input into education and the need to look for new directions in education. As such he talked about interest groups, such as employers, governments, concerned citizens, which are involved in the change of the education systems as a whole, not just at the local school.

In his analysis of the discourse of participation, Fazal Rizvi (1995) explores the link between participation and education policies and concludes that the word ‘participation’ has different meanings and definitions within the literature. He makes a distinction between representative views of participation, social democratic views of participation and market views of participation and then provides an analysis of how these relate to the educational setting. Market theories, for example, suggest that participation would increase efficiency and the interests of the school would be shaped according to the interests of the parents or the school would risk losing pupils. The social democratic view suggests that participation enhances self-learning and self-development in participating parents, which is seen as intrinsically positive, while representative views consider the links to a constituent group that is being

represented by delegation to those that belong to their nominal group, in this case parents.

Beattie's (1985) well known analysis of parent participation in decision-making in four Western-European countries identified participation as "the legally required association of parents with the schools their children attend through systems of elected representatives and committees" (1985:19). His emphasis is on how parent participation was legally constituted in these four countries. Beattie also identified ultimate aims in participation in decision-making where those with liberal ideals do not aim at changing the decision-making system fundamentally yet reformist thinkers, aim at educating the people to become more active citizens, which are well able to participate in decision-making. He claims that in the latter case democratic decision-making would automatically follow as more educated and democratic citizens would not accept authoritarian leadership any longer. In this sense, participation in decision-making would be a self-fulfilling and perpetuating cycle (Beattie, 1985:5-6). For Richardson (1983:19) participation in decision-making means "participation in the process by which decisions are made." She makes a strong point that this is not the same as the activity of 'taking decisions' where one would have the right to make a decision collectively with others. Pateman (1970) and Arnstein (1971) examine direct and indirect participation as mechanisms of participation; both use a form of scales that range from pseudo decision-making to full participative decision-making where each member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome (Pateman, 1970) and where the highest level is assigned to being able to influence decisions directly at the level of the decision-making body (Arnstein, 1971). Thus, there are difficulties in defining 'participation', and even more so, researching participation so that one has to conclude that whichever way, issues of power, degree of influence, mode of influence and opportunity of influence are intertwined and major determinants of whether participation in decision-making is effective and possible. For the purpose of this research my definition concurs with Davies' (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1979:50):

When I use the term citizen participation I mean citizen influence or power in educational decision-making in the most significant areas of policy: budget, personnel, program.

This definition incorporates the concept of power in that it includes the ability to influence decisions by participating in decision-making and it illustrates what the key policies are that affect education most, yet these are the policy areas to which power holders are most reluctant to devolve real decision-making (Limerick, 1995). While the word 'citizen' maybe synonymous with 'parents' here, it can be viewed as a broader term encompassing citizens as in the whole community. Current governments in Australia are keen to use the broader terminology of 'community participation' instead of 'parent participation' to be able to put forward an essentially functionalist position, which ensures that other interest groups' needs can be considered also, for example, those of employers.

THE HISTORY OF PARENT PARTICIPATION

This section discusses some of the key documents and ideological positions, which have influenced parent participation in decision-making in schools. There is a continuum of models of decision-making in matters of school education that ranges broadly from school self management and a decentralised model where every school or a local area through a body of stakeholders makes decisions about schooling to a centralised decision-making body that is generally organised as a bureaucratic institution where decisions are made on behalf of schools and schools are expected to conform to guidelines that eventuate from the centralised structure. The former is marked by devolution of power to the local level while the second exercises power from a centralised power base. The trend toward parent participation in decision-making challenged the hitherto more centralized structure (Blakers, 1981). A brief history of education by McCulloch (AACE in Conference Proceedings, 1979:10-12) showed that there were three key ideas, which shaped the call for community participation and thus, parent participation in schools in the 1970s. These are: the concept of liberal education which is non-sectarian education, access for all to this liberal education and the lack of flexibility in educational approaches caused by powerful bureaucracies that control education as a whole.

Historically, parent participation can be traced back to civil rights movements of the 1960s and the consequent revision of democracy, particularly in terms of

participative democracy. Parents were affected by this movement, as were many social institutions. This popular demand for participative input, in later years, was matched with a demand from some parents for self-management of schools, which in turn was utilised by economic rationalists of the prevailing political climate at the time, as a rationale for the devolution of decision-making and responsibilities from the state to individual schools. There were two reasons for this devolution, one overt and the other covert. Overtly, the intention was to save money. Covertly, it effected a diversion of attention of parents to local schools rather than to the State, in terms of taking responsibility for education. At least, this is the interpretation given by sociologists and education advocates, who identified the political benefits that the devolution of decision-making has had for policy makers in a field such as education, which is often the centre of heated debate (Perry-Indermaur, 1998).

As for the historical development of parent participation, Beattie says that parent participation in decision-making before the 1960s was “sporadic and unstable and aimed at supporting particular schools rather than at questioning or altering the system or conveying parent views to teachers or administrators” (Beattie, 1985:2). However, the social movements of the time, which included human rights and social justice issues, promoted views of participatory democracy focusing on citizen participation and involvement in decision-making. Schools were affected, as were higher educational institutions and workplaces. The general idea was that democracy should go beyond voting rights, and that citizens should be involved in discussion at all levels of bureaucracy to ensure that they have input on issues of concern to them. Sarason (1995:7), in his analysis of the rationale for parent participation, suggested “when you are going to be affected, directly or indirectly, by a decision, you should stand in *some* relationship to the decision-making process” (*italics his emphasis*).

For parents, however, this idea is complex, as the people to whom school education is of primary concern are minors who cannot directly represent themselves. Additionally, ‘parents’ are an incredibly large diverse group of people, by no means cohesive, and lacking similar interests. Hence, they constitute a new category, one of indirect representation on behalf of the child (Beattie, 1985:3). Moreover, it is not necessarily obvious what roles parents and parent participation fulfil vis-a-vis schools as institutions which were based on bureaucratic control and professional

administration by teachers. One could surmise that an increase of parent influence could have elicited fears by teachers and the administration about the ability for parents to practise 'surveillance', a Foucauldian (Shumway, 1989) concept, that refers to control exercised by power holders through being able to assess and observe any movements of those that needed to be controlled, pupils, senior bureaucrats and sectional interests of teachers, in this case. Teachers in fact were concerned about their role as professionals and how the devolution of decision-making would affect their workplace and the relationship with the children, parents and the institution of education as a whole (Connell, 1985:201-206).

However, as early as 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Beattie, 1985:2) parents are mentioned and their right to " 'have a prior right to choose' the kind of education that shall be given to their children". Subsequently, Article 2 of the First Protocol of The European Convention of Human Rights (1952) elaborated on this:

In this exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the state shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

This statement clearly indicates the positions held by those who negotiated the Human Rights convention and in response governments implemented legislation or entered discussions with existing parent organisations (Beattie, 1985; Limerick and Nielsen, 1995; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988). Incidentally, this statement of the entitlements of parents for education of their children according to their own personal beliefs and convictions, provides a rationale for private education and the operation of education markets in that the provision of alternatives, diversity and choice are fundamental concepts underlying education markets, one aspect of which is private education, at least in Australia.

Beattie (1985) in reference to the four Western European countries he researched, contends that the legislation itself regarding parent participation was confused and piecemeal. For example, one legislative issue was the fact that parents already voted as citizens and then received another opportunity at influencing decisions. Beattie claimed that this leads to a 'conflict of jurisdiction' (1985:4) with sectional interests perhaps conflicting with the common good interests, an issue I have grappled with

throughout my thesis as, at least in my experience, many parents indeed do display an interest in their own child's education, but exhibit less interest in the 'common good' of all students or a minority group in need. Mawson (1996:93) though saw the international trend of the development of parent school programs as being the result of a rather top down approach of implementation:

The reforms appear to have been imposed from outside and hone in on the control and governance of both schools and school systems; the reforms are overtly political and target the management of education.

Whatever the limitations of processes adopted, recent decades have seen a gradual engagement of parents by schools and education departments. The next section sets out some of the key developments, which fostered progress in this area in a number of countries.

WORLDWIDE DEVELOPMENTS IN PARENT PARTICIPATION

OECD Members Conference, 1973

Participants at this conference included representatives of education ministers of 14 OECD countries as well as social scientists and education researchers (Australia's first OECD conference attendance, Manefield, 1988:42). The conference examined models of alternative schooling, which, even at this early stage, when markets were not as central to the thinking around education, already included the idea of providing vouchers for schooling to individual families who then could choose the education most suitable for their children. At the time the conclusion was that most people are not looking for individualistic solutions, but rather that changes to education and education systems need to be driven by collective action and input into decision-making in education. Contributors to the book came to the conclusion that the conference endorsed the overall desirability of having meaningful parent participation at the local school level because

without close working relationship with parents and with community institutions they (participants at the conference) could not mobilise the full resources which they needed to enable each individual child to achieve his full potential (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1975:133).

This quote also alludes to the issue of resource distribution and recognises that parents' labour in their home and within the school enhances students learning and educational outcomes. An example of this parent factor is the research into the relationship between the family and children's level of literacy and language. According to Spreadbury (1995:24) the US, UK and Australia all had parent packages and instructional sessions on how parents can assist their child in learning to read. In Australia, it is well known that literacy has been an issue which politicians have expressed great concerns about, so much so that the media termed it a 'national crisis' (Speech, Dr. Freebody, P&C Conference, 1998).

The increasing focus on parent participation was also indicated by the number of speakers at the *Third International Community Education Conference*, held in 1979, where many keynote speakers touched on the school community, its learning needs and the desirability of having parents involved in decision-making in schools (AACE Conference Proceedings, 1979). Many advocates pushed for local control and Victoria (Australia), where the conference was held at the time, already looked at extended local control for schools. In the 1990s Victoria in fact instituted wide-ranging powers to schools at the local level (Blackmore, 1996).

A brief summary of a selection of countries' development of parent participation in decision-making follows, using a number of sources all of which look at the context of parent participation and its development. Some of these countries had leading parent movements or explored similar trends at the time as Australia did and some of the English speaking countries are often cited when providing an international focus.

Developments in other countries

For the United States, Caldwell and Spinks (1988) claim that there have been two waves of attempting to devolve control over school management to the local school community. They refer to the first wave as being largely identified with the 1983 report *National Commission on Excellence in Education*, which recommended a number of reforms. This report was the result of discussions concerning parents' influence on schools and whether schools ought to be self managed, a discussion

which was prominent during the mid to late seventies (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988:16). In the US, as in other countries parent participation is related to ideas of school self-management and self-direction, in a rationalist, capitalist, competitive environment. However, the United States took the path of Parent Advisory Councils rather than devolution of decision-making and decentralisation, at least during the 1970s and 1980s. However, according to Caldwell and Spinks (1988) a second wave of discussion around this issue of self-management focused on claims such as “substantial decision-making authority at the school site is the essential pre-requisite for quality education” (National Education Association – National Association of Secondary School Principals 1986, in Caldwell and Spinks, 1988:17). Despite the concern with school self-management, Marsh in 1988 identified in the USA a tendency to move towards a more centralised system as evidenced by an increased focus on desirable school subjects and a lengthening of school hours for all. A more recent development has also seen the introduction of parent compacts and contracts, particularly in disadvantaged schools, where parents are made aware of participation as an obligation and an expectation that school has of them as parents (Nakagawa, 2000:446). In one state, California, employers have even made provisions for parents to take paid leave from work to attend to their children’s schooling (Nagakawa, 2000:449).

If the USA exhibited both self-management and centralisation tendencies, Canada focused on self-management (Caldwell and Spinks (1988). For example, in the Edmonton District, Alberta, schools were self-managing, which included receiving resources and administration funds through payment vouchers per student based on identified needs of students. The higher the needs of the student, the higher was the financial value of the voucher. Parents as well as teachers were seen as part of the management process.

Since the late 1980s, Britain has made quite far-reaching decisions in terms of self-management of schools. From 1987 British schools have been able to ‘opt-out’ of Local Education Authority (LEA) management and instead become self-governed and self-managed (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988:15). This was a direct result of the 1986 Education Act, which recommended increased parent participation. Both

teachers and parents, however, were resistant lamenting that there were very few resources to actually enable change to occur (Marsh, 1988:88).

Davies (1996:88) in an action research study that involved forty countries indicated that many have developed policies to support an increase in parent participation. As examples he cites: Australia, Chile, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain with New South Wales in Australia, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic making moves towards devolution of decision-making to schools. But, he also confirms from an international perspective that

the reluctance and resistance of teachers to inviting parents into fuller partnerships appears to be universal. Some of the roots of this condition include: tradition, threats to professional expertise, lack of adequate preparation in pre-service or in-service education, lack of structures and mechanisms to bring teachers and parents together in non-threatening settings (Davies, 1996:88).

Phtiaka (1996:53) in writing about Cyprus critiqued the prevailing ideas about parent participation in that she identified how the lack of cultural capital of parents to get involved in a meaningful participatory way with the schooling of children is being used as a scapegoat for lack of school achievement:

When referring to home-school partnership therefore one is in fact referring to an arrangement where one party (the teachers) imposes its philosophy on the other (the parents) and expects assistance in materialising its own goals. When the other party accepts these terms, then we have 'home-school partnership'. When it does not, then we have 'hard to reach parents'.

She concludes that there is a deficit model that is applied to disadvantaged and working class parents that implies that working class parents are not capable to engage and support their children. Phtiaka (1996) strongly advocates that schools should take full responsibility for school learning, so that there is no justification for blaming the parents or their circumstances if a child is not achieving.

PARENT PARTICIPATION IN AUSTRALIA

In Australia, school education has been considered the responsibility of the States within the Australian Federation (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Blakers, 1981; Fitzgerald, Musgrave and Pettit, 1976). It was not until the 1950s that the Commonwealth started to yield to public pressure and develop policies for

government schooling. According to Blakers (1981), however, involvement was sporadic, political and mainly related to funding, and was predominantly directed at the support of non-government schooling. However, the Commonwealth Schools Commission in the 1970s clearly had a brief to examine schooling in Australia and make some far-reaching recommendations. It is worth pointing out here, that the National Policy on the Education of Girls of 1987 was the first national federal policy on schooling (Lingard and Porter, 1997).

The Commonwealth provides funds to government schools, through their respective state systems, on a funding formula basis. However, private schools continue to command considerable goodwill, particularly from conservative governments, and market and decentralisation policies ensure the flow of funds to private education, which culminated in the year 2000 in a public outcry over the (perhaps excessive) allocation of funding to private schools (Daily Telegraph, 21/8/00).

Blakers (1981) claims that schooling in Australia was very centralised in each state and together with the apparent lack of the community to get involved broadly in issues of schooling, Blakers (1981:1) argues, that it is not surprising that broad moves in Australia for self-determination and increased participation in decision-making in schools were slower than in many overseas countries.

The Australian Government in the 1970s supported participation in decision-making in schools as illustrated in the *Schools in Australia Report 1973* (Karmel report) which

supported the right for every child, within practicable limits, to be prepared, through schooling, for full participation in society, both for his own and society's benefit. It saw advantages in greater local responsibility for schools, greater community participation involving teachers, parents and senior students in the making of decisions for schools (AACE Conference Proceedings, 1979:23).

ACSSO (Australian Council of State School Organisations) at the time (early 1970s) made a submission to the interim committee of the Schools Commission, supporting the need for parental involvement in locally or regionally constituted committees and the devolution of decision-making. It derided existing forms of parent participation

“sporadic discussions, lawn mowing and ‘the unwilling, inexpert involvement of local chambers of commerce’” (ACSSO in Pettit, 1980:12).

The School Commission in 1975 (Australian Schools Commission, 1975) concluded that most schools still operated on either a level where parents have no educational role in the school and what happens at home is ignored, or at a level where the school promoted increased communication between parents and teachers, in the knowledge that parents’ interest in the education of the child can enhance the child’s learning. Most schools, however, fell short of the next two levels, one which is about offering opportunities to parents to reach agreement about the educational values of importance, and the other, where initiatives are undertaken and the whole school and parents get involved in achieving change and where there is an agreed understanding that everybody needs to understand and influence decisions made jointly.

Blakers (1981) concluded that with the pressures exerted through democratic movements, the media and the consistent policies of the Schools Commission over the years, parent participation in decision-making in schools has increased to a degree where school councils were operating in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Victoria and South Australia and developing in the Northern Territory and Tasmania. Blakers (1981) argued that only in the ACT was there an opportunity for parents, at least to some degree, to influence how education should be conducted and the role they should have within the system. For all the other states, she contends,

community participation is a new growth, which has had to be grafted on to or incorporated into structures and processes which have existed with relatively little change since State systems were established a century ago. Rarely, even in the ACT, have the implications of the changes been charted in advance and their inherent problems prepared for (Blakers, 1981:3).

As in other countries, in the 1960s and early 1970s the Australian public did start to question education, largely too because most of the population had benefited from secondary and tertiary education by then, but participatory practice only started to develop with a proactive move towards having parent advisory committees in the Australian Capital Territory, which had a population of highly educated and well travelled citizens and as such it is not surprising that they were leaders in this debate (Blakers, 1981, Pettit, 1980). However, the motivation for the ACT to be actively

seeking change was the fact that they were still administratively placed within the NSW Department of Education, which left them with little control over local schools. Hence, the Currie report in 1967 (Pettit, 1980) suggested that the ACT ought to have an independent education authority and that there should be independent decision-making within schools giving the parents rights for participation in decision-making at the local school level. An active parent, teachers and community group under the chairmanship of Sir George Currie produced the report to campaign for a change in education authority and broader decision-making to the community. By 1974 the newly established Australian Capital Territory Schools Authority managed the eighty odd schools in the ACT itself and each school established a board consisting of

principal, a nominee of the authority, two members of the teaching staff, three parent representatives, coopted non-voting members if desired and, in the case of high schools and colleges, two students as members (Pettit, 1980:184)

This composition is significant as the school councils in NSW followed the same principle in later years. According to Pettit (1980:185)

In January 1973 the New South Wales Minister for Education quite unexpectedly announced plans for greater community involvement in educational decision-making in the setting up of a select committee to make proposals on how involvement was to be achieved.

Yet, actual legislation and establishment of school councils across NSW occurred only in the early 1990s, as outlined in table 4.1 overleaf.

Victoria is hailed as the state, which took early initiatives in involving local decision-making including the participation of parents (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Fitzgerald et.al. 1976). Already in the early 1970s the State of Victoria allowed for a number of community schools to be developed within the State system, with the aim of involving the local community in operating and managing the local school to a degree that allowed for free structuring of the school day. This was previously unheard of, but closely related to the sentiments voiced by Ivan Illich (1971:10) at the time, who argued for a close examination of the institution of education and proposed a “deschooling of a schooled society”. Illich opposed the institution of the school because he suggested that pupils learn about processes of schooling rather than learning. He claimed that students learn about institutional processes and

responses, such as, one has to sit for an hour, study quietly and then have a break. He called schooling a process of degradation and identified pupils as being constricted by structure as well as social values being increasingly institutionalised (Illich, 1971:9).

By the mid 1980s Victoria established school councils in each school, which involved parents as equal decision-makers to teachers and the principal and by 1987 plans were made to devolve the responsibility for budgeting to the local school council also. The selection of principals occurred at the local level and moves towards decentralisation continued to such a degree that by the mid 1990s state schools became largely autonomous and parents could freely choose schools for their children with the result that many schools had to close down for lack of pupils. A further push towards decentralisation occurred under the Kennett government (1992-1999), which introduced the *Schools of the Future* concept in 1993, which essentially advocated devolution and self-managing schools (Blackmore, 1999b). Competition to succeed sharply increased, putting many principals' emotional well-being at risk in a free market environment (Blackmore, 1996) and an environment, where principals were blamed for schools that were not performing.

The change towards school self-management did not come without resistance and many teachers and parents in Victoria, which had a strong parent movement, did fear a reduction of commitment to both education generally and to equality of education for disadvantaged children, a concern that is not surprising given the strong focus in the early 1980s on equity of outcomes in education with Victoria being a very active state that committed quite extensive resources to equity programs under Labour governments (Blackmore, 1999b).

In Western Australia a proposal for self-government was considered in the late 1980s also in a report called *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement*, 1986 printed by the Ministry of Education (Marsh, 1988).

By way of a summary, Table 4.1 overleaf, sets out an overview of legislative provisions for participatory practices in Australian States/Territories (Meadmore, 1995:135). The phrase 'title of the body' refers in this table to the body that is

formally endowed with participatory decision-making power. Of particular interest is the fact that NSW was the last state to formally implement legislation that provided for the right to participate in decision-making (see section this chapter on New South Wales).

Table 4.1: An overview of legislative provisions for participatory practices in Australian states /territories

STATE/ TERRITORY	LEGISLATION/SOURCE	WHEN INTRODUCED	TITLE OF BODY
ACT	Schools Authority Ordinance	1976	school board
NSW	Education Reform Act (brief reference)	1990	school council
	Guidelines for the Establishment of School Councils	1990	
NT	Education Act Education (School Councils) Regulations	1983	school council
SA	Education Act Education Regulations, 1976-1981	1972	school council
TAS	Handbook for School Councils (under review)No specific provision within the Education Act	1984	school council
VIC	School Councils Act	1975	school council
	Ministerial Paper No. 4 (under review)	1983	
WA	Education Amendment Regulations (No. 3)	1991	school decision-making group
QLD	Education (General Provisions) Act (under review)	1989	Parents and Citizens Association

A significant national program which provided case studies of parent participation in practice through funding individual schools for innovative projects, was the *Participation and Equity Program (PEP)* which ran in the early 1980s, but was discontinued in 1987 due to increasing school retention rates, which created the perception that the program was no longer needed, as it sought to address high youth unemployment and low retention rates (Marsh, 1988:161-165). The program allocated projects to the value of 164 Million Dollars over four years. The broad aim of the project was to improve schooling and to provide opportunities for all children to complete secondary schooling. A number of action areas were identified and “teacher/student/parent interaction was one of these” (Marsh, 1988:162). Rizvi (1995) identified that PEP was developed under a social democratic notion of

participation, which was to empower parents, students and the community to actively participate in decision-making and achieve better outcomes for the students. He concludes that while the intentions were well meaning the success of the program was limited as “the program was built on a contradiction: it aimed to secure democratic ends by bureaucratic means” (Rizvi, 1995:31). Elsewhere, Rizvi and Kemmis, (1987:349) summarise that the greatest achievement of the program was “that it showed that school communities and education systems can tackle issues of profound and social consequences when given the resources and support to do so”. This is supported by the conclusions drawn by Marsh (1988:161) who said that many evaluators of the program commented on the excellent benefits of these projects. However, Rizvi (1995) also claimed that relatively junior staff was expected to guide the program and that notions of competitiveness introduced into Australian public sector management were undermining the program. The PEP program also addressed girls in education through a number of projects (see section in this chapter on gender equity). Prior to the PEP program the Commonwealth government had administered the *Innovation Program*, which operated for eight years and funded thousands of projects, 1200 alone in NSW (Marsh, 1988:159). One of the criteria to attract funding, was the relationship or involvement of the community in the school. This criterion is reflective of the period of time where parent and community participation was increasingly encouraged as expressed in the Karmel report (Australian Government, 1973). Similar goals were also set for the *Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP)*, which has been funded by the federal government since the mid 1970s and aims at improving school outcomes for those from low socio-economic backgrounds (Allen, 2000).

PARENT PARTICIPATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES

The move towards greater parent participation in decision-making in New South Wales schools occurred relatively late in comparison to many other States and Territories in Australia. According to Manefield (1988:42) the decision of Minister Eric Willis in 1973 (see reference above regarding the relationship of ACT and NSW schools) to introduce School Councils into NSW schools occurred without due consultation meant that the initiative had no support from neither teachers nor the

parent community. Consequently, the initiative was not acted upon. However, Pettit (1980:85) argued that teachers, at the time, experienced real threats to their employment conditions in the form of a potential of deregulation of their profession, a threat that would have been exacerbated by the possibility of school councils that may have managed staffing issues at schools. The hostility of community groups towards this early school council initiative was so great that it wasn't until the mid 80s that other moves were made to introduce school councils and formalise parent input into decision-making. This is not to say that parents did not have any means to contribute to decision-making in education, but they did so predominantly through key parent advocacy groups or the local parent committees. While local groups were potentially were effective in influencing decisions, the school was not mandated in any way to take this input into consideration. However, with the change of the Education Act in 1990 (NSW Government, 1990) and the introduction of school councils, if so desired by local schools and their communities, there was now a tool that had a formal decision-making status. It was also the only local school decision-making forum, which was tripartite in that it included management, parents and teachers, and at high school level, even students.

As for the input of parent advocacy organizations, they had formal representation on the Education Commission, which was formed as a result of the *Working Party for an Education Commission* founded in 1976 by Minister Eric Bedford (Manefield, 1988:43). Parents' contributions were valued by Ministers and education bureaucrats and the organisations in return formed regional councils, which were able to engage directly at the regional level with their regional directors. According to Manefield (1988:40) parent organisations were able to effect change, through evoking the parent vote, and particularly so when they were united with the Teachers Federation on any issue. But, Manefield also claimed that these organisations in NSW were quite happy to play the role of assisting the Minister and education management in their role of managing schools and as such did not push strongly for increased decision-making at the local school level. This is a clear example where the interest of the 'apparatus' took over, to use a term from Bourdieu (1991). As shall be demonstrated in Chapter Six: Parents and School Decision-Making, it is indeed a handicap now, to work as a centralised body primarily, when decisions are increasingly made at the school level.

The introduction of the idea of school councils in the early 80s was less related to the desirability of parent input into decision-making, but rather was introduced in the context of a liberal government, which was aiming at 'deregulating' the education market (Rizvi, 1995). The Greiner government, with Chadwick and Metherell as Education Ministers, was very interested in the devolution of decision-making, which would allow parents to get involved in their local school to improve schools so that the school remained competitive in the education market, or so the rhetoric goes. It also had an agenda to reduce government expenditure at head office level in line with economic rationalist views. As outlined above, this is comparative with the Thatcher era in Britain, which was leading the direction in terms of exposing education to market forces.

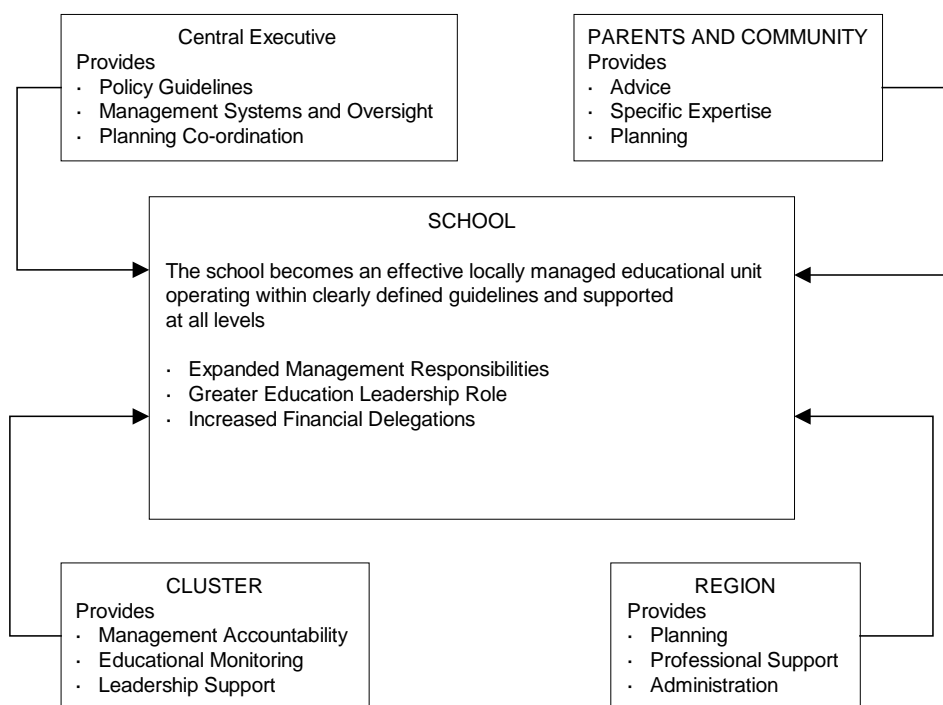
The push to establish school councils continued well into the 1990s and at some point the performance measure of local superintendents seemed to be their ability to establish school councils across their district (interviewee). Over time, parent organisations that were not generally in agreement with the school council idea, were able to gain some concessions in terms of their involvement in school councils. The 1998 directions by the Department of Education and Training (DET, 1998) clearly established that the President of the local P&C Association must be a member of the school council, that they must report back to the parent group and that they need to consult their parent group before participating in decision-making in the council.

Today, according to interviewees from both parent organisations, there is relative freedom for schools as to whether they have a school council, or not, and as to how the school council is managed. The consensus, however, seems to be that at their own schools the school council has made some difference to school governance as it is the only tripartite forum where management, teachers, parents and often older students as well may together debate issues of concern to the school. Occasionally, the forum will debate curriculum issues, but primarily it is concerned with budget, discipline and forthcoming events.

According to Mawson (1996), a management review of the NSW education system produced two reports that together prompted a key change in NSW' management of

schooling. These were the *Schools Renewal* (June, 1989) and *School-Centred Education* (March, 1990) reports. The Schools Renewal report recommended decentralisation of the head office structure, with a view to dismantling bureaucracy that “was seen to be ‘top-heavy’ and having too much concentrated authority” (Mawson, 1996:93) and the empowerment of schools, giving schools the authority to make decisions locally which further strengthened the idea of school councils. Figure 4.3 following Chapman and Dunstan (1990:205) illustrates such a structure for NSW which was “accepted in principle by its government” and “All states and territories have now modified their structures in varying degrees” (Chapman and Dunstan, 1990:206). When I began my research the words ‘School Renewal’ and the impact of these policy shifts were still frequently quoted within debates in parent organisations. As such their impact has been far reaching.

Figure 4.3 Proposed school support structure for NSW



Source: Management Review: NSW Education Profile (1989), p.9

To complete this section, it is pertinent to mention those key advocates for parent participation that have proclaimed parents’ rights for many years. Parent

organisations in Australia were founded early in the 20th century, when parents were required to take much responsibility for the running of the school, at times even administering the payment of the teacher. There is the national body of Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) founded in 1947, with which all state bodies are affiliated, and to which they send delegates to participate in the Association's decision-making. At the state level, in NSW, there are two state-wide parent bodies covering public schools, that is the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations (P&C), which was founded in 1922, and Federation of School Community Organisations (FOSCO) founded in 1926 (P&C Handbook 2000/2001). According to Blakers (1981:8), in the traditional model of centralised education state level parent organisations had the role of informing and exerting pressure on the Education Minister of the day, with communication going back and forth between the two. The effectiveness of parent organisations, both in regard to communicating with the Minister and to distributing information to other parents, varied from organisation to organisation, year to year, Minister to Minister. However, Barry Manefield (1988), an educational leader and observer holds parent power in high esteem, believing that it is the parents who manage to influence politicians. In his words:

when the government 'razor gangs' were at work in the late 1970s, it was not the teachers who saved Education from ravaging cuts suffered by other areas, it was government sensitive to the parent vote; and that sensitivity continues today. I participated in many deputations at a high level and I know that to Malcolm Fraser, John Carrick, Neville Wran and others, it was what the Joan Browns, Tottie Cohens and Shirley Bergs said that counted (Manefield, 1988:40).

These women were the presidents' and executive members of parent organisations in New South Wales at the time.

THE IDEOLOGICAL BASIS TO PARENT PARTICIPATION

This section examines the various sites of struggle located around the concept of parent participation in schools, as they occurred over time in the political setting of government policymaking and as influenced by ideological directions related to paradigm shifts in the broader social and political environment. While other sections in this chapter follow a more or less chronological path, this section pays less

attention to chronology, as this is charted in the other sections, but it is rather concerned with exploring the various dimensions of parent participation.

Participative democracy and parent participation

One site of struggle is the rationale for introducing parent participation. As I have commented elsewhere the call for participative democracy in the 1960s did not stop at the school gates. The ideologically driven demand for having an increased say in one's own affairs (Sarason, 1995:7) demanded of politicians that they look at means to increase input into decision-making of those directly affected by the outcomes of schooling. There was little questioning of the benefits that such a measure would have in improving schooling, among those who advocated for parent participation in decision-making, as they believed it would take into consideration the needs of individual children as expressed by their parents, and it would ensure that schools remain closely connected and in touch with the local communities, which in turn have an interest in the outcomes of education in their future citizens and workers (Henry, 1978). However, state bureaucracies and schools, which were in charge of education, were not as optimistic about the prospect that parents would contribute anything more than advocacy, than being advocates on behalf of their child on a one to one basis, with the teacher still having absolute power and changes being granted at the goodwill of the educator (Manefield, 1988). It took agitation by those committed to the cause of participation before politicians considered the proposals (Blakers, 1981). It took research results which showed that positive home-school relationships are beneficial, and it ultimately took a market driven approach to public services that made power holders seriously consider the needs of those who by now were termed the consumers of education, that is, parents on behalf of their children. However, it might not have been so much the insight that parents are the consumers of education and therefore should have a say in the matter, that convinced policy makers, but rather the possibility of devolving the responsibility to the local school, many of which (after all) were interested in increased accountability and self-management (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988), that convinced governments that there might be some merit in devolving decision-making, namely so that parents at the local level can be held responsible for educational mishaps (Whitty et. al., 1998;

Soliman, 1991; Beattie, 1985:21). Furthermore, devolution of decision-making meant that some of the work could be undertaken at the school level, such as detailed budgeting, allocation of work hours to staff, subcontracting work and so on. Hence, staff could be 'saved' at the head office level.

It is worth noting here that perceptions of childhood had also changed in the past decades. Gittins (1998) in her book *The Child in Question* claims that a concept of universal childhood has evolved that is primarily based on Western middle-class perceptions of childhood and does not take into account gender, class and ethnicity. Among other questions, she asks, who owns children? For this thesis, this leads to the significant question of: should the parents be in fact considered the consumers in terms of education or are their children the consumers? Gittins (1998:71) identifies how education has been a key issue over the past two centuries and that universal education has been used to exercise control over working class children at the instruction of the State, blatantly disregarding the economic contributions children may have made to working-class households. She also identifies children and parents as being in a binary power relationship where the parent, while being seen as the protector, is the paternalistic power holder. While the State monitors and intervenes when family arrangements seem to break down or children have to be controlled, Gittins (1998:78) concludes that children are still being seen as property of the parents:

Regardless of legislation it is still the case that the vast majority of the population believes children *belong* to parents, and that parents can do pretty much what they want with them (Emphasis in original).

Parents then are the de-facto consumers of education on behalf of their children in a world where childhood is invested with emotional expectations that weigh heavy:

It (the myth of the child) tells us childhood is a special time when children can be free from adult worry (which can also be read as dependent and disempowered), innocent (to a large extent ignorant) and happy (or at least smiling for family photographs when demanded). We as adults have a heavy investment in perpetuating the myth because if we did not do so our own precarious ideas of having had a happy and special childhood are threatened, and that can shake the very roots of our own sense of self and identity (Gittins, 1998:204).

These developments also have to be seen within a background of the development of precise measurements, that is the positivistic tendencies that evolved in Social Science, and also the increased literacy of the population that allowed parents to

compare schools and to further develop their understanding of children and childhood, and generally form their own opinions. This relates to a general trend of questioning the expert, a tendency also observed in the medical field, for example, where the authority of Doctors has declined and self-help and alternative medicine has increased (Katz and Levin, 1980). As mentioned before, the onset of using statistical material and increasing bureaucratic structures, similarly to Foucault's notion of discipline (Burchell, et. al., 1991) influenced direction in schools and school management. There was a constant call for schools to 'improve' outcomes for pupils and society, as evidenced through many school reports in various States of Australia (Marsh, 1988). Issues such as retention rates, low achievements for certain groups in society, increasing unemployment rates, changes in the employment market and skills needed for the labour market all culminated in reviews of education. This drive for school improvement is evident across the Western world where phrases such as 'improved productivity' and 'effectiveness of schooling' were positioned as achievable, meaningful goals. According to Davies (1996:85)

Accompanying this world wide surge of interest in school reform is a greatly increased interest in the roles that families can and should play in educational reform. In scores of countries, policy makers have included various forms of collaboration among school, family and community as a part of their educational reform programs.

This, effectively links the major sites of cultural reproduction, that is the family and schools. This arrangement of working together has the advantage of reinforcing dominant ideologies through the mechanisms of hegemony providing congruent messages between sites that imply that achievement will greatly be enhanced through collaboration. To complement each other in the education of children is the explicit goal of working together, but the effect of this practice is shared responsibility which also assures parents' complicity in sharing blame for failure to achieve.

The push for parent participation by Ministers and parents' demand threatened the centralised bureaucratic structure and its staff. As Manefield (1988:44) observed: "...the profession is dragging its feet, with tacit approval from the middle level of the bureaucracy". Therefore, there was limited support from the establishment for participative democratic notions of parent participation, which is evidenced in the lack of resources devoted to this area of work and the powerful positions of principals that believe and in effect are held responsible for the management of the

school (Blackmore, 1996; my interviews). Yet, the introduction of school councils, at least in New South Wales, came about through a top down approach primarily to satisfy the political rhetoric of the consumer who buys goods in the education market, thereby emphasising the importance of education as a positional good.

The Ideology of the Education Market

As alluded to above, there is a link between devolution of decision-making and the view that education could be exposed to market forces in line with other public services. The rationale is that parents should be able to choose the schooling of their children and schools in turn need to be delivering a product, to use language appropriate for economic ideas, which parents would be interested in buying. A quote by Andrew Norton (in Goldsmith, 1998:26) gives a clear indication of what a market approach entails:

Even the best intentions cannot fully compensate for the loss of price signals. Without the evidence of actual consumer behaviour it is difficult for schools to tell how highly parents value the services they offer.

In other words, if parents were paying schools, Norton assumes that they would influence the quality of education positively, in that they would be prepared to pay the fee only if they were satisfied with the service. By implication, if enrolment numbers are falling, it is understood that the school is not offering a service of acceptable standard to its parents and therefore it is justified that the school loses enrolments and eventually closes down. Trends like these are already observable in Victoria, where a number of schools have been closed in the mid 1990s (Blackmore, 1996), and more recently in New South Wales, where the Minister announced in early 2001 a new concept for Inner City schools which suffer from lack of enrolments (Sydney Morning Herald, 3 March, 2001). Yet, education is not a market. Children are required to attend school and schooling is not deregulated because it needs to teach within the curriculum and needs to observe certain standards. Funds are allocated through the public purse and apart from the more prestigious private schools, schools are not regulated by price and market principles. However, the rhetoric about private schools being better because they are expensive and the old

saying 'that you get what you pay for', has meant that education has become contested as if it were subject to a market.

To facilitate the process of judging the merits of any school, state governments have been attempting to introduce accountability measures to schools that are meant to aid parents in their decision-making as to the appropriate school for their child. These include an annual school report, which is sent out by the Department of Education directly to each parent, thus implying the notion that the report is confidential and has the seal of approval of the department; a number of tests that show how the child's achievements compares to the state average and where the school is required to disclose at a meeting and through the Annual Report how the whole school fared in comparison to the rest of the State; a public appraisal of HSC marks in major newspapers; time limited contracts for educational leaders as opposed to life long tenure, and so on. Arguments between parent organisations and the government have raged over the last few years as to whether test results of individual schools should be made public, but this argument was successfully terminated after one school suffered public recriminations when scoring considerably lower than the state average one year. However, education departments are able to compare results and take a school to task as part of its accountability requirements to the public. Perhaps, needless to say, private schools do not have to be accountable in these terms, but rather in terms of whether parents are still willing to pay for the education they are getting, and they assume that their child will have a better education by the fact alone that the students at the school are selected according to their cultural capital, that is their socio-economic background, measured by being able to pay for the school, in the first instance. Both parent organisations I observed argue against using aggregated data from tests and the annual report as appropriate instruments for the assessment of schools as the following excerpt of minutes of a meeting between the P&C and DET illustrates:

P&C opined that the (annual) reports must not be used to deride the school and should be cased in positive language, aware of the wider marketing context within which they can be both used and abusedtotal inappropriateness of tests (Basic Skills, School Certificate and Higher School Certificate) as an indicator of school performance (Council Report 01/172, 17 April 2001).

The public reception of these tests is what is being contested here and not necessarily what the tests are measuring, in that the organisations are clearly concerned about the impact the publicising of these reports could have on individual schools.

As parents have come to be seen as ‘resources’ and ‘consumers’ (de facto on behalf of their child), parents input in decision-making has been promoted so that the school is more likely to satisfy the parents’ interest by hearing from the parent directly about their needs and desires. It is clearly in the interest of the school to be able to convince parents that they are important members of the school community. Part of that image is offering the opportunity for parents to have input into school decision-making. Although, research shows that few parents take the opportunity to formally participate through parent committees and school councils and that many choose to ‘vote with their feet’ and move the child to another school (David, 1993; Glenn, 1996; interviewee). Also, this and other research show that there is very little decision-making in terms of educational policies and curriculum development at the local level as these are functions which are mainly conducted at the state and federal bureaucratic level, and are reinforced by the principal primarily (Glenn, 1996; Limerick, 1995; Rizvi, 1995). Devolution of decision-making dovetails with a market approach quite well, which suggests that the individual needs to make decisions to get ‘value for money’. In Rizvi’s words policy makers, especially in NSW, have been

attempting to capture the popular social democratic vocabulary of participation to serve a set of contradictory political purposes, and to champion the virtues of an educational market that protects the interests of the individual ahead of those of the community (Rizvi, 1995:29)

Moreover, Rizvi (1995:29) makes the point that

schools are expected to be self-managing, but only in an instrumental way, to devise a set of administrative procedures that can be used to realise centrally dictated goals

and therefore one can suggest that it is not so much about a “politics of participatory management as one of management participation” (Rizvi, 1995:29). Furthermore, Richardson (1983:21), in discussing what consumer participation is not, suggests that decentralisation of administration does not in itself bring about more consumer participation, although it is often seen as bringing government closer to the people and it is assumed that they therefore will influence administration. She states that

unless there are attempts made to gain consumer input, and those people, who are able to effect changes are listening, then consumer participation is not possible or at least very limited.

While there are links between school self-management with parent participation in decision-making, links, which are evidenced in the literature by the fact that often the two are presented as one and the same, the two are predominantly related because of the ideology that says one needs to decide over one's own affairs and that then conveniently fits with government ideas of reducing bureaucracies and giving education over to an illusionary market which is self-selecting the best schools, thus taking away from governments' responsibilities for improving schooling.

Much could be said about an education market but the important relationship here is that the idea of the market further opened the path to local parent participation in decision-making and maybe more so than many of the other struggles fought in a more traditional era of parent organisations telling politicians what parents want (Blakers, 1981).

From meritocracy to parentocracy

In the 1970s the focus on the role of the family in schooling emerged through research findings, which showed that children from low socio-economic background were underachieving in school. Already, throughout the 1950s and 1960s a clear link was established between class background and school achievement, illustrated by cultural deprivation theories (Bernstein, 1971), and social democratic and liberal approaches to schooling have not been able to change that relationship (Connell et. al., 1982). With the general questioning of injustices and discrimination and the need for qualified workers to rebuild nations after the second World War, the population was no longer prepared to accept disadvantage on the base of class (OECD, 1975). Reflective of a liberal notion of schooling, the school came to be seen as an institution which was responsible for ensuring equality of outcomes for all children and that each child has opportunities to achieve their potential and gain access to resources on a merit basis, rather than on the basis of social networks, financial

resources or status of the family of origin (Dewey, 1953), in other words, on the basis of their cultural capital or lack thereof.

After considerable effort by the education system to improve outcomes for students of all backgrounds it was found that outcomes for low-socio-economic background children had not improved to the level that was hoped for and efforts were therefore directed into educating working class families to assist with the schooling of children (Limerick, 1995; Glen, 1996; Crump, 1996). According to Toomey (1996:61), numerous studies showed improved outcomes for children who were learning at home under the supervision of a parent and who had parents that were actively involved with the school. Thus, governments funded special programs such as the Participation and Equity Program (PEP) in the 1980s and the Disadvantaged School Program (DSP) alluded to earlier.

This era of achieving according to one's potential, and the right to be treated according to one's merit when applying for jobs or further education, was termed 'meritocracy' by Miriam David (1993). Underlying meritocracy was also the idea that each child is competent to learn and to achieve their full potential regardless of their social class background, given the right conditions at school. This belief was very important as it meant that comparisons between children were made, which revealed that some children are not achieving, depending on social categories such as gender, race, and socio-economic background. This recognition of the need to support less privileged children brought about much reform in schooling. Overall, the era of meritocracy and its social justice position as evoked through the 1960s and 1970s social movements had a great impact on schooling and school policies, as reflected in Australia through the changes during the Whitlam era and the Karmel report in 1973. However, David claims, in recent years education systems have moved from meritocracy to 'parentocracy', where parents determine the schooling of their children in a number of ways (David, 1993). In a consumer society, driven by consumerist ideologies, parents conduct themselves as consumers and demand satisfaction in services received. They threaten for their child to leave the school, they threaten to take complaints to the education department, they may participate in decision-making structures in schools, but more likely they are just aware of their rights and are not afraid to threaten schools with them. They vote with their feet (at

least in Australia) and increasingly enrol their children in private schools (Marginson, 1997). Education departments heed the parent vote, or at least they appear to do so, when they quote what parents want for their children in the department's opinion. For example, to accommodate the demand for choice, a central concept of market ideology, education departments in Australia made it possible for children to enrol in any public school provided the school can accommodate the child (NSW Government, 1990 Education Act). One has to ask which parents are able to exercise those rights of choosing one's school, which parents are able to speak up and have themselves heard by education departments and which parents are more likely to be represented in decision-making forums in local schools. It is safe to say, that it is middle class parents who are more likely to speak up on behalf of their child and who are able to negotiate the choices open to them, due to middle class parents' being aware of concepts of rights and having skills to speak up, in other words utilising their cultural capital, a concept developed by Bourdieu (1984). It is the children from low-socio-economic background, those who are recent arrivals from non-English-speaking background, indigenous families and those children with special needs who are less likely able to exercise any alternative choices. Therefore, one can say, that parentocracy once again leads to a situation where one's parents' position in the class structure of society determines one's life chances, as Weber (Parkin, 1982) would put it. Life chances in this case are linked to educational success, a link that is not always borne out in later success in an occupational and financial sense (Marshall, 1997; Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1993). As indicated above, socio economic background also provides cultural capital that in turn is linked with educational success. Within a consumer society, increasingly life chances are also enhanced by the financial capital one can invest in education, and this is clearly evidenced by the increase in coaching colleges and private education institutions that parents use to enhance their child's chances in a perceived market environment where education constitutes a positional good (Sloane, 1998).

Parentocracy as such is embedded and evolved out of the 1980s shift towards exposing public services to market forces in the belief that the market regulates successfully all transactions, be they of an economical nature or a service provision

nature. British observers who saw changes of this nature in Britain during the Thatcher era commented that

...it is arguable how far an efficient and just service can be provided within a market for education devolved to parents. Would not the free play of parental choice be both inefficient and unfair as well as chaotic in implementation? (Golby, 1989:134).

Limitations to parent participation in decision-making

As indicated before, the perceived benefits of parent participation are confirmed by research (Epstein, 1990; Hepworth Berger, 1991). Thus, schools are encouraging parents to be involved in their children's schooling in a number of ways. However, there are many parents who do not get involved at the school level or only attend events where they can be passive and do not need to do anything other than observe and applaud. The absence of parents is of concern to schools as the dominant ideology requires the involvement of parents, as outlined above. If parents do not attend at school functions and do not have much contact with the school, teachers make assumptions about the parents and the interest they may have in their child's schooling (Soliman, 1991; Crump, 1996). Teachers assume parents are not interested in the child's schooling and if the parents have not had much formal education themselves teachers assume that these parents have not passed on relevant values that emphasise the importance of education to their children (Phtiaka, 1996; Connell, et al. 1982.) Yet, parents also believe that not all that much has changed at school, as illustrated by Fitzgerald, Musgrave and Pettit (1976) in their study of five schools. Although, that study is somewhat dated, my own interviewees had similar thoughts, saying that parents are only interested in the school if any problems emerge for their own child.

The absence of parents and consequently their lack of input into decision-making in schools is an issue for parent participation in decision-making. It means that there are the silent masses that do not give any input, either formally or informally (Rigter 1986:41). Certain groups are more likely to participate than others because of their cultural capital that allows them to participate appropriately. For these reasons, Bourdieu (1984) claims that schools contribute to social reproduction, that is, the

reproduction of the established order. He claims that the education system is systematically structured in favour of the dominant classes (Bourdieu, 1984) to ensure that the children of those classes are able to follow in the footsteps of their parents, and in essence, to minimise competition for coveted positions. As I have previously argued, middle class parents are more outspoken and do understand concepts such as consultative mechanisms and participative democracy, while those of non-English-speaking background, those with less formal education and indigenous people, for example, have often less confidence participating in decision-making forums (Rigter, 1986).

It is often assumed that parent participation in decision-making is a harmonious and fulfilling process, which will produce consensual decisions. Lightfoot (1981) claimed that this idea of harmony is false as teachers and parents have different perspectives and teachers in particular lay claim to expertise as far as education is concerned, while parents lay claim to be experts in terms of their own child. Principals, in turn, contend that they are more than happy to listen to parents and their ideas, but that at the end the decision is theirs because they need to ensure that they act in the interest of and according to the guidelines of the education department, which is their employer. Thus, there are conflicting interest groups and parent participation in decision-making has limitations. Parents are heard and listened to, but the decision is made by the principal and his/her executive team (Blackmore, 1996; interviewees) This is essentially related to the existence of different interest groups with motivations that are at times conflicting, for instance, while the concern is the well-being of the child, teachers need to protect their income and career and parents desire high achievements for their child, education being a positional as well as cultural good, thus they might clash in their approaches to education and the child in question.

A major issue with parent participation in decision-making is the likelihood that parents make decisions in the interest of their own child rather than in the interest of the common good and the school as whole. At times, the interests of the common good may disadvantage one's own child in some way and parents who have decision-making power would have to be able to separate their interests from that of the school as a whole. This is why teachers and principals claim that they are more

competent to decide what is in the interest of the whole school while parents to some degree have a conflict of interest. As Golby (1989:142) rightly said “parents are indeed the ‘parents of the day’ and there will be a new set of parents with each new intake to school”. School staff in contrast may be there for years and have a long term view of the school albeit one that can be clouded by their personal interests of having a job also. Staff may invoke their years of experience as justification for decisions they make, which is a regime of truth, endowed with the symbolic power of having been there for many years, which in reality does not necessarily equate to being competent and having more rights to make decisions.

This section has sought to provide an overview of the development of parent participation in schools since the early 1960s at an international, national and state level. It has outlined the political environment, which facilitated or, alternatively, hindered the development of parent participation, and it has examined ideological frameworks for parent participation. In conclusion, the participatory democracy environment of the 1960s encouraged the examining of governance of schools, but it is the influence and rhetoric of competitive market environments, that have enforced the demands for parents’ rights and exacerbated the focus on high achievement, with education providing cultural capital that is being traded as a positional good.

GENDER EQUITY IN SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Within the education sector, gender difference manifests itself in multiple and diverse ways. For example, educators are predominantly female; curriculum pathways show different outcomes for boys and girls according to the subjects selected by pupils; and many school subjects are ‘gendered’ in the sense that boys may avoid certain subjects due to a hegemonic perception of what is appropriately or inappropriately ‘male’. Affirmative action strategies have made some difference for girls, who now are more likely to take a non-traditional, that is, a ‘boy’s’ subject, if they are interested in a particular area (Collins, Batten, Ainley and Getty, 1996).

Gender equity is a term generally used in education to identify gender-focussed programs and policies, which aim to address gender based issues and gender based disadvantage in education. This section on gender equity in schools deals with the historical context of gender equity; theories and paradigm shifts within the area of gender in education; and the relevant education policies of successive state and federal governments.

To provide an understanding of the complexity of gender equity in education, table 4.2 overleaf provides an overview of the different policies, policy statements and key documents covering gender equity in education.

Table 4.2: Relevant Gender Equity Documents

Author	Document	Date of Publication	Synopsis
United Nations	Resolution no. 2263: Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	1967	Within this resolution there are a number of paragraphs which make reference to girls' education and equal access to educational opportunities.
Commonwealth Schools Commission	Girls, Schools and Society	1975	This report is the first comprehensive report for girls' education. It contains results of research into girls' education and makes a series of recommendations to be addressed.
Commonwealth Schools Commission	Report for the Triennium 1976-1978	1979?	This report contained a chapter called "Schooling and Girls" which was based on a draft of "Girls, School and Society" mentioned above.
Commonwealth Schools Commission	Girls and Tomorrows, the challenge for schools	1984	Report by working party which monitored girls education. The report reviews achievements and makes further recommendations one of which was the need for a national policy for the education of girls.
Commonwealth Schools Commission	The National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools	1987	This is the first national policy for the education of girls. It provides a framework of what the needs of girls are in the school system and society and it also provides a mechanism to review progress. Funding for special projects was allocated on the basis of implementing this policy, that is, PEP projects.
Department of Employment, Education and Training	Girls in Schools 1-4, Reports on the National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian School.	88-91	There is a series of four of these reports. They provide a review of the achievements of each state with respect to the recommendations of the national policy. NSW generally showed good progress.
Department of School Education in NSW	Girls Education Strategy	1988/89	This policy document took into consideration the National Policy for the Education of Girls and set goals for the schooling of girls in NSW.
Australian Education Council	National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997	1993	This action plan identified four broad areas to address and recommended strategies and review mechanisms for implementation.
O'Doherty, S. (Chair), Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs	Inquiry into Boys Education, Challenges and Opportunities: a Discussion Paper	1994	This report is the first one to have a look at boys' education. It raises education issues for boys such as truancy, behavioural difficulties, literacy and so forth. It still has high standing and is often quoted by proponents of boys' education and those interested in gender equity.
Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Gender Equity Taskforce	Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools	1996	This framework document was produced by the Gender Equity Taskforce for the MCEETYA. It contains papers written by various members of the Taskforce to provide a broad understanding of the issues in need of consideration to implement gender equity strategies.
Collins, C. Batten, M. Ainley, J. and Getty, C.	Gender and School Education	1996	This report is based on national research as part of annual reporting on schools by the Australian Council for Education and Research (ACER). Research is extensive across all three school systems and including boys and girls.
NSW Department of School Education	Girls and Boys at School, Gender Equity Strategy 1996-2001	1996	This is the current strategy for NSW. It contains several goals to be addressed together with pupils, school management and community.
Australian Government, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training	Inquiry into the Education of Boys	2000	This inquiry sought to "inquire into and report on the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools..." and to find relevant examples for improvement of boys' education (Terms of Reference for the Inquiry)
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia	Boys: Getting it Right	2002	This is the report that resulted from the Inquiry into the Education of Boys. It contains recommendations and a summary of the submissions and issues raised in these submissions.

A brief analysis of content and trends in policy was provided by Kenway and Willis (1997) in their book *Answering Back, Girls, Boys and Feminism in Schools*, where they said that in the early 1990s the emphasis was on encouraging girls into non-traditional subjects, specifically maths, science and technology, in order to expand their access to the labour market and enhance their career prospects. For example, one of the practical steps to address gender issues focused on making the curricula gender inclusive in that stereotypical use of language was eliminated. Before this period

sex-role socialisation, sex stereotyping, self-esteem and role modelling tended to dominate policies in the 80s. In the mid-90s, they have all been superseded by emphases on the construction and reconstruction of gender within school cultures and across curriculum and on the education of boys. Of course, many other issues have been on gender reform policy agendas, including the need to attend to educational issue associated with poverty, ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality and locality. However, they have never dominated policy circles (Kenway and Willis, 1997:xxiii/xxiv).

It is in the light of the latter assertion, that educational issues of poverty, ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality and locality have not been sufficiently considered in education, that some of the reactions of those in the parent organisations should be understood, who were confronted with the needs of boys. They had battled with the issues of gender and minority groups for many years and felt that a general focus on boys would detract from these issues once again. Many activists that had been involved in arguing for better education for girls, identified the additional difficulties girls face who are from low socio-economic, Indigenous or ethnic background. They felt that they would lose the public support they had gained on these issues, if the focus changed to boys as a group (interviewee). Kenway and Willis (1997:xxii) further claim that in the early to mid-1990s government commitment to gender justice declined, and that “gender justice policies, programmes and personnel were restructured and ‘downsized’ along with much else”. The arguments around boys’ education would have been quite useful for the ‘downsizing campaign’, because then there was an opportunity to claim that what was needed for girls had been achieved, that is equality, and if girls were now doing better than the boys a claim could be made for focusing on the achievements of each individual child, which was the duty of a teacher anyway and could be catered for within other programmes, thus gender equity programmes are rendered obsolete. And indeed, some of the policies of this

period show that many of the policy statements were motherhood statements with few strategies or funding forthcoming.

SITUATING GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION

In examining the development of gender equity as a policy area in school it has to be recognised that historical contexts and theoretical debates cannot easily be separated as the two are often entwined. An attempt is made, when possible, to focus on theoretical discussion apart from the historical context, so that the interweaving of history, theory and practical implications at the school level are highlighted. Therefore, the guiding position for this thesis is following Kenway's (1990b:7) advice:

policies on gender and education do not exist or have their effects in isolation from other matters of policy, or from other social or administrative issues and processes...they should not be studied in isolation.

The nexus between gender equity and parent participation is the substantive focus of this thesis. Recent developments in parent participation make it imperative for parents to consider gender equity policies, among others, as important educational strategies which will affect the well-being of their children. A close look at the development of gender equity in education reveals the historical and theoretical contexts within which such policies are set, and in exploring these concepts I have been informed by Foucault's notion of discourse. Working with his concept of discourses and their genealogy/archaeology entails an examination of power relationships and those notions of truth that underlie a particular perception of events, similarly to issues explored around regimes of truth in Chapter Two: Theory. In addition, according to Danaher et.al. (2000:34) Foucault sees discourses as evolving from a series of events in that "Discursive practises occur at a particular time, and are like events in that they create effects within a discursive field". Thus, for example, the boys' education issues entered the discourse of gender equity precisely when girls' HSC results in certain subjects topped that of boys. The discourse on gender equity subsequently changed to one of inclusion of both sexes and one of competition, where one side was concerned to preserve the resources they had, that is, a focus on the education of girls or alternatively for the other side to gain some of

the resources that they thought needed to be distributed differently, that is for the benefit of boys. This shift from girls' education to gender equity as inclusive concept is evidenced in Table 4.2 where a rudimentary glance shows the use of gender equity, as a term, in more recently published material.

Historical perspective on gender equity

It is significant for this thesis that a trend in recent publications is the predominance of literature and educational programs concerned with gender and masculinity (Connell, 2000; Myers, 2000), while earlier periods of studies concentrated mainly on girls and women gender studies. Therefore this historical section starts with the context of girls' education.

The analysis I propose here takes me back to the earliest work on gender equity in education to assess the nature of the discourse within which the need for girls' education was framed. Policy development towards girls in education needs to be seen in the context of the women's movement, which emphasised the many areas in which women and girls were disadvantaged, and sought to provide solutions to this disadvantage. For example, the earliest debates on girls in education, occurred in the late 1800s in Australia (Chambers Garner, 1980:114-115). Within the context of examining women's role in industry and commerce, questions arose as to what subjects should be taught to girls at school, and whether there should be different subjects for the boys on the one hand, and girls on the other. These sorts of questions created an awareness of girls' intellectual capacities or at least led to a questioning of the potential girls may have to contribute to the wider society and its commercial enterprises. Such debates led to women being granted access to universities, albeit reluctantly, and it led to private girls' schools being opened which taught a roughly similar academic curriculum to that of boys schools. However, Chambers Garner (1980:126) observed that many women at the time were participating in the work force also and that they often needed to earn an income for their families, but that working class girls were situated in low paid jobs, acceptable for women to be engaged in. Middle class girls were more likely to be engaged in 'light genteel employment' such as governing children, dressmaker, drapery and so on. Thus,

efforts to educate girls were in practice linked to social class, where only privileged families were able to educate their girls, while others had to work for an income.

A secondary trend followed, apart from the teaching of more academic subjects to middle and upper class girls and more vocational subjects to working class girls, which was a consideration of women's role in society in terms of their special duties to home and family. Mackinnon (1982:435, cited in Kenway, 1990b:31) considered this a marked shift and she observed that it:

deserves considerable attention for it was in that period that the patterns were established in both state and private sectors which were to influence the ways in which both working class and middle class girls were to be educated until very recently.

This trend is also borne out by many social theorists and social observers of the time in that they identified a change to an ideology, which saw women as home makers and played up the importance of a primary care giver to children which should be with the mother at home (McMurchy, Oliver, Thornley, 1983). This ideology was supported by Bowlby (1973), for example, who claimed that forming a secure attachment in infancy is important to establish close personal relationships in life, which in turn has been used to enforce that women have to stay home to look after their infants so that they form an attachment to a primary care giver. The response from schools at all level, working and middle class, was to introduce domestic science classes for girls while boys' education focused on technical and industrial skills much needed in the economy at the time, thus the gendered curriculum was institutionalised (Matthews, 1983). According to Kenway (1990b:32) this is a classic case of what Foucault called power/knowledge:

The human sciences and the state government's bureaucratic apparatus combined their power and knowledge, which became a moral technology, an instrument of domination filtering into the everyday lives of women and girls.

Girls and parents opposed the provision of domestic science classes, but to little avail as eventually the classes were made compulsory (Kenway, 1990b), since persuasion alone did not improve enrolments. The role of home maker and mother was also particularly emphasised after the war years: patriarchy combined with patriotism did not allow for a situation where men returning from war were unemployed, while their wives continued to work as during war times. For an illustration of these

ideologies and strategies to convince women to take up the housewife role after the war years see McMurchy et. al. (1983). During World War II women engaged extensively in the war effort and took on skilled jobs that formerly were undertaken by men. Thus, women discovered their potential and understood in practical terms that they were capable to undertake any jobs previously thought to be a men's domain (McMurchy et. al, 1983). The 1960s civil rights movement brought to the fore the plight of women, who were not perceived as an oppressed group by the movement. However, being part of the discussions at the time women discovered a sense of identity as a group and raised questions as to their status in society. Feminists as a result engaged in the nature/nurture debate, challenging the myth of only women being able to mother and questioning the assumption that because women bear children they should also be the primary caregivers. Feminism questioned the role of women in parenting and as home-makers altogether (Summers 1975; Oakley, 1974; Mitchell, 1971). These arguments of feminists that the caring and nurturing role for women is culturally determined and not an innate trait shaped the perception of the role of education for girls, in that an understanding emerged that girls can undertake other roles also, as opposed to being seen as carers only.

The civil rights movements were also having an impact on school education in that debates centred around equality of opportunity, among other issues, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Yet, according to Arnot and Weiner (1987:13), the debate on equality of educational opportunity in that period did not consider girls in education issues, despite the United Nations having recognised in 1967 already this aspect as a key role of education in its far-reaching resolutions:

'All appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure to girls and women, married or unmarried, equal rights with men in education at all levels, and in particular

- a) equal conditions of access to and study in educational institutions of all types, including universities and vocational, technical and professional schools;
- b) the same choice of curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard, and school premises and equipment of the same quality, whether the institutions are coeducational or not;
- c) equal opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;
- d) equal opportunities for access to programs of continuing education, including adult literacy programs, and
- e) access to educational information to help in ensuring the health and well-being of families.'

(Resolution no. 2263 adopted by The General Assembly of the United Nations, 7 November 1967, under Article 9, the 'Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women', Arnot and Weiner, 1987:25).

Feminist debates and the civil rights movement, with its focus on community participation and reform, led to the first Australian public report on girls' education in the 1970s, namely *Girls, School and Society* produced by the Schools Commission in 1975, which was set up by the Whitlam Government in 1973. This report highlighted the need to look at girls' education in an environment of general school reform. The Karmel Report *Schools in Australia* (Australian Government, 1973) dates from the same era. It identified and recommended parent involvement as important in Australian schools and it also supported and ensured funds for the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP), a program which tried to address inequities for children of low-socio-economic backgrounds. The DSP program is important in terms of gender equity as it provided opportunities to support girls and boys according to their individual needs using a gender equity perspective. Around the same time legislative reforms were made in the area of discrimination and affirmative action. One outlawed discrimination on the base of one's sex and other factors (New South Wales, 1983), while Affirmative Action guidelines aimed at improving the career paths of women among other disadvantages women and other social groups were facing (Ryan, 1984). Thus, for women, Affirmative Action legislation provided the basis for closer analysis of their disadvantaged situation regarding occupational and educational attainment and for demands for special strategies that take into consideration gender equity issues.

A Schools Commission Working Party was set up in 1982, which considered the education of girls. The working party's report *Girls and Tomorrow* (Schools Commission, 1984) reviewed progress and made further recommendations, among them that there should be a national policy on the education of girls (Taylor and Henry, 1993). The national policy eventuated in 1987 after intense consultation with state education departments. It was called *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* (Schools Commission 1987) and all states committed themselves eventually to work towards gender equity for girls. This policy was the very first Australian national policy in education ever (Lingard and Porter, 1997). A further initiative was the federally funded Participation and Equity Program (PEP), which also had a major emphasis on the education of girls. Through this program schools were able to apply for grants to implement equity strategies at their local school. The major underpinning of PEP was equality of outcomes. In terms of gender

it looked at sex differences in subjects studied at schools, in career choices and also in the post-compulsory phase of education. It focused particularly on economic and labour market factors:

The school experiences of girls were related to their limited options in the labour market and the associated implications for women's economic dependency and future life chances were indicated (Henry and Taylor, 1993:155).

States were eligible for funding to assist in the implementation of gender equity strategies and some states made more use of this opportunity than others. However, according to Connors and McMorrow (1988) the next stage of implementation was hampered by a lack of financial commitment to the program by the federal government. The reason being, that in the late 1980s there was an increasing shift towards economic rationalism along with strategies to look at curbing public expenditure. During John Dawkins' term as federal minister of education (1987-90), government control over the sector was extended and a number of previous commissions were abolished and amalgamated into the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET). As the title in itself illustrates, a closer link between broad education goals and 'training for the marketplace' was made, which resulted in a strengthening of the tertiary education sector and an evaluation of school education in terms of the benefits to the economic enhancement of Australia. This functionalist view of education is illustrated by publications such as *Skills for Australia* (Dawkins and Holding, 1987) and *Strengthening Australia's Schools* (Dawkins, 1988b, both in Henry and Taylor, 1993:158). Kenway and Willis (1997:xxii) also claim that in the early to mid-1990s governments' commitment to gender justice declined. Hence, instead of a national plan of action for girls, a 'set of illustrative strategies' resulted which could be used as a guide to implement changes subject to states being willing to do so with their own resources. On the positive side the National Policy was strongly promoted by the Hawke government (1987-1990) and it included consideration of girls according to their cultural and socio-economic background. This was quite different to the earlier reports, which treated girls as a homogenous group. The other positive aspect of the report was that it included review mechanisms, to which states eventually agreed, after much discussion (Henry and Taylor, 1993).

Henry and Taylor (1993) claim that the history of social reforms in Australia show three major aspects of influence: 1) social justice was often seen as wage justice 2) concern over welfare needs rather than welfare rights 3) “a gendered wage and welfare system which has enshrined women as dependants of men” (1993:159). This differs from other countries such as Sweden, which had a focus on social justice policies as opposed to wage justice (Blackmore, 1999a:37). In Australia, strategies to achieve social justice were set within the market arena, that is, job placement and training projects rather than questioning unemployment as a necessary result of a market economy, which supports a capitalist system. As MacIntyre (1988/9 in Henry and Taylor, 1993:161) concluded:

Efficiency and equity, one sanctioning the operation of the market and the other registering its social effects, are thus yoked into a couplet. It is all too clear which element is dominant.

In terms of education, this has meant, that there is a clear expectation of education being able to address individual failing, produce employees fit for a particular market and throughout time men were supposed to be the breadwinners of the family while women stayed at home and needed no educational qualifications as the role of home maker would be natural to women, thus suppressing women’s education needs under patriarchy.

Further, Henry and Taylor (1993) claim that the policies were contradictory in that they emphasised the need for a highly skilled work force, yet also acknowledged the rights of people to some equity in education, particularly those who are ‘underprivileged’, to give them ““the chance in life which they deserve”” (*Towards a Fairer Australia*, 1988, in Henry and Taylor, 1993:162). The effect of these hegemonic policies in terms of girls’ education was a functionalist view of education with a narrow focus towards disadvantage in terms of economic or educational outcomes to benefit the economy. For example, subjects such as science, mathematics and technology received most attention in terms of whether girls were represented in those in sufficient numbers. Thus, Kenway (1990b:73) concluded: “Gender justice is coming to mean an education designed to prepare girls for the sorts of vocations that the government believes will enhance the economy”. Conversely, boys are also not encouraged to take on non-traditional subjects as these have little economic value in Australian society, for example, home science.

Considering the focus on economy, outlined above, it is almost self-explanatory why liberal feminists and their ideas were being considered seriously by Australian governments, a claim made by Kenway (1990a). Their focus on improved educational outcomes for girls matched the economic rationalist idea of educational outcomes being about life opportunities in the market. Both of these views, liberal feminism and a functionalist view of education, are conservative in the sense that they do not address power relations in society between male and female and privileged and underprivileged population groups, but rather ensure that education as such cannot be blamed for disadvantages women suffer in society by not producing equal educational outcomes for boys and girls.

Reconsidering the education of boys

The change towards considering the needs of boys in education occurred from a level of demand and advocacy of academic writers, some education professionals and parents, in particular from the P&C Federation, but also from some advocates working within a gender equity framework who believe that the construction of gender and the impact on girls cannot be looked at in isolation from gender construction of boys (Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Gilbert, 1996).

During 1993 a draft report called *Equity in Senior School Assessment* – a research study conducted for the Department of Employment, Education and Training (Gilbert, 1996:7) prompted a discussion on boys and education. The report assessed boys' and girls' achievements through a number of assessment tasks in academic subjects such as science, mathematics, English and so on. The results of this draft report showed that girls' achievements had improved considerably and that overall they had slightly better results than the boys. Subsequently, many journals featured articles about girls' achievements as compared to that of boys' (*The GEN*, 1994:3). The NSW HSC results of 1994 received specific attention, as the comparative (to girls) decline in boys' academic achievement led educators and the public alike to announce a moral panic, a 'crisis' in boys' education. Media attention culminated in a *Four Corners* TV discussion program called "What about the Boys?" (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1994).

In NSW, O’Doherty, Liberal MP, formed a committee to examine the needs of boys. An enquiry was called, which showed that boys do experience some difficulties with the education system, in that they are overrepresented in statistics pertaining to detention, behavioural difficulties, reading recovery programs, adolescent suicide. A report called *Challenges and Opportunities: a Discussion Paper (1994)* resulted, but the recommendations of this report were not acted upon due to a change of government. Publicly Stephen O’Doherty said that “boys have specific problems” and teachers “need to run some specific programs for boys alongside and together with what they are doing for girls” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1994:15).

Since the mid-1990s the discussion of boys’ education has been a constant among educators, culminating in the year 2000 in a Federal Parliamentary inquiry into boys’ education (Australian Government, 2000). Many submissions were received for the inquiry, some of which reflected the public concern for the education of boys and others that recommended an examination of gender issues in education and the relationship with other social variables. Meanwhile, at the practical level and among policy makers issues of harassment and sexual harassment were considered to be key areas as these affected both boys and girls, and were identified as problem areas from a report called *Gender and School Education* (Collins et. al., (1996). The same report indicated that education programs for boys were on the increase in a number of states, reflecting this new attention to this area of gender education (Collins et. al., 1996:170).

Alongside the debates around boys’ education, significant structural change occurred in the government environment, as a form of corporate managerialism combined with economic rationalism developed. This has triggered several restructures within education departments, at both federal and state level. The key issue was that departments were too costly and that there should be fewer managers and less centralised functions and instead more devolution of decision-making and responsibility to individual schools and their consumers (Blackmore, 1996:345), as outlined earlier in this chapter. As a result, the focus on gender equity strategies was reduced, because head office could no longer function to promote gender equity policies across the state. Instead, local schools were able to decide the educational focus of their school, which invariably reduced the interest in policies such as gender

equity, because parents are mainly concerned with academic achievement of their child (Myers, 2000; Glenn, 1996). Hence, while the Department still has some policy functions, its capacity to promote policy changes and provide resources to produce a change in approach, is limited.

In addition, since the federal elections in 1996 there has been a decrease in commitment towards women's programs in general (Blackmore, 1999a). In NSW commitment is ongoing, although restructure within the department has meant that staff for this policy area has been reduced at the head office level, according to several interviewees. However, a network of gender equity staff exists across NSW through staff based at district offices that have responsibility for this policy area. Each district has a staff member that has responsibility for gender equity and the head office resources this network through telephone conferences, resources such as report, videos and training kits, that they produce. The *NSW Gender Equity Strategy 1996-2001* (DET 1996:3) identified four areas of foci that relate to expected outcomes. These areas are: teaching and learning; the school culture and organisation; the school and its community; monitoring, evaluation, review and development. On balance the *Gender Equity Strategy 1996-2001* considered boys' and girls' education issues and to support these areas a Gender Equity Kit provided resources that covered a number of key issues such as gender construction, terminology and history of gender equity, Australian policy framework and so on. The resources were provided to schools to run their own gender equity programs. Funds were made available on an application basis to schools that wanted to organise gender equity activities. The policy and the kit were an attempt to ensure that boys' and girls' needs were considered equally in education. However, and despite the focus on equity, the P&C Federation argued that there was not enough consideration given to the needs of boys, (see Chapter Six: Parents and School Decision-Making).

Alongside the debate over boys and girls a new focus on citizenship and civics started to evolve with the understanding that

of all the sites that children draw on in learning about gender the school is the only site which has a mandate to prepare individuals to be fully equipped for their lives as future workers, citizens, parents and partners. (Clark, 1995:10)

This late 1990s focus on civics education portrayed learners as citizens. Once again, and potentially in the face of ongoing backlash as far as girls in education are concerned, girls and boys are being ‘merged’, as it were, into non-gendered individuals, citizens. This implies that there is no need to consider boys and girls as having any differences: both may be treated generically, as children, as youth, or as citizens. However, it cannot be assumed that the concept of citizenship is neutral. According to Foster (2000) there is a vast literature on the gendered nature of citizenship in the modern state (Blackmore, 1999a; Foster, 2000). In essence, these writers examined how citizenship concepts affect girls and boys and concluded that girls in many ways are excluded from the civic public realm of citizenship “which is both normatively masculine, and relies on an opposition between the public and private dimensions of human life” (Foster, 2000:1). Reiger (1998) outlines that citizenship is a gendered concept in that citizenship is exercised in the public arena whereas in a dichotomy of the public and the private where women are assessed as belonging in the private sphere, the concept of citizen belongs to men:

The feminine, private world of nature, particularity, differentiation, inequality, emotion, love and ties of blood is set apart from the public, universal, - and masculine – realm of convention, civil equality, and freedom, reason, consent and contract (Mouffe, 1992 cited in Reiger, 1998:1).

To conclude this section one can say that currently the focus of gender issues is on boys’ education, and proponents of girls’ education are trying to ensure that girls are not affected by a potential backlash in terms of supporting girls in education and achieving equitable educational outcomes for girls.

THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE

While there is an enormous amount of literature concerned with gender in general and gender and education specifically there are some key publications, which have assisted in focusing my work. Among these is Jane Kenway’s *Gender and Education Policies* (1990b). In this book she summarises the trends of gender policies in education, admittedly before the period of ‘what about the boys’. She contextualises the policies within the political setting of the time and critically analyses the shortcomings of these policies. Kenway also analyses the academic work on gender and education, where she outlines the silences and gaps of research and academic

work that need to be theorised to move gender and education policies forward. More importantly for my work, she outlines differences in approaches to gender equity, which preceded the focus on boys' education.

An examination of definition of gender assists here to provide the context for analysis:

gender is a concept which encompasses boys and men as well as girls and women. It refers to a cultural process whereby male and female sexual and social identities are built in relation to each other (Kenway, 1990b:70).

Collins (1997:3) suggests that in Australian culture gender has traditionally been imagined as binary and exclusive, as a dichotomy that disallows similarity between sexes and diversity within sexes. Connell (2002:8) sees the general understanding of gender as:

In most common usage, then, the term 'gender' means the cultural difference of women from men, based on the biological division between male and female. Dichotomy and difference are the substance of the idea.

By extension, if some cultural attributes are labelled as feminine they cannot be masculine also, because there is a perception that there are differences between sexes and if an attribute is assigned to one than it is not likely to be present in the other. Further, Collins (1997) makes a strong point that the binary concept has allowed us to define gender also in terms of power relationships, power which in some sense is also binary, in that one has more or less power in a given situation. The masculine and males in Australian society are associated with being more powerful than females.

Men who identify with the masculine cast women into the cultural position of complementary, supporting and peripheral as a way of defining themselves and what they do as necessarily centre-stage and important. The fact that labelling gays 'feminine' is intended as an insult reveals a great deal about the assumed power and importance of the masculine (Collins, 1997:3).

Much work in gender theorising has examined the dichotomy of gender and found it wanting as a comprehensive approach to the issues of gender. Connell (2002) argued that 'gender relations' would be more appropriate for discussion of gender and he contends that a dichotomous approach fails to recognise the complexity of human

life. Moreover, it pays scant attention to the fact that many traits and attributes are common to all humans and that there are many differences among women and among men and it disregards the broader influence common conditions such as being workers or parents have on both sexes. Also, Fitzsimmons and Lennon (2002) examine in one of their chapters the idea of gender and identity, as resulting from 'Queer' research, which suggests that women (or men), while having some collective connections, are individuals that are shaped by different discourses and not by a concept of gender that is based on naturalist ideas, that is one's sex:

Each subject is constituted by a range of discourses. These discourses are not necessarily connected but at the same time do not merely coexist but overdetermine and subvert each other. Additionally, there is no automatic, *a priori* link between different subjects, that is between women (Alsop et. al, 2002:235).

It follows that neither women nor men have specific traits or attributes, but that there are many possibilities of difference, perhaps as many as there are individuals. This position presents the opposite of assigning fixed attributes to males and females. The idea of gender relations postulated by Connell (2002) and embraced to some degree by Alsop et. al., (2002) enables an understanding of the cultural shaping of gender and gender based meaning and the relationship between people who are gendered according to their sex.

When we look at a set of gender arrangements, whether the gender regime of an institution or the gender order of a whole society, we are basically looking at a set of *relationships* – ways that people, groups, and organisations are connected and divided...Not all gender relations are direct interactions between women on the one side and men on the other. The relations may be indirect – mediated, for instance, by a market, or by technologies...Relationships may be among men, or among women, but still are gender relations – such as hierarchies of masculinity among men (Connell, 2002:54).

The debate over girls and boys in education, however, envisages polarities, in other words, a politics of difference, and this is despite the fact, that evidence suggests that there is no justification for perceiving an innate difference between girls and boys:

Now that sex similarity research has decisively refuted the concept of character dichotomy, we must reject all models of gender that assume social gender differences to be caused by bodily differences producing character differences (Connell, 2002:47).

I argue here that school systems respond in a gendered fashion, which assisted in identifying and exacerbating advantages and disadvantages on the basis of sex. Together with education being a positional good, argued elsewhere, the arguments

around gender equity based on a dichotomy of the male and female sex became exacerbated to a degree that proponents of either side were not prepared to accept the basic premise of there being no innate social and intellectual differences between the sexes. Moreover, having a gender based system in school means that achievement is measured by pitting one sex against the other, as opposed to, for example, pitting parents' income against each other, one of the variables used when comparing school achievement and social class. As Collins (1997:1) identified:

There is much evidence, again in this State, of a backlash phenomenon. This backlash plays upon Australia's common sense binary view of the world in which the interests of girls and boys are seen as naturally oppositional interests in a zero-sum game.

A closer consideration of the policy environment around gender equity illustrates my thinking. As outlined in this chapter, there is agreement among various authorities that liberal feminism was a dominant influence in education (Blackmore, 1999a; Collins, 1997; Kenway, 1990b). Liberal feminists postulated that girls should have equal outcomes in education to boys and this was best measured by using generally accepted measurements such as HSC results, NSW School Certificate and so on. As liberal feminists were oriented to notions of 'wage equity' and intent on refining the status quo rather than replacing it, they focused on issues such as post-schooling options for girls which would give girls career choices in non-traditional, but highly paid jobs. Collins (1997:2) confirms this when she says that the liberal feminist wing of the women's movement has been prominent in the NSW Education Department and fought for as many resources as possible to be extended to girls in order to enhance their academic achievements and consequently their post-school employment opportunities. However, liberal feminists did not question how education generally was being conducted in NSW, nor did they problematise the link between achievement at school and achievement in the market place.

The role of liberal feminism in schools is particularly important here as it links, in my view, with ideas of positional goods, as it predominantly focused on academic educational outcomes that are hierarchically structured in a competitive environment and are thought to provide better life-chances for girls. Blackmore (1999a:50) suggested that there was a needs discourse used to redress structural inequality in society, by addressing disadvantage of those in need, and a rights discourse, which

particularly relates to liberal feminists in that they claimed they had rights for equality in education. Blackmore contends that the rights discourse made it all too easy to link demands with a market concept of freedom of choice and equality of access, which would be regulated through the market. Blackmore, in turn, puts forward the need for a discourse of difference, which recognises that different groups of people have different needs, which have to be taken into consideration to be able to offer equality in education. This is an important point that argues against dichotomy, rather suggesting a plurality of differences within sex groups.

Dale Spender examined the arguments of feminists in terms of the relationship of girls' and boys' achievements in education. She said that boys and boys' achievements have been seen as the norm to aspire to rather than gaining an understanding of what girls need and want for themselves (Spender, 1989). Her analysis showed how male values have been considered as universal values. She then parallels this finding with education and found that much of teachers' attention was directed towards satisfying boys' needs in the classroom. Today, proponents for boys' education claim exactly the reverse, that curriculum and expectations are shaped to suit girls more so than boys (Hoff Summers, 2000).

This scenario of liberal feminism engaging in a rights discourse ideally provided the basis for the claim for 'justice' for boys, as the instruments used by liberal feminists are now being used to create an argument of girls having achieved their goals of better educational achievement on the one hand and on the other, that boys are now the newly disadvantaged group. A situation Weiner, Arnot and David (1997) termed the 'moral panic' of whether boys are losing out on education, a claim, which has been echoed across the world (Smith, 2003; Foster, 2000; Hoff Summers, 2000). This is not surprising as the call for improved educational outcomes for girls was also at the forefront of international discussions by feminists. With their focus on improving marks for girls, liberal feminists have legitimised marks as the measurement of educational outcomes against a regime of truth operating in education. However, because marks do not determine, or at least not substantially, long term career outcomes:

Both of these academics (Dr. Victoria Foster and Richard Teese) have indicated that completion of and success at school does not necessarily translate into a success outside school (NSW Teachers Federation, 1998).

Gilbert, (1996:8) and the NSW Teachers Federation (1998) have claimed that in NSW arguments over the boys have focused almost exclusively on the HSC results and girls' success has been looked at in a fashion, which shows "a narrow reading of assessment figures".

The reality is that at this year's HSC just over 3,000 more girls were enrolled than boys and this of course in itself will distort the results. Of the subjects that girls have come top in, around 30 of these are subjects in various languages, traditionally an area boys have ignored (NSW Teachers Federation, 1998).

Nevertheless, four years after Gilbert's (1996) book there seems to be a general acceptance that girls are achieving somewhat better results as indicated in the report on the Inquiry into the Education of Boys which claims "Recent research indicates that the pattern of gender performance is similar throughout Australia and that the gap between girls and boys appears to have widened between 1994 and 2000" (Australian Government, 2002). However, this report also points out that assessment of results is very difficult due to enrolment patterns and subject choices.

While feminists may have provided the foundation for later arguments around boys' outcomes being concentrated on the HSC marks, feminists' arguments needed to convince a masculine world using 'scientifically' based argumentation with 'hard core' proof. Foster (1992) claimed that the neo-liberalist framework of equality is a framework which keeps at its centre a masculinist subject and the education system as such is considered to be normatively masculine. Moreover, as education has been dominated over the last 15 years with mainly economic concerns, arguments inevitably had to be framed around the dimensions of academic schooling as linked with a numerical assessment result. This is not to say that there were no feminists who supported a reformist agenda in education, however, they were primarily 'heard' on educational issues in the 1970s when education for the disadvantaged was very topical (Allen, 2000:6-8). Arguments from socialist feminists were largely suppressed because the dominant discourse of the time, economic determinism, made socialist feminists' arguments appear to be impossible to justify politically. So,

feminist activists fought their battles with means that promised the most likelihood of success.

The whole concept of marks reduces education to a number that makes educational outcomes comparable within a framework of rationality that is based on a notion of objective truth. It is erroneously assumed that the marks are comparative and that they conform to a set standard, where a number is achieved by equal means and has the same meaning. In other words, each number has equal value. However, this is far from true. In fact, marks in education operate as a regime of truth, in which they are upheld as a measure of educational achievement. Yet, in reality the marks are quite arbitrary, despite some of the testing being standardised. They only measure performance on a particular day; they do not measure the ability of an individual to function in society; much examination assessment is subjective and depends on the judgment of others; and incidental skills students may have acquired through education may well be much more valuable to society than that which the number is supposed to measure. In fact, some of the arguments made in the gender debate question the instruments used to measure education in that proponents for improving the education of boys argue that some of the tests are presented in a format that is not conducive to boys' thinking and comprehension patterns, similarly to limitations expressed for girls:

Frustration was expressed by some students and teachers at the imbalance in assessment methods. 'One of the things I have noticed is that...the senior curriculum...is very language intense. In South Australia ... the physics exam and the structure of the physics course was changed to make it more appropriate for girls' (Australian Government, 2002:21).

Examining educational disadvantage of boys

A closer examination of arguments around the under-achievement of boys as presented in the 'moral panic' debate, raises the question of what exactly constitutes under-achievement and how is it measured. Smith (2003) claims that the arguments around boys' achievements were set within a 'discourse of derision' with media engaging in lamenting over boys' lower achievement claiming instead that they are under-achieving. Smith outlines that it relates to the concept of achieving below one's ability considering as a measure "the discrepancy between achievement and

ability, either by statistical measures of difference or through teacher nomination” (Smith, 2003:290). With the boys’ and girls’ arguments it follows then that without a measure of ability, under-achievement cannot be measured. One can only claim that boys achieve lower than girls.

Smith (2003), like many others, argues that different groups achieve at different levels for various reasons and that the higher achievements of girls is mainly due to the achievements of white middle class girls in certain subjects (Mills, 2000; Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Salisbury, Rees and Gorard, 1999; Yates, 1997; Teese, et al., 1995). Furthermore, Smith (2003) points out that in Britain similar percentages of boys and girls achieve no substantial educational qualification at age 16 and similar percentages of boys and girls gain A levels. Salisbury, et. al. (1999) argues that the gender differential shows only after a certain level of attainment. In fact, in the Welsh data set, which their research was based on, the gender differences only started showing for the high achievers and then they predominantly related to English and Humanities subjects but not the Science and Mathematics based subjects. In Australia, according to Lingard and Douglas (1999) drawing on Teese, et. al. (1995) the picture is slightly different in that at the lower cohort of achievements girls still outperform boys somewhat, mainly in English. Also, girls are grouped primarily in the middle cohorts and in the higher cohorts are girls who are very high achievers. These results also apply predominantly to English. In more Maths based subjects the differential with girls achieving higher is often negligible in comparison with the boys, but the data also shows that it is selected girls that are choosing these subjects due to their early achievements in these subjects and therefore their personal preferences are shaped accordingly. Thus, the girls that do take these subjects are likely to be very high achievers, one could argue, rather than being of mixed ability cohorts: “A more select group of girls (both in terms of academic results and social class background) does maths (and science) than is the case for boys” (Lingard and Douglas, 1999:107). Indeed this proposition is also confirmed by Lingard and Douglas’ (1999) and Yates’ (1997) claim that boys overall still have a preference for Maths based subjects.

Salisbury et. al. (1999) along with others (Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Epstein, Elwood, Hey and Maw, 1998; Connell, et.al. 1982) examined social and educational

influences that determine levels of achievements. Among the social influences rate: ethnicity of pupils, socio-economic background and forms of masculinity that contribute to a perception that learning and school achievement are not commensurate to what constitutes 'being a man'. Among the educational variables, schools as institutions are examined, differing learning styles, forms of literacy that are preferred by boys or girls, type of assessments that reflect gender preferences and labelling practises that inhibit moving to classes that are streamed at a higher level. Researchers agree that

It is time to unpick the 'unequal binary fictions' ...and that evidence is required which will contribute to a more sophisticated awareness of the sets of relations that exist between the wider inequalities, local systems of belief about learners and learning, schooling cultures, and differential achievement ...There is a need for an approach, a language that would allow researchers 'to think through more than one difference at once' (Salisbury et. al., 1999:406).

In Australia, evidence shows that Aboriginal children, those born of migrants from certain cultural groups, those born overseas and those of working class background have lower levels of educational achievement, in general, when compared with Anglo Celtic Australian born children. However, one has to also consider differential outcomes within their own groups depending on the socio-economic background of parents, especially among migrant groups there are considerable differences in achievement (Mills, 2000; Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Epstein et. al., 1998).

Schools as learning environments are said to appeal to girls better, because girls are perceived to be more organised and responsive to order, quiet learners and obedient. Conversely, boys are said to enjoy active learning and want to debate questions, seeking attention from teachers or behaving in a manner that forces teachers to consider their needs. Studies also considered different approaches based on gender to testing, literacy, numeracy, coursework and so on. By and large they have found that there are differences that can influence achievement, but that they also apply to some girls and some boys more so rather than to everyone in the same gender group (Salisbury et.al., 1999).

Lingard and Douglas (1999:98) also identify the problem data presents in analysing the gender and schooling issues. They claim that the data collected needs to reflect nuances between groups and outcomes, while reports also need to be more reflective and questioning of data. Yates (1997) claims that many of the indicators boys' perceived disadvantage in education is based on, such as lower school retention rates,

higher need for remedial classes and so on, have been present over the past decades, yet at that time there was no outrage that claims boys are disadvantaged. It appears that the competitive and positional environment influences public opinion and policy rather than the facts and data collected.

Men and boys

Proponents of the need for a policy on boys' education and the need to examine boys in education provided a variety of theoretical viewpoints, some of which subscribe to the notion, that boys are biologically different and are 'programmed' differently. Alsop et. al, 2002 used the term 'naturalism' for this approach. Others look at the intersection of class and ethnicity and generally look at disadvantage in terms of structural disadvantage (Gilbert, 1996; Connell, 1994). Some, with a more feminist approach, look at the social construction of gender rather than accept biological determinism. However, others feel that the needs of men have to be increasingly considered in society and that a more positive understanding of the needs of men and fathers is required (West, 1996), some refer to these groups as the Men's Rights movement (Lingard and Douglas, 1999). But, many also suggest that a consideration of men's needs will improve the situation for women, as issues such as domestic violence are inherently linked with a particular understanding of masculinity (Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Connell, 1994).

Two discourses utilised by those who support the need for more focus on boys in education are biological determinism and historical predetermination, the latter being some kind of Darwinist notion of these drives being developed throughout generations of men (Biddulph, 1994). Advocates and theorists taking up these discourses believe that boys are born to act as they do, that their biological make-up is the major reason for displaying more competitive behaviour, being more active and so on. Gilbert and Gilbert in their book *Masculinity goes to School* (1998) challenged the myth of biological and Darwinian reasons for behaviour in that they examined many studies, none of which were in fact conclusive, once they considered representativeness of samples and methodical shortcomings (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998:36-46). They also believe that the argument of biological and predetermined

reasons for behaviour undermines the idea of education's transformative potential, in so far as one cannot change what is predetermined. From my reading of those who propose biological reasons for the behaviour of boys (often seen as a homogenous group, which is always a problem), they postulate that education needs to develop appropriate strategies, which take into account the biological and pre-determined reasons why boys act as they do. Instead, Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) assert similarly as outlined above when discussing sex differences, difference in educational outcomes are greater among boys or among girls than between girls and boys. For example, Education Departments have increasingly looked at the intersection of rural/city settings, socio-economic background, ethnicity and Aboriginality with gender relations in their analysis of gender issues, but also in the diversity of designing and implementing educational programs. It is well known, as pointed out elsewhere, that educational outcomes are influenced by social class and that both, boys' and girls' educational outcomes are affected by that factor (Connell, 2002:41).

Connell (2000:10-12), a leading sociologist of gender, education and difference, after examining the extensive literature on masculinity and studies on men, summarises the findings as follows: Forms of masculinity vary widely according to culture and context; there are multiple masculinities in the same social context and they are organised hierarchically, that is, some are dominant others are subordinated; masculinities are collective and institutionalised in that collective processes construct masculinities and masculinities are in a state of flux. As such they are being reconstructed constantly.

One of Connell's main contributions is his development of the notion of hegemonic masculinity:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted (Connell, 1995:77).

The hegemonic dominant masculinity is what would be generally recognised and people would know what constitutes typical male behaviour, although this does not necessarily have to be most common behaviour, but behaviour that is expected of or

admired in males. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is an idea about men, what they are like and the expectations they have as males. However, this does not mean that men necessarily adhere to the ideal of what constitutes a man:

The number of men rigorously practising the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from overall subordination of women (Connell, 1995:79).

Kimmel (1994:128) expressed the kinds of influence men are under to conform to a stereotypical understanding of men, when he observed how masculinity is perpetuated among men and, by extension, boys also:

We [men] are under constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance.

This scenario is played out in the schoolyard too, when boys try to ensure that they are not associated with anything that is remotely perceived as feminine (Kenway and Willis, 1997).

Connell's assessment of masculinities and how to approach the related issues was much embraced by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) in that they cite a number of research studies, which demonstrate the cultural construction of masculinity in its various forms and through various agents. They themselves examined sport, video games and school as social sites where masculinity is played out. Their conclusions are in the form of strategies and recommendations to those concerned with the education of children. Gilbert and Gilbert's (1998) book is one of the more comprehensive and yet easy to read books on boys and masculinity. Theoretical analyses of boys and masculinity have been limited and much writing has been conducted by advocates who are at best involved in the educational enterprise as consultants, teachers, psychologists and social workers (Foster, 2000). Connell (1994) similarly suggested that the men's movement is divided into those who believe in gender justice, those who look at masculinity-therapy and those who want to restore patriarchy. He says of these currents:

No unified education program will come out of this. However the arguments between these currents will certainly affect the balance between gender equity and boys' troubles as themes of programs for boys (Connell, 1994:18).

A further development included the post-modern position of looking at the individual and deconstructing ideas of mass disadvantage (Blackmore, 1999a). Postmodern thought has brought a focus on the subject and individual subjectivities, which influenced education to the extent that teachers looked at the individual pupil as an 'achiever' who needs to reach their personal potential rather than considering cohorts of children as a whole. The idea of citizens explored earlier embraces this concept of the 'ungendered' individual also. The problem with this approach, however, is that no-one is gender neutral and the cumulative results and behaviours are eventually attributed to gender, due to the binary thinking outlined earlier. For example, if many girls achieve highly, someone will attribute this to their gender and vice versa if a majority of boys seem to act in a certain way, it becomes identified as part of their gender. On the other hand, without some aggregation of data, disadvantage affecting a whole group would not be identified either and thus, addressing it would lack the argument of how many suffer from given circumstances, an argument embedded within the positivistic stream of social science, which is a dominant stream in Western society (Bourdieu, 1991).

International developments

The movement towards examining boys' disadvantages is not unique to Australia (Yates, 1997). Accounts of the men's movement in America and Europe describe similar concerns with boys' education, men's lesser health outcomes and their alleged oppression by feminist policy making (Hoff Summers, 2000). In America, the 'failing boys' issue received a very high public profile also and research suggests that findings are similar across English speaking countries (Epstein et.al, 1998). Historically, the feminisation arguments were quite strong in America with the public perceiving that boys are suffering from a dominant ideology in schooling that insinuates that boys should become more like girls (Mills, 2000). From a backlash perspective, research in the US showed that women are used as a scapegoat in times of insecurity and accordingly there have been attacks on affirmative action legislation (Lingard and Douglas, 1999). Much research in America is also concerned with education outcomes for African-American boys and boys from Hispanic background. Interesting insights come from testing systems that are used

quite extensively in the US. For example, in a common aptitude test called SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) boys outperform girls consistently, yet girls (not all of them as outlined before) achieve higher school grades than boys (Sadker and Sadker, 1994 in Lingard and Douglas, 1999).

A recent publication (Myers, 2000) identified the following key issues for gender and education in the United Kingdom: 1) differences between male and female results in tests cannot simply be reduced to sex differences as differences within sex are greater than between sexes; 2) culturally specific expectations are more important than biology driven arguments, that is the expectations of who is suited to what job influences the likelihood of aspiring to a job more than a biological determination for a particular job; 3) expectations are gender role specific 4) expectations change over time, for example, now women can aspire to becoming Members of Parliament (Myers, 2000:2). Myers (2000), in an analysis of the media, found that there was considerable uproar about girls getting special programs, while now nobody seems to be concerned about boys getting special programs (Myers, 2000:5). Along with other writers (Smith, 2003; Salisbury et.al., 1999), Myers (2000) recognised that some boys underachieve, but she contends that girls' post-school options are still not providing them with equal outcomes to boys. Myers also concluded that the unresolved issue for both sexes is the link of class to school achievement and that this was the most difficult one to address out of all the inequality issues. This issue was highlighted also by other British observers (Smith, 2003; Mills, 2000; Salisbury et. al. 1999). In addition, much of the British work also considered masculinities of Afro-Caribbean boys, finding that they do suffer additional educational disadvantages, but that these are also present in girls of Afro-Caribbean background also (Mills, 2000; Wright, Weekes, McGlaughlin and Webb, 1998).

A further observation of Myers (2000), relevant to the Australian situation is the effect of devolution of decision-making to local schools and gender equity programs. Within a market driven environment girls with high achievements, as indicated through testing, have increasingly been able to gain access to schools of their choice as they have become a desirable asset (Myers, 2000). This trend has been observed by one of my interviewees also, who has claimed that some private boys' schools are now having an intake of girls for years 11 and 12. One of these schools has openly

stated that this change will maintain and lift the standing of the school in terms of its educational achievements as measured by HSC results. Myers (2000) further claimed that local schools do not consider gender equity as a priority, yet Local Education Authorities (LEA) have little power to influence local schools, who themselves may or may not be involved with developing education policy. Similarly in NSW, excellent resources have been produced by the Department, but schools are free to ignore these resources, (see Chapter Six: Parents and School Decision-Making).

The backlash

The boys' education issue created considerable debate among feminists and education professionals, particularly those that have a pro-feminist stance.

Implicit, and sometimes quite explicit, within many of the claims about boys' underachievement is an anti-feminist politics that suggests that the gender equity policies and strategies of the 1970s and 1980s have benefited girls at the expense of boys. Consequently attitudes that 'it is now time for the boys' are becoming increasingly legitimised (Mills, 2000:238).

Many saw the emergence of the call to reconsider boys in education as part of a broader backlash against feminism, while others just feared that the gains made for girls' education may be lost (Mills, 2000; Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Kenway, 1996). "While I do not believe that it (the stress on boys and the boys' movement) is simply and only an antifeminist backlash, I do believe that it is partly a reassertion of masculinity" (Kenway, 1996:448). The definition for 'backlash' most commonly used is in Faludi's (1992) sense of 'backlash' being related to an episodic occurrence in history of more intense challenging of gains made by women

Certainly hostility to female independence has always been with us. But if fear and loathing of feminism is a sort of perpetual viral condition in our culture, it is not always in an acute stage; its symptoms subside and resurface periodically. And it is these episodes of resurgence, ..., that can be accurately termed 'backlashes' to women's advancements (Faludi, 1992:13).

Further Faludi identifies when she thinks these periods of backlash most likely occur "it returns every time women begin to make some headway towards equality, a seemingly inevitable early frost to brief flowerings of feminism" Faludi, 1992:66). Given these sentiments not surprisingly many termed the alleged disadvantages for

boys in education as a backlash against women and girls, because no sooner that boys appear to not achieve as highly as girls, was there a call that enough has been achieved for girls and it is now the 'boys' turn'. The accompanying outrage and media hype provided an opportunity to voice anti-feminism stances in the guise of fighting for innocent children, that now have unequal opportunities to achieve in life "Today's underachieving boy is tomorrow's unemployed youth. He is public burden number one..." (Mahony cited in Smith, 2003:282). I note that nobody suggests that it is wonderful that girls will be able to save the world and adequately perform jobs that need to be undertaken to advance the nation.

Lingard and Douglas (1999) identify a number of triggers that contribute to the backlash represented in the call for improving boys' education: 1) they identify it as a response to feminism and the gains it has made for girls, however spurious and limited, because feminism is blamed for boys' so called underachievement; 2) the global economy that increasingly has led to redundancies and put the workforce under pressure; 3) "there is pervasive insecurity in the population at large, along with new individualism, which together encourage various forms of backlash against claims of group disadvantage and calls for redress through state policies and targeted funding" (Lingard and Douglas, 1999:3); and 4) a 'structural backlash' in the education system that lead to a more masculine presence in middle management through entrepreneurialism, while at the same time having a largely female teaching workforce. In other words, the backlash is also embedded in an emerging conservatism that is linked to the laissez faire of the market place, from which schools are not excluded as outlined earlier in this chapter, and the manner this environment may affect the individual's chances to succeed economically. A quote from the book *Women, Public Policy and the State* (Hancock, 1999:12) summarises these changes in education well:

Reforms in education have brought about a marginalisation of the discourses of equity, the rise of the 'performative' state and the market, competition between public and private providers, and the focus on productivity through 'vocalising education' 'in the interests of the globally competitive nation state'.

I contend, that underpinning these triggers of the backlash is the fundamental ideology of patriarchy that perceives the dominant role for males to be active in the public sphere, the breadwinner of the family and the corner stone of society.

Backlash fears appear justified when the push towards favouring boys is so strong, that it triggered, what one could term, an international movement within the English speaking world. But, those who are concerned for girls and women recognise that gains made in terms of post school options for women are still paltry:

But for white male elites the 'natural order' is not about to be overturned and any panic in that direction is unfortunately unwarranted with women constituting fewer than 5 per cent of senior management in the United Kingdom and United States (2 per cent in Australia), 5 per cent of UK Institute of Directors and less than 1 per cent of chief executives (Mahoney 1998 in Mills, 2000:243).

Given this episode of backlash, embedded as it is within a political environment that is driven by economical determinants and is essentially conservative, pro-feminists and those concerned for equitable educational outcomes fear that there will be little support for girls in education in the near future, if there indeed ever was by many male teachers at the grass roots level, judging by Kenway's (1996) research.

In conclusion, an examination of gender studies and gender policies in education reveals that over the past decade 'gender' has increasingly meant 'boys issues' played out in a predominantly binary debate that positions boys against girls as 'competing victims', a concept cited in Connell (2000). The focus on boys coincided with an increased focus on market driven education, which in turn is linked to a transformation of the employment market and the economy in recent decades. A decreased availability of some forms of employment, particularly in unskilled occupations has been one result. Accordingly, the HSC results have become more important in an environment of competition, where traditional male kind of jobs are scarce and education a positional good. Thus, boys and girls are pitted against each other for economic reasons, but also because there are still underlying perceptions in a patriarchal society that men need employment. The role of feminism over time influenced the education of girls, but it also prepared the ground for proponents of a boys' education strategy, in that advocacy focused primarily on matriculation marks of boys. The expanding research on gender and men assisted in advancing the cause of boys in education, although many theorists were cautious not to perpetuate a dichotomous understanding of gender.

Overall this chapter has provided a literature review for the two key areas of interest that relate to this thesis, one being parent participation in schools and the other gender equity in education. A critical analysis revealed the historical determinants, social paradigms and political contexts that pertained to these areas of research over time. The underlying significant field of influence revealed for both areas, was the renewed focus on economical benefits that shaped events and educational policy to a degree that forces converged to trigger a backlash against girls in education, in the view of many, or a shift towards boys' education to the potential detriment of girls.

CHAPTER 5: THE PARENT ORGANISATIONS

This chapter provides an overview of the two key parent organisations I researched, including their structure and operations. Both of these groups are linked with a national parent organisation for public education, which I have not examined in detail, but by extension is relevant to the thesis and a brief account of this organisation is included towards the end of this section. Details of parent organisations' success, issues they deal with and so on are part of the inquiry and as such are dealt with in Chapters Six to Eight. The outline of the organisations provided here describes the organisations' structures from the 'bottom up' in that it starts with the membership who then elect other groups who manage the organisation as a whole. For a structural overview of the organisations, see Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 this Chapter.

At the time of writing, there were two key parent organisations for public schools in New South Wales, The Federation of Parents and Citizens (P&C) and the Federation of School and Community Organisations (FOSCO). They both operate as federations with individual school parent groups being affiliated as members of the federation. Policy and major structural decision-making for the federations occurs yearly at a conference where members vote in a new Council and executive body, from its membership. Debate at these conferences is lively and provides a blueprint for actions to be taken the following year.

THE FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS (P&C Federation)

This organisation was founded in 1922 and incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1976 (P&C Federation, Handbook 2000-2001). The organisation is formed as a federation and consists of affiliated members, a Council which is the representative body of the members, an executive group, which handles affairs in between Council meetings if they are of an urgent nature and an office bearer group headed by the

Federation President. The organisation operates an office with paid staff managed by an Executive Officer (see figure 5.1 overleaf). Membership to this organisation is open to any 'properly constituted' school based parent association and parent associations district Council by paying an affiliation fee (P&C Federation, Handbook 2000-2001). Local school associations have their own constitutions and are formed under *The Education Act 1990* (NSW Government, 1990). A model constitution is included in the federation handbook to ensure local associations meet requirements to affiliate with the federation and to assist them with their affairs. The yearly handbook of the organisation provides all guiding principles for the organisation, including its aims and objectives, constitution, by-laws and policies. The handbook is updated and revised every year according to policy decisions made at the annual conference.

The following preamble of this organisation is used to introduce itself and its values when making a public submission so that the reader of the submission understands what the organisation's foundations are. The preamble reads as follows:

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales is committed to a free public education system which is open to all people irrespective of culture, gender, academic ability and socio-economic class and empowers students to control their own lives and be contributing members of society.

This commitment is based on the belief that:

All students have capacity to learn;

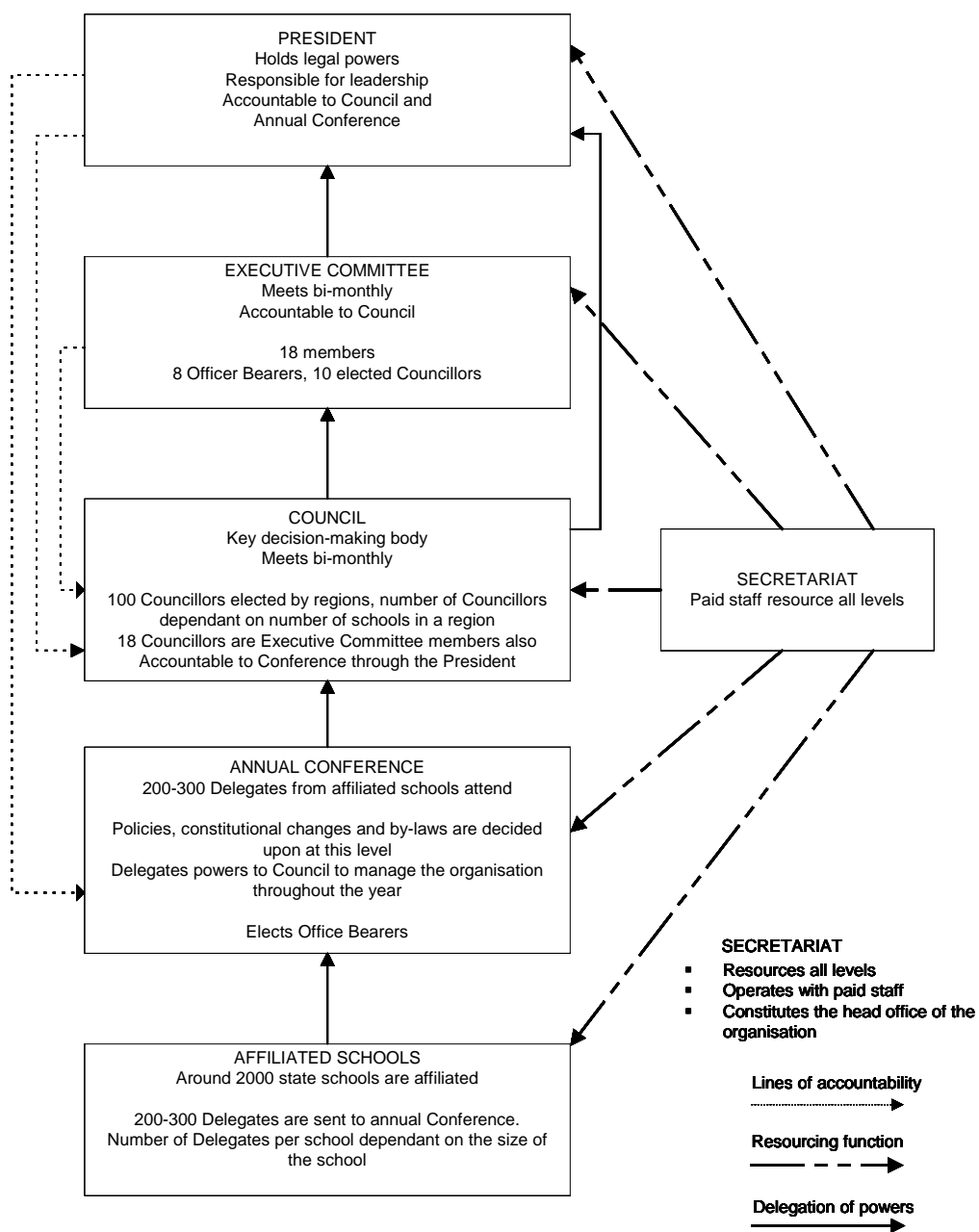
The Government has prime responsibility to provide an education system open to all which is free and secular;

Schools should be structured to meet the needs of individual students and should respect the knowledge those students bring to school and build on that knowledge to foster their understanding about the world.

Parents, as partners in the education process, have a right and a responsibility to play an active role in the education of their children. P&C Federation and its representatives share a responsibility of ensuring representative decision making for the benefit of all students. P&C Federation's annual conference, attended by representatives of its 2100 affiliate associations, develops policy which is energetically promoted by P&C Federation's democratically elected Council (Submission to the *Inquiry into the Education of Boys*, 2000:1-2).

This preamble clearly supports an advocacy role and enshrines the rights of students and parents. It firmly places responsibility for education in governments' hands. It does not provide a vehicle to influence schools, but rather it promotes a representative mode that claims a broad based representation of parents. As such the preamble assumes a notion of centralised decision-making vested in governments.

Figure 5.1 Organisations Chart of Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW



The Federation operates an office that functions as a secretariat to the organisation. It is mainly concerned with the administration of the organisation and servicing of its affiliates. For this purpose it employs an Executive Officer, a research officer, an insurance officer and five other staff mainly concerned with administration. To resource the various meetings and its affiliated members the office produces and disseminates extensive information packages, as indicated throughout this chapter.

To illustrate the extent of office involvement an extract from the guidelines for Councillors regarding correspondence is reproduced here.

Correspondence to outside groups, including the Department, are not to be despatched by convenors of subcommittees, but they must be despatched by the EO after vetting through Council, Executive, the Office Bearers or the President (P&C Executive resolution E/93/156, March 1993, quoted in report to Council 9/2/99, by Executive Officer).

The coding in the reference indicates the complexity of filing systems in the office and decisions taken that need to be traced over time. This quote also points to the Executive as a decision-making body, on administrative matters at least, even though decision-making power is formally vested in the Council.

The following sections describe in detail the relevant forums of decision-making of this organisation, its operations, membership, attendance at meetings, meetings facilities and atmosphere of meetings. My own observations, reading material, interviewee comments and an analysis of relevant statistics over the last four years are used to develop an understanding of the organisation. The four-year period was chosen for analysis as this covers the time of my field research. Figure 5.1 assists in identifying individual forums.

THE LOCAL SCHOOL BASED AFFILIATED ASSOCIATIONS

Over 2000 NSW public schools have a Parent and Citizens Association operating in their school. The aim of these associations is to provide a voice to parents in the schools. The associations generally meet once a month in the evenings to hear about events and to discuss issues, which may be raised by either the parents or the principal at the meeting. They are generally the key fund raising organisation in the school and they also operate in many cases a canteen and a uniform sale outlet. Often guest speakers are organised for the night of the meeting to attract parents to attend and to inform parents of new developments in the education field.

The Associations have Office Bearers as in President, Treasurer and Secretary who form the Executive and some of the Associations have Executive meetings in between monthly meetings. At the Executive meetings proposals are at times

developed to be voted on by the larger body of the Association. While there is a formal membership of the Association by paying one's due once a year, any parents can attend on the night of the meeting, but cannot vote unless they are a paid up member. Membership and attendance is also open to community members who may have an interest in the school, but are not parents at the school.

While only a limited number of local associations have been directly researched through this thesis (six in all) discussions with members of the Council and Executive as well as my own observations reveal that most associations are foremost concerned with the fundraising aspect, operations of a canteen and uniform shop. Attendance at meetings is small with the elected core group being regulars and maybe five to ten other parents attending. It is the experience of those interviewed that attendance only reaches higher levels if a serious issue, which can affect the whole school community is being debated. The impression is, that in general parents are content enough with schooling, or they feel relatively powerless from earlier experiences. That is, when their children started school they attended one or two parent meetings and then realised that while they are listened to politely, their contribution does not change events much and that there are a group of insiders that seem to know what is going on and that seem to have much control in the school. Thus, many parents become disillusioned or too busy to participate. Often parents only attend an association meeting if they want to raise a certain issue and then do not appear again until another issue arises for them. This is confirmed by research as set out in chapter Four: Setting the Scene.

For affiliated members the office of the Federation provides a number of services. The services are: an information service including a regular newsletter, a Website and an advice line during business hours; direct advocacy on behalf and at the invitation of parents which can include mediation at the school level; resources in form of handbooks, which provide guidance and training; insurance cover for all the Associations to insure their local activities; education sessions in local schools on demand; research into issues of concern to parents and it voices its findings and suggestions with relevant government bodies, but most importantly it provides a mechanism where parents can have their concerns regarding public schooling heard, debated and subsequently raised with power holders such as the Department of

Education and Training (DET). In other words, it acts as an advocacy organisation. Although, cynics in the organisation suggest that most local associations stay affiliated because of the favourable insurance scheme the Federation offers.

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

A three-day conference is organised each year at which delegates of affiliated Associations develop their positions on educational issues, which then form the policies of the Federation for the year. The conference is conducted under the ‘Standing Orders for the Conduct of Annual Conference, Regional Conferences and all Meetings’, published in the handbook. An excerpt of a promotional article for conference attendance in the organisation’s magazine provides an indication of the significance of the conference for parents:

Parents need a voice, and Conference ensures that our voice is democratically decided upon, in terms of policy and leadership...Policy is our platform. Policy is arrived at through debate of items on a published agenda. Policy drives Federation’s media statements, and defines the boundaries of our discussions with the Department of Education and Training, and other arms of Government. Policy ensures that personal opinion is not offered in a public forum...policy represents our agreed view on any issue (P&C Federation, Parent & Citizen Journal, 2001:12).

While this article is meant to encourage people to come to conference, it may not appeal to all parents, as it does not necessarily instil confidence that the issues of an individual parent will be heard. It in essence recommends policy platforms similar to political parties. Many people do not want to be involved with anything overtly political. The tone of the excerpt appeals to middle class parents, one would think.

At the conference elections are held to determine the members appointed to the Federation’s Council and the Office Bearers who together ensure that Federation policy is being implemented. The conference also grants life membership and distinguished service awards to people who have been active in the organisation and have made worthwhile and/or special contributions to the organisation or the school community.

For this research I have observed three yearly conferences and my analysis is based on observations from the conferences as well as information gained through the

perusal of documents of the association. The conference is divided into six business sessions, two sessions each day with an official opening and presentation of Annual report at the beginning of the conference.

Decision-making process at conference

Each affiliated school is encouraged to put forward motions as to what items should be included or changed in the federation policy for the year. The policy includes 'premises items' which provide the underlying belief system and information, which informs the premise for a given issue. Then there are action items in the policy, which stay there for two years unless they are revoked at the next conference. After two years, action items have to be accounted for in terms of the action taken. For this purpose a written account of the status quo of these items, called Action Item Report, is provided to conference delegates. If the item is not concluded satisfactorily the conference may endorse the item for another two years or put forward an alternative motion accordingly. For example, at the year 2000 conference, 69 motions were put forward altogether, 36 of these by the Council, and 20 items or so of the total were items carried forward for another two years. The Council puts forward approximately half the items for the conference due to Councillors being involved more closely with the issues, as described below. There are many policy sections and Council draws out a ballot as to which section will be discussed in which business session. Conference members are not likely to know before the conference when a certain section will be dealt with. This is to ensure that delegates do not only attend the debate on their items of interest because the Federation, in the interest of representation, wants to ensure that the Federation policy has endorsement from a broad section of parents.

Care is taken to have a democratic process, in the sense of majority rules, relying on information provision and subsequent voting. Each item of policy is moved by a delegate of the school, which recommends the item as printed in the Conference Agenda. In moving the item they explain their reasoning in a short speech of no longer than three minutes duration. A seconder is sought who chooses to speak on behalf of the motion or simply seconds the motion. Speakers will then be sought who may want to speak for or against this motion. They can speak for two minutes to

make their point. The original mover has a right of reply of two minutes after hearing the debate. After that the item is put to a vote. Voting is by raising a coloured card, which can be clearly seen from the panel by the sitting Chair and a simple majority carries the decision. Motions to the constitution, by-laws and procedural motions need a two thirds majority to be carried.

As the exact wording of a motion is being voted upon at the conference, amendments to the motion are often sought. The amendments have to be voted upon also, in order of their occurrence. An amendment has to be in line with the item under examination otherwise the amendment becomes a separate point, which then needs to be dealt with under General Business. General Business is a section of its own in the Agenda as scheduled by the ballot. Amendments also incur the right of having speakers for and against the amendment and therefore a premise or action item may take considerable time to be processed at the conference level. At times delegates do not know any longer what they are debating, that is, an amendment, an addendum or the original motion that they have printed in their agenda. This leads to a sense of helplessness where many think the others who have been involved longer must know what they are doing.

The limited time allowed for debate is often an issue and conference participants can move a motion to extend the time of a speaker by another two minutes and this motion is then voted upon. It is also possible to extend the time a motion can be debated for another ten minutes if the issue is of great interest to the conference. This can jeopardise the likelihood of all items being dealt with at the conference. If there are any motions that were not considered at the conference they can be delegated to Council for deliberation. If this is not acceptable to the mover then they will have to be dealt with at the next conference. Generally, most of the business can be dealt with during the conference and only few items are delegated to Council each year.

Sessions are chaired alternately by a number of people, mainly Office Bearers who have a number of years of experience with chairing. Yet, often a chair is forced to step down to deliberate on the decisions they made to allow or disallow a motion from proceeding. These decisions generally pertain to a procedural rule. Any delegate, who thinks that procedures have been breached by the chair's actions, can

interject. These interjections then have to be dealt with foremost, generally with the assistance of the rules in the book. The Executive Officer plays a central role in these deliberations as he has been handling conference proceedings for more than a decade, thus conferring to him quite a powerful position.

Making delegates feel welcome

An evening cocktail function called 'soiree' is organised for one of the conference evenings and an invitation with a 'reply' request is distributed in advance with the conference papers. This function allows participants to meet for informal, social conversation and no special program is organised for it. At times a conference dinner is organised to farewell a well-known member. Attendance at these functions ranges from 60 – 80 delegates and officers. There is also a cocktail function with the Minister and the Director General of the Department of Education and their staff to which all conference participants are invited. About 100 attend this function. The President of the Federation and the Minister and Director General give a speech, but apart from that the event is fairly informal and gives conference delegates an opportunity to personally raise an issue with a staff member or an opportunity to familiarise themselves with departmental staff. The parent organisations (both parent organisations have a ministerial cocktail function) invite members of the 'Three Federations', these being the two parent organisations in NSW and the teachers' representative organisation to this function. A fixed number of members are invited from the Three Federations group, although the invited organisations do not always adhere to the number prescribed (interviewee comment).

Documentation for the conference is distributed in advance to all affiliated schools. The package of documents includes an Annual Report, an agenda with the motions which schools have put forward for debate, a summary of actions taken to address action items passed at the previous two conferences, background papers which deal with an issue relevant to various sessions of the conference, the current Handbook of Federation policy and by-laws and a coloured voting card. The Handbook of the Association is a key information document which does not only contain the policy, rules and regulations of the organisation, but also useful addresses for those

interested in education including all school districts and their contact numbers, other parent and teacher advocacy organisations, educational acronyms and memoranda distributed to all schools by the Department of Education throughout the year. It contains contacts for all Federation Councillors so that parents know whom they can approach for questions in their district. Parents then have the means to take an issue further if they wish to or they can inform themselves of the Federation's position on an issue they have concerns with.

For illustration, the 1998 conference is described here using a description of the setting and an excerpt of debates around a motion that is related to gender.

1998 Conference – my first P&C Conference

I arrive at the venue, which is the old Teachers Federation Building near Haymarket. At the entrance, in the hallway a long table is leaning against the wall with copies of submission written throughout the year, promotional pamphlets for Office Bearers standing for election and a limited number of agendas and policy handbooks, as delegates are expected to bring their own. As I enter the entrance foyer I see a number of tables that have a title of a geographical region pinned on them. These are the registration tables where volunteers record attendance afresh for each business session. This procedure is considered as very important because it determines voting rights. A delegate has to be nominated by their school and each school has a limited number of delegates they may send, depending on the size of their school. Registration ensures that there is no possibility of a bias in outcomes through a particular school holding an illegitimate number of votes. After asking where I should register, I am sent to my local table and I declare myself as an observer in the region that my children's school belongs to. I get given a badge, that is waiting for me as a result of my earlier registration and a couple of women talk to me to see why I am interested to observe the conference. I learn in the process that many others are observers also. They are from various organisations such as universities, Departments or specific interest groups. All who attend at the conference have to register in advance. It seems that the organisation is very strict on procedure, in case they are scrutinised by the media or the Education Department. This is not surprising

because as an advocacy organisation they need to ensure that they do not undermine their credibility.

I enter the hall of the actual conference and it is buzzing with people talking to each other, last minute preparations in terms of business papers, officials running around to ensure all the equipment is in order and there are many people that have not seen each other for a while, sometimes not since the last conference.

The room is a lecture theatre with tiered rows of chairs. At the front is a table for the person who chairs, other Office Bearers and the Executive Officer who sits behind a computer. To the side is a table with another computer and a fax machine on it and two male staff members. Above is a screen to list the motions and amendments as put forward by the conference.

I look around and I see about two hundred to three hundred delegates attending this conference out of a possible 6000 delegates from approximately 2000 affiliates. Two thirds are women. Some people look elderly, say over 60 years old, many appear to be in their late 40s. According to interviewees more than half of the conference are delegates from rural and regional settings. Travel costs to attend the conference are reimbursed at the level of a first class train fare. The year 2000 conference was held in a rural setting due to the Olympic Games in Sydney and country attendance reached two thirds as against one third of Metropolitan delegates. As with Council (see section on Council composition below) there is a group of older participants which is quite notable because of the fact that one assumes their children need to be currently in school to talk about 'true' representation of concerns in the sense of the political principle by Sarason (1995). Apparently, they have the time to participate, provide continuity to the organisation and can remain involved in areas of interest to them (see later comments). Questions about which schools the delegates come from revealed that this is a guarded secret, again so that Departmental scrutiny cannot question representativeness.

The conference begins with a brief welcome by one of the contestants for presidency this year. She is an office bearer and chairs this session. She reads out the agenda and asks for confirmation of the agenda. She then introduces the President of the

organisation who provides her report for the year. The President highlights the problem of the increasing deregulation of education in the market place. She claims that in the last financial year \$ 4 Million were lost to the public education system that went instead to private schools. Obviously, this issue is of great concern to parents in an organisation, which represents parents of the public education system. For this organisation, the potential of education systems being exposed to market forces is a fear for the potential demise of a school system that provides a universal approach to schooling for all children and is open to public scrutiny. In the words of the P&C Federation:

Market choice absolves the producer from virtually all responsibility to the consumer: 'You can always take your child to another school'. Real choice is continuously and individually accountable...Market choice may be only exercised at the moment of purchase...In market choice producers 'market' themselves (create both substance and image) to *potential new customers*...Choice derived from market theory is not choice at all, but one more example of language being captured for political purposes. Market choice in education works *against* real choice and *against* interests of parents and students. Parents seek to maximise *real* choice within practical limits. The most important of these limits is the duty of each generation to ensure effective and appropriate education for *all* of its children (P&C Federation submission to DET titled *The Future of Public Education*, 1997:3-4).

Further, the President addresses the issue of Aboriginal reconciliation and also the new HSC that she hopes will bring improvements and that the organisation worked hard to contribute to through its committee membership. She then proceeds to list some interesting facts on an overhead that relate to the 150th anniversary of public schooling in New South Wales. She relates the facts to the achievements and involvement of P&Cs across the country since the early nineteen hundreds.

The delegates are then encouraged to ask some questions of the President concerning the annual report or any other matter that occurred throughout the year. An issue on media coverage was raised and the Media Officer who is an Executive member answered this question by saying that they had been misquoted and met with the Press Council over the issue of misinformation. There were no further questions and people were referred to the handbook to look up all the committees the P&C had been active on and to peruse the list of submissions written.

The Treasurer's report was then presented on overheads. The Treasurer used the opportunity to thank staff and her colleagues for supporting her throughout the year.

Somebody congratulated the treasurer for the excellent presentation. This is significant because this person is also standing for presidency this year and therefore had an opportunity to present herself in the best light. A supporter to enhance the candidate's prospects of winning presidency would have provided the positive sentiments.

This being the formal opening of the conference, the special guests, the Minister of Education and the Director General of Education, have arrived and a school choir sings as an interlude before the Hon. Aquilina MP, Minister of Education and Training, speaks. The fact that these two dignitaries are taking the time to come to the conference is much appreciated and is not taken for granted. At subsequent conferences there have been apologies by the Minister, but also a refusal one year by the Director General to come to the conference. This refusal was based on controversial media coverage according to P&C Executive members.

The Minister's speech attracted great attention and a number of questions were asked of the Minister. One is of interest here because it clearly shows the dilemma between centralised control through the bureaucracy and local decision-making through schools. The question asked was:

There is no budget for the maintenance of computers. Is there a possibility that computer maintenance can be shared between schools?

Minister's response:

There is flexibility for principals and local communities. It is up to principals what they do with the latest funds for computers. Maintenance funds have been provided, but each school decided individually what it wanted to do with the money.

Here the parent organisation is trying to gain a concession of the Minister when he clearly has little control himself as to how individual schools deal with funds. Another person in a similar vain raised money issues also in that she says there are sometimes only \$ 1500 for 780 students to run an educational program. She said: "we will continue to lobby for more money for education". The audience responded to this with "hear, hear ...". In her opening sentence she also said, that it was 'nice' that the Minister called parents partners in education and she followed this statement

up with raising the recent unnecessary restructure, in her view, indicating that true partnership would have included consultation of the key parent body in the state.

After the speeches that constitute the formal opening the conference is ready to debate policy. By now the room is pretty full, while before people were moving in and out. First on the agenda are motions aimed at changing By-laws. This year the debate centred on changes to geographical boundaries of the organisation to align them with the new boundaries of the education Department. People vote by holding up their voting card after motions and amendments have been received and debated. If the number of votes for or against is too close to estimate Office Bearers will undertake to count votes.

Two microphones are available, one in each aisle that separates two rows of chairs. A roving microphone is available for interjections from the floor. Generally, those who want to speak line up at the microphone. I notice throughout the day that some of the more frequent speakers actually make sure they sit near the microphone for the duration of the conference (For an analysis of increasing one's profile, see Chapter Six: Parents and School Decision-Making).

While the seating order and procedures are quite formal, there is considerable movement in the room and outside in the foyer as people leave the room to get a cup of coffee and/or to talk outside to people who they have not met for a while or with whom they may want to debate an issue. There are no morning or afternoon tea breaks and at lunch participants leave in informal groups to have their lunch wherever they wish. Some regional groups organise to have lunch together and they have the venue announced through the chair so that new participants have the opportunity to link up with people from their local region.

Proceedings are complex and what follows is a paraphrased debate on motions (called items by this organisation) that involved a gender-based difference in allocation of resources. The motions being put read as follows:

Policy item 48:

That Federation believes that schools must cater for the welfare and other needs of all students regardless of gender. All students are entitled to access to a head teacher or supervisor with specific responsibility for dealing with issues relevant to their gender.

Item 48 and 50 of Conference Agenda 1998 pertain to head welfare teachers at high schools. The items are dealt with one after the other as one is a policy item and the other an action item.

The mover makes the following points:

Currently there are allocations for girls only, which means that single sex girl schools will receive a head teacher welfare, but comprehensive schools may not as they may not have enough girls in their school. Since the early 1980s we know about welfare and harassment issues, also the increase in suicides among young people, and we now know also that the boys have issues too. We recognise with this item their rights to support also.

She reads out the policy and action item.

A woman moves an extension of time. This was carried.

The speaker continues and says:

this proposal caters for all schools, mixed and single sex as long as they have 500 children altogether. We propose that the head teacher is important rather than just having welfare staff as they do not have enough power to change anything.

There is clapping all around at the end of this speaker. The woman who seconded the motion was from the same school. She emphasises the point that some schools will not have enough girls to attract a head teacher and how important that allocation would be. She says: 'if we adopt the motion all will benefit'.

An amendment is then proposed by a woman who is one of the key supporters of gender equity strategies that do not disadvantage girls. She suggests:

delete 'regardless of gender' and put a full stop. Then include social background in the second sentence, because welfare needs are broader than gender only. It needs to include social variables such as class, ethnicity, age, religion and so on. We have to be careful that looking at girls only, given the history, should not be portrayed as discriminatory. We have to be careful of our reasons, as there have been shifts in thinking. Gender has moved along towards a more sophisticated understanding of gender construction. We can't have the

‘competing victim syndrome’. Children come from different backgrounds and gender is only one issue.

Her amendment is seconded by a woman who teaches in Education at a university. She argues: that the amendment ensures welfare needs of certain groups will be higher on the agenda.

A speaker against the amendment then rises. She contends that the purpose of the action item is the focus on the sexes and their needs. While she agrees with the sentiment of the previous two speakers she thinks their issue needs to be dealt with through an addendum. Another woman speaks against the amendment also in that she says the mover of the amendment wants something for an area that is not catered for in the motion.

A male who frequently speaks from the floor then speaks for the amendment as he believes it will ‘allow us more room to develop that policy. As a policy it is a better item, but leave gender in the second sentence’. This motion is then seconded by another woman who concurs that gender should be left in the second sentence “otherwise you get an Islam Head teacher and father headed household Head teacher and so on”.

The amendment then is not carried completely in that ‘gender’ stays in the second sentence. The motion at the end read as:

That Federation believes that schools must cater for the welfare and other needs of all students. All students are entitled to access to a head teacher or supervisor with specific responsibility for dealing with issues relevant to their gender.

They now moved to the action item No. 50 that is related to the previous item above. It reads as follows:

Action item 50:

That Federation urges the Minister for Education and Training to allocate all:

- a) Co-educational high schools with more than 500 students, a head teacher (female students) supported by a supervisor (male students) or a head teacher (male students) supported by a supervisor (female students), the specific allocation to be at the discretion of the principal;
- b) Co-educational high schools with more than 500 boys and more than 500 girls, a head teacher (female students) and a head teacher (male students);

- c) Single sex schools with more than 500 students a head teacher (male students) or (female students);
- d) Co-educational high schools, or secondary Departments of central schools, with fewer than 500 students a supervisor (male students) and a supervisor (female students); and
- e) Single-sex high schools with fewer than 500 students a supervisor (male students) or (female students), as appropriate.

The two women that moved the amendment earlier spoke again and moved another amendment but reversed the order of moving and seconder. The mover of the amendment said: “list the position we want to create and it will look at how gender is constructed and it brings into practise gender policy”. The seconder said:

we are past boys versus girls, we had to contend with backlash against girls, we can't argue we need to concentrate on boys (she is getting emotional), it's an old argument and the pendulum has not gone too far for girls. The mover has provided a way forward, boys and girls are not homogenous groups; we need generally head teachers for welfare.

There were then supporters for the motion, but no supporters for the amendment. Eventually the motion was carried. Altogether 8 people spoke to item 48 and 9 people to item 50 with 5 speaking on both items. The supporters of a motion or an amendment are often linked to each other and have had experience with each other's thinking. I've asked interviewees whether there is much caucusing before conferences and meetings and they all said “no, not really”. Yet, observing who speaks and supports what motion and in which fashion, the process appears quite orchestrated. Given that there is much moving around at the conference people may debate in the foyer how to approach an issue and whether they can rely on the support from another person. In addition, some people know each other very well because they might be a Councillor and an Executive member, which means they meet monthly and may attend joint meetings with the Department as well. Thus, the process appears above board with relationships and weighting of comments as equal and facilitated through the chair, but in reality there is much supporting of motions through having personal relationships and knowing each other's stance on issues.

Just before these items, when the debate centred on allocation of counsellors, one woman identified that the policy handbook already had a motion as to how many counsellors are needed per school. This caused restlessness among the audience while papers were being shuffled at the front desk. The debate continued as a resolution had to be sought that included what was written in the agenda. Further

concerns raised indicated that this motion means a four-fold increase of counsellors and that rural schools would receive no allocation at all on that basis and sharing counsellors was not an option as schools are too far apart. The final resolution was “that the Federation believes all government schools should be allocated one day per week of school counselling per 100 students, or part thereof” (P&C Federation, Minutes of Conference, 1998:12).

I have used the above example to question the process of moving items and presenting them straight to conference without some vetting to see whether these items do not already exist in the handbook. While this process appears to allow for participation and the raising of issues from the constituency, one could conclude that it also serves to give the impression of there being many issues out there to resolve and that the organisation is very busily addressing these issues. In other words, it gives the organisation the *raison d’etre*, a reason to exist. Some interviewees in fact said, that there are items that appear at every conference in some form or other, mainly because resolving them is difficult. One would have to question then, why they are still being pursued rather than other approaches being utilised? The answer is most likely to be in the impression the organisation wants to give and the regime of truth of advocacy organisations; they are meant to be representative and they need to be seen to argue with power holders for improvements of the situation. To appear to be effective they need to engage in these actions that make them appear to be responsive to expectations. One can also say these actions are based on cultural arbitrariness that makes people believe that they are effective in pursuing the advocacy goals and therefore, they have tacit approval for doing so. The processes are imbued with the symbolic capital of advocacy groups.

The paraphrased proceedings above depicted what I observed. It illustrates how proceedings are difficult to follow; yet they have an air of ‘officialdom’ as outlined in the passage below, which is a transcript from a taped conference (1993 Annual P&C Conference). The complexity of proceedings often goes beyond the capacity of the person chairing even though they generally have years of experience in the organisation. For a person who attends the conference for the first time proceedings are nigh impossible to follow and they are certainly intimidating. In fact, the

organisation is aware of this issue and it broke into discussion groups around the issue of communication at one of the conferences I attended.

The passage below, transcribed from a P&C Conference, shows the proceedings used to manage debate. The passage refers to policy item 10, 11 and action item 19, which read in the *1993 Conference Agenda* (1993:17-18) as follows:

Policy Item 10:

That the following Gender Equity Premise be adopted:

- Gender does not determine the capacity to learn
- Girls and boys should be valued in all aspects of schooling.
- Providing a high quality education for girls is a mainstream professional responsibility for all educators.

Policy Item 11:

That the following Gender Equity Policy be adopted:

That Federation supports the development of provision for the educational needs of girls in all aspects of schooling, from early childhood through to post compulsory, among parents, teachers and the wider community by:

- a) Promoting awareness that girls and boys have equal rights in all aspects of schooling;
- b) Promoting awareness of the changing role and status of women and of the specific educational need of girls;
- c) Recognising that meeting the full educational needs of girls is a mainstream responsibility for all school and systems;
- d) Improving the information base through fostering relevant research and statistical collections as a basis for refining or developing policies relating to the education needs of girls.

Strategies to improve the quality of education for girls should be based on an understanding that girls are not an homogenous group. Priority should be given to meeting the specific needs of those groups most requiring support to benefit from schooling; such as Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, girls from L.B.O.T.E. (Language Backgrounds Other Than English), those who live in remote areas, and girls who may be at risk of not completing their secondary education.

Schools should educate girls and boys for satisfying, responsible and productive living, including work inside and outside the home.

Schools should provide a challenging learning environment, which is socially supportive and physically comfortable for girls and boys.

Action Item 19:

The Federation calls on the Department of School Education to recognise the need for gender equity initiatives for both boys and girls by promoting research into the different needs of boys and girls in the education system, and by developing a boys education strategy and extending the present girls education strategy to identify these needs at both primary and secondary levels and assist schools to develop appropriate strategies:

- a) for teaching and learning suited to the different needs of boys and girls;
- b) to break down stereotypes in male, as well as female roles;
- c) to address the separate areas of disadvantage particular to boys and girls.

(In the interest of privacy, names and schools in this passage are not quoted).

Chair: Thank you yy. Now, School x would you like to move your procedure.

Woman x: I would like to move that consideration of item 10 is deferred until consideration of item 19. I repeat, on the grounds that item 19 ahm, is a broad based item and presentation of arguments relating to that item, ahm, we would like conference to be informed upon before considering a position on this item.

Chair: seconding that referral motion? Male x, any comments x?

Male x: I just have to watch out for this cup of coffee. Name x, Primary School (same school as mover above), in seconding this Ahm, this deferral procedure I would like to also foreshadow that we wish to Ahm, It's an action item, item 19 and we wish to foreshadow that a policy item should also accompany it. I don't know whether that comes in 'general business' or whether that's ah...

Chair: ah, yes.ah it is already in the collection for 'general business'.

Male x: ok. hm...(small silence) I recommend for everyone to vote to defer item 10 and 11. I know we are not voting on 11, but 11 comes under the same headings as 10.

Chair: well, just let us wait. Woman xxx, I saw you. Are you speaking to the deferral?

Woman xxx: Ah, yes, name, xxx High School, speaking against the deferral. Not because I oppose x school's motion. I think, I would like to congratulate them for putting together an excellent motion, but it just has to be pointed out. This item is in fact an action item, hm, the motion that xx moved is a policy item, which would go into policy as a statement of beliefs, Ahm, x school's item if passed, would go in as an item on which we take action and the action wouldn't be based on a policy. I think the two go together very well and I see no reason why we shouldn't consider policy first and the action after.

Chair: Thank you, xxx. Male xx, I saw you.

Male xx: name xx from High School. I opt to support this proposal for deferral, I wish though, Mister Chairman, that you'd chosen a different procedure and you accepted a motion that would say to deal with item 19 forthwith, rather than going by one motion before another having it moved and seconded and then deferring them in turn. But, since this is the procedure we've got, but anyway I'm support of this because I think, that the issues which x school wish to vote for and certainly I wish to vote on, are item 19 and are of a very general kind. In dealing with those issues initially will help with amendments that people may wish to move to the various bases that there are on gender equity. I think it would be a good thing if we dealt with the general things first before we get bogged down with the minutiae of hm whether the clauses are going to refer to boys and girls or whether they gonna refer to girls or are an issue for one or the other.

Chair: Thank you, xx. Are there other speakers for or against the deferral? Very well, in that case, I invite x school to ...(whispering)

Woman x: Ah yes..

Chair: sorry, apparently I overlooked that there is no right for reply for a procedural motion. Therefore I am putting the motion that item 10 be deferred until item 19. Those who vote in favour to defer item 10, so those in favour of referral of item 10 please raise their voting cards. That wishing to vote against deferring item 10 please raise their cards. That's clearly carried, item 10 becomes deferred and I would invite x school to present its item 19.

Item 19 is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven: Analysis of the Gender Equity Debate, but for the purpose of understanding procedures the process of the debate is summarised here. In the following hours of dealing with item 19 two amendments were introduced with a total of seven speakers responding to them and three motions being added to the 'general business' list, two calls for the chair to stand down and once he did, as his ruling was opposed and conference had to decide whose opinion is favoured by the conference, a motion to defer the vote on the chair and go to lunch which was not carried, a motion then followed to extend the time for 10 minutes, which was carried. Then the first amendment was lost, but the second sparked a new round of debate with one member accusing a speaker of not being consistent in adhering to procedures when the speaker asked the mover whether they could accept a compromise. The chair changed and after a vote the original person was back in the chair. Another motion for extension of time was carried, after a motion to adjourn for lunch was put forward first on the basis that the extension of time was only for the procedural motion. The whole session was fairly explosive and tension could be felt in the room. Even five years later at the time of my interviews interviewees recalled this session quite vividly. In fact one person was also interviewed because of her mediating role in those proceedings. Yet, these are not unusual proceedings. My observation of other intense debates showed that many delegates could not follow any longer where the debate was at, others were getting increasingly bored and wanted to move on to other items or adjourn for lunch. There was a sense of relief when people left the hall and I observed laughter by some, ongoing discussion and a shaking of heads by others. There is certainly a sense of bewilderment often in the face of complex proceedings. Given that the annual conference provides the key forum where ordinary parents from affiliated schools are able to have their say for the year, the proceedings are incredibly cumbersome, alienating many parents in the process.

THE COUNCIL

The Council is the primary elected decision-making body of the Federation, which implements policies and decisions of the conference. Hence, the detailed account of the composition of Council here. There are four Council weekends in a year and each

day is divided into two sessions, totalling sixteen sessions of Council per year. The Council elects an Executive body to act on its behalf in between meetings. The Council and the executive meet once every school term approximately one month apart. The Executive meets for the whole Saturday.

The Council consists of one hundred and four elected Councillor positions, which represent affiliated associations in their regions. These Councillors may be nominated by local Associations or District Councils. District Councils are umbrella organisations of a district area where all local associations send representatives who meet to discuss district-based issues. There are only few district Councils still in existence. Each region has an identified number of Councillors they can delegate to Council. These Councillors are being elected through a preferential ballot at the annual conference. Office Bearers and Councillors have a term of two years before they need to be elected again. Only half of the representatives to Council for each region will be voted on in any year, which means that there are two year and one year positions available, the latter in cases of unscheduled vacancies. Many regions do have vacancies for Councillors, so that voting relates mainly to what position (one or two years duration) one will hold rather than whether they will be able to be Councillors. Over the last four years (1997-2000) there was an average of 20 % vacancy for Council positions with, for example, only four regions and one sub-region being complete and others having one to six vacancies out of a total of 14 regions and subregions in the year 2000/2001. South Western Sydney consistently had a lack of representatives. The reasons for that may be that: 1) the region is not far enough away to warrant a nice trip to the city, 2) there are predominantly middle class delegates in the organisation and 3) the region has many low socio-economic background students and has some schools that are being considered as residual schools where students and parents have been failed by schools and thus parents may have given up on engaging with the school and its systems (Connell, et. al. 1982). The number of Councillors per region depends on the numbers of schools in each region. For 50 schools or part thereof two Councillors can be delegated. Many Councillors have been in the organisation for years. For example, the two candidates for presidency had 21 and 19 years of service with the organisation.

Council nominates members to various committees, both internal and external, and delegates to these committees are chosen through a preferential voting system, once a year at a Council meeting in spring. A guide for new Councillors is handed out at the beginning of their period in office. This guide sets out meeting and voting procedures, representation and reporting duties, the structure and membership of subcommittees as well as the function of the Secretariat. A welcome meeting for new Councillors is held on the night before the first Council meeting after the Conference, but numbers in attendance appear to be limited. It seems that new Councillors rather engage with the business at hand than socialise with other Councillors.

Proceedings and atmosphere at Council

Council meetings are held at the offices of the organisation in Darlington. Council meets upstairs in a relatively small room that needs to fit almost one hundred people. Councillors are seated at long tables and the President, an Office Bearer and the Executive Officer are seated at a table in front of the Councillors. A microphone is used to chair the meeting, but contributions from the floor can generally be heard across the room. Procedures are fairly formal and voting is by show of hands. Speaking time is less restricted than at the conference, but nevertheless proceedings are chaired fairly tightly. Time is made to receive important reports as indicated by Councillors before the meeting. At times issues need to be talked through as a group in which case a Councillor may make a formal presentation so that Councillors gain an understanding of the issues at hand. The handbook also regulates the formal proceedings of the Council. Interestingly, despite women constituting by far the majority in these meetings male Councillors quite dominate the debate at times by the number of times they speak and the number of times they hold lengthy speeches. As this is an overtly political forum, this is not surprising, given that most politicians are also male. It appears that the hegemonic male is surfacing here, in that males assume a right to be in leadership and many women in turn allow them to do so. However, the most active women in the organisation are fighting this leadership as evidenced by derogatory remarks against some men, which I overheard in hallways. A couple of years later when one of the men was due for presidency, according to the

general unspoken rule of Senior Vice-Presidents becoming President, a woman was elected into the presidency position. This was the third consecutive term that a woman was elected for presidency. Criticisms of the male candidate centred on his way of alienating people through cynicism, accusations and a general impatience of those who had contrary views. His demise became clear to me when he delivered a vote of thanks that actively accused a bureaucrat for the Department not achieving better outcomes, in the speaker's opinion. In the lunch break after this speech, I heard much murmuring and discontent. It appears that the more removed one is from the average person and acceptable behaviour regarding conventional politeness and appearances, the less likely there is support at the conference level. For further analysis see chapter Six: Parent Organisations and Decision-Making.

The atmosphere at the meeting is relatively relaxed with people having at times small conversations across the table and having a chuckle if someone was humorous during their speech. Nevertheless, proceedings are formal and there is a lot of paper work to consider as well as listening to people and deciding on one's vote. There are no tea breaks and people move freely to get a cup of coffee or tea and they bring their own snacks to the table. At lunchtime small groups go out to lunch together or eat their sandwiches in the room while they consider a video or educational program, which is generally presented in the second half of lunch. Participation in small groups over lunch showed that often the business of the morning session is being further discussed and that like minded people or people from the same region have lunch together. Not surprisingly many of the Executive group also go to lunch together often discussing the business of the morning.

Attendance and composition of Council

A review of the attendance of Councillors over the past four years revealed that on average 27 % attended every single Council session in the year, 29 % attended at least three full Council weekends and at least one session on the fourth weekend, 27 % attended two full weekends and at least one session on the third weekend, 13 % attended one weekend and at least one session on the second weekend and 4 %

attended only at some time in the first weekend while 6 % (in effect four people) attended no session at all, see table 5.1 for an overview.

Table 5.1: Average attendance at Council meetings from 1997-2000

Attendance of sessions	Ordinary Councillors	Executive Councillors
All sessions (16)	27%	48%
Three full weekends plus one session fourth weekend	29%	26%
Two full weekends plus one session third weekend	27%	15%
One full weekend plus one other session	13%	11%
Attended at some time on one weekend	4%	0%
No attendance	6%	0%*

* In four years one person in one year attended no meeting at all

Total number of Council positions 104
 Total number of Councillors who are Executive members 18
 Vacancy rate of Council positions 20% on average (83.2 Councillors)

One could therefore say that the vast majority attended two thirds of the meetings with almost a third attending every session of Council and over a half attending at every weekend of Council. Of the third who attended all meetings two thirds are the same people attending all meetings over the four years and the same can be said of the 50% who attended on all four weekends. Thus, there is a strong core group that has attended every weekend of Council over the four year. This attendance record relates to the importance of Councillors being visible at meetings (for further detail on visibility see ‘gaining power’ section in Chapter Six: Parent Organisations and Decision-Making). Considering that the Councillors included in the above calculations do not hold Executive positions attendance is remarkably high and consistent. Only the year 2000 showed a lower attendance due to there being only ten meetings, which made many people opt to attend the two weekends only. A one-day attendance, the third meeting, was not feasible for remote country people. For additional information on attendance at Council meetings, see also attendance of Executive members.

Gender and age distribution

By far the majority of Councillors are women and this has not changed for the past four years. Over the four years examined on average of 72% of Councillors were women out of a total of 83 Councillors on average. It appears that women are still seen as the parent primarily concerned with the children's schooling, not surprisingly really, as it fits within a discourse that sees nurturing and care giving as a woman's role. Also, for Office Bearers and very active Councillor positions, a parent is needed who is able to commit the time to the organisation and women by and large are still more likely to be home during school hours. The role of women in parent organisations is confirmed by Blackmore in Limerick (1995:57) when she says: "From the start, mothers were positioned as 'carers', while fathers have generally been positioned on school councils in a professional capacity as 'citizens'". The over-representation of males at higher levels is present in this organisation also, because males constitute 50% at the Executive level, yet only 38% at the ordinary council level. In terms of age distribution one can say from observation that few Councillors would be under 30 years of age and the majority are between 30 and fifty years old and quite a considerable number, approx. a third are over 50 years of age. Of those who are over fifty many do not necessarily have children at school any longer. This age factor of Councillors has been explained by interviewees in terms of 1) older members having more time at their disposal to be active in what can be a fairly time consuming activity, 2) it is valuable to keep and use their expertise of having participated for many years and their children having come through both primary and secondary schooling into tertiary education or into employment, and 3) younger parents are more likely to be in paid work and therefore have limited time to be active in a voluntary capacity. Although Council meetings are on weekends, people need to be active in the local school community also. Councillors need to be nominated from their region and as such they need to have a regional and local profile. However, it has been alleged by two interviewees that many of the older people are not in fact any longer involved at the local level, which then raises a question about their competence of speaking on behalf of experiences of parents who currently have children in the school system. Yet, the Local Associations' and Education Act 1990 (NSW Government, 1990) clearly allows for those to be active

who have an interest in the welfare of the school. Moreover, citizens who have an interest in the welfare of the school are included as part of the P&C Federation's name and are therefore an acceptable part of the organisation. But, when the organisation makes public comments on issues it uses the terminology of 'parents', rather than a terminology that includes citizens. Hence, there appears to be an incongruent form of representation, one that portrays an image of parents and consumers, even though there is not always a direct service user link, as there is with parents at the school that have an a priori right to decide on behalf of their children, who in turn are users of schools (Sarason, 1995).

Rural and metropolitan representation

An average of 37% of Councillors were from Metropolitan schools while 63% were of semi-rural and rural backgrounds. If one considers the coastal areas of Wollongong and up to Newcastle as semi-rural 13 % of the 63% would be from semi-rural areas. In comparison the break down of affiliated schools between metropolitan and rural areas is 43% as against 57 % from rural and semi-rural areas. Thus, the rural areas are slightly over-represented in terms of the number of Councillors involved in the Federation. The reason for this over-representation, according to interviewees relate to the fact 1) that needs in rural schools are high due to their isolation from infrastructures a city has to offer 2) rural Councillors do receive some travelling funds to come to Sydney on a regular basis which provides opportunities for a break away from the daily routine and 3) people in cities have more resources to choose from for their children (for example to change school) and 4) people in cities are very busy, often work in paid positions and are involved in many other activities also.

Occupational background and Socio-Economic Status

According to interviewees, many Councillors have been professional educators at some point in their adult employment career and some still work in education as teachers or lecturers, after they have been teachers initially. One can argue that these 'education professionals' have through the parent movement an alternative, and at times, enhanced opportunity to voice concerns they have developed potentially as a

result of their place of work. This issue is frequently debated at the yearly conference as the potential for a conflict of interest does not escape the attention of the participants. For further development of this argument see Chapter Six: Parent Organisations and Decision-Making.

Given that many female Councillors are homemakers and full-time parents, to assess their social class status, it would appear reasonable to look at their occupation before child rearing, which was indeed a question I asked of interviewees. Interaction with participants over lunch at conference, Council and Executive weekends revealed that most people have tertiary education, which lets one conclude that they either have been in a semi-professional occupation before child-bearing, their partners work in occupations requiring tertiary education now and/or their lifestyle in terms of financial capacity allows them to broaden their understanding of educational issues to a degree that they feel confident to proactively participate at Council level. It is safe, therefore, to say that a majority of Councillors are from an educated background and are well able to articulate publicly a comprehensive argument on a given issue. There are others though, a silent mass, to some degree, that do not speak up for lack of confidence or because they feel too new to contribute effectively. They gather in groups, sit together at meetings and amuse themselves over lunch about observations they made that day. This is not to say that they do not have opinions, they certainly do, but they do not want to engage in some of the profile building activities, which some of them called 'grandstanding'. However, they are voters and they carefully assess whom they will give their vote to. They are being treated as a silent mass by those who aspire to office bearer positions and the staff, and at times it seems they are viewed with contempt. A successful contender for leadership knows how to talk to and engage these people. For these people it is about moderation and appropriate, honest behaviour. They want to make sure that the reputation of the organisation does not suffer (Interviewees' comments).

There is a distinct under-representation of people from non-English-speaking background, Aboriginal people and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds as evidenced through the absence of Councillors from South Western Sydney. There is much support expressed for the plight of these groups, but there is little effort made to actively engage these groups. Thus, there is a politics of difference that, by

way of not fitting into the dominant culture of the organisation and its active members, undermines the capacity for those who are different to feel welcome and accepted. From my own experience in the organisation, at least in the beginning, and at the local level of schooling, I myself often felt as a 'deviant' because it seems that I did not fit with my opinions within the dominant discourse or I did not express my opinion in a fashion that befits the dominant culture of the people or organisation. At a Council meeting I observed this kind of discordant engagement, when an outspoken, but a bit naive woman made her points and the President said, let's have a talk after and I will help you formulate your motion. Counselling would have taken place over lunch, as the woman did not move that particular motion afterwards, although she was obviously feeling quite strongly about it.

It was not possible to find out how many Councillors are from primary and how many from high schools as this information is guarded. I surmise that the reason would be the fact that some people do not have children at school any longer and the organisation does not want to provide any opportunities to have their membership base scrutinised, as indicated before.

THE EXECUTIVE AND OFFICE BEARERS

The Executive consists of the Office Bearers and ten elected Councillors. The Office Bearers are elected bi-annually by a preferential voting system at annual conference while the ten Councillors are nominated and elected by Council. There are the following Office Bearers positions: President, Senior Vice-President, two Country Vice-Presidents, two Metropolitan Vice-Presidents, Treasurer and Publicity Officer. These Office Bearers may also meet at the initiative of the President or the Executive Officer depending on the support and management structure the President desires. Any Councillor can attend the Executive meeting as an observer, but the President or Acting Chairperson of the day, has the right to call 'in camera' meetings, in which case observers are excluded. This is a curious mode of conduct, because the Council meeting is supposed to be the primary decisions-making body. Yet, according to a Councillor, the idea of observer status of Council members was highly controversial and hotly debated. This indicates the nature of the Executive, which in essence is the

decision-making body if not formally, it is certainly so informally (see Chapter Six: Parents and School Decision-Making).

In terms of composition the proportion of women was slightly higher than men and by and large they were educated people, a number of them lecturers and teachers, others had their own businesses or their partner did. The majority had still children at school, mainly High School. Given that this group relates the most to the government, hands-on current experience with schools would be an asset in light of being seen as parent representatives of children at school.

Procedures and atmosphere at the Executive meetings

The procedure at Executive meetings is one of fairly free flowing discussion with few decisions made by voting. The President chairs the meeting generally and the Senior Vice-President only if the President is absent. Votes are mainly taken if it appears that there are oppositional viewpoints that are unlikely to be resolved by consensus. This method of debating allows for the discussion of issues in more detail than the procedures used for conference and Council meetings. Accordingly, the atmosphere at the meeting is fairly relaxed and there is a sense of people being knowledgeable on subject areas and little explanation is necessary to enable people to understand the issues. The Executive is the group which is most closely involved with power holders in the departmental structure and they are the one's delegated to go to particularly important meetings with the President. Hence, this is the group with the most opportunity to be power holders and accordingly they drive the organisation to some degree. However, the duties formally are similar to that of the Council, that is, to take care of the affairs of the organisation.

Attendance at Executive meetings

The eighteen Executive members also attend Council meetings as well as the four Executive meetings held during the year. Almost half (48%) of Executive members attended all Council sessions, a further 26% attended at every weekend in that they attended three weekends and at least one other session on the fourth weekend, 15%

attended on two weekends and at least another session on the third weekend while the other 11% attended at some time during two weekends. In the whole four years there was only one person in one year that did not attend any Council meetings, see Table 5.2 below for an overview.

Table 5.2: Average attendance at Executive meetings from 1997-2000

Attendance of all day Saturday meeting	Percentage
Every meeting	56 %
Three meetings	35%
Two meetings	7 %
One meeting or none	2 %

Given that Executive members have a leadership role, due to their increased frequency of direct involvement through meetings and their interest in the organisation as well as their own aspirations of needing to be elected into positions, it is not surprising to see a higher attendance of these members at Council meetings (see Chapter Six: Parent and School Decision-Making).

Executive meetings are held on four Saturdays per year and attendance on average over the four years was as follows: 56% attended every meeting, 35% attended three meetings, 7% attended two meetings and 2% attended one meeting or none. The highest percentage of full attendance was recorded in the year 2000, when there were less Council meetings due to the staging of the Olympic games. Thus, the Executive committee had to take on more responsibilities during that year. During a Presidential and Office Bearers election year (as occurred in 1998 and 2000) attendance at Council meetings by Executive members was increased by 29% with 77% attending each Council meeting, while the attendance of ordinary Council members shows no such increase. Executive members are trying to ensure that they are well known by Councillors who they hope will vote for them.

Of interest in terms of Executive and Council attendance is the attendance of Office Bearers as they constitute the leadership of the Federation and thus constitute the inner circle in terms of on the spot decision-making and representing the Federation in all circumstances, particularly in those where the organisation is exposed publicly

and in meetings with powerholders. An analysis of attendance of Office Bearers over the four years reveals that all attended every Council meeting although not always every session and that three quarters attended all Executive meetings.

According to interviews, Presidential elections are fiercely contested and in fact the result between the two contestants in 1998 revealed only a difference of 11 votes, out of 224 voting. Analysis of Council attendance reveals that the attendance of Executive members during an election year is increased by 29% while attendance of ordinary Councillors is about equal to other years.

As the Office Bearers of the organisation meet according to need only, as determined by the President, there is little material available on these meetings, however, interviewees confirmed that if a meeting is called most Office Bearers are available to attend and in fact meetings are set to enable full attendance.

THE ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

The President is the figure head of the organisation and is responsible either directly or by implication for all matters concerning the organisation. In particular, the President is responsible for all public statements on behalf of the organisation and for approaches to the Minister, his or her staff, and to be the officer who can be sued on behalf of the organisation. Each President may choose to exercise their duties in various ways, delegating many functions to others. The current President (2000) for example, takes on a lot of public engagements while the previous President needed to delegate many of the meetings and functions as she lived in a rural area quite far from the P&C head office. Looking at a six week period in 2001, the President engaged in 26 school meetings at 22 different schools, had 44 media engagements, and attended 58 departmental and other organisation meetings, excluding internal meetings among P&C Councillors and staff.

The President is influential in the organisation and has discretionary powers, which are far reaching in that the Executive Officer is only responsible to the President and the President in turn only to the Council and Conference, every two years. The two

leaders, the one of paid staff and the other of all the members together are able to command considerable power. Members of Council and Executive look to the President for guidance with regard to office issues and all management questions. Thus, the position of President is very important, more so, than in many other community organisations, from my experience, mainly because they have sole power invested in them, rather than in a management committee. There are very few processes to consult with others that the President has to formally undertake of any of the activities she is engaged in, including media appointments and writing letters and submissions. Given the importance of the President, during a Presidential election year, factions do talk to each other behind closed doors regarding their support for candidates.

The procedures for elections of President are detailed in the handbook and the Executive Officer generally acts as the Returning Officer. People have to be nominated by another Councillor or delegate and also seconded by another relevant person. Secret ballots are taken in all cases. Nominated candidates briefly stand up so that delegates and Councillors can see who the nominated people are. A preferential voting system is used where distributions usually become quite important for most positions, but particularly so, for Office Bearers as these are elected by approx. 250 people, who have a diversity of opinions. Results have to be worked out over night using a computer system because of the complexity of allocating preferences.

FORMS OF ADVOCACY/LOBBYING

For the Federation, the most common form of advocacy on behalf of parents occurs in the committee meetings where parent representatives, departmental representatives and other interested parties debate issues related to the education of children. At times the parent organisations meet with the Minister or his (currently male) representatives directly, at other times with the Director General of the Department, but most of the times they meet with delegated members of the bureaucracy. Some of these meetings are called ad hoc, others are established committees, which meet on a regular basis, although at times this can mean just once per year.

There are many State level committees and working parties the Federation is involved with. For example in the year 1999/2000 the federation was “represented on over 80 State and National committees and working groups” (P&C Federation Handbook, 1999-2000:17). The committees range from statutory bodies, to departmental committees, to community organisation committees and special interest groups committees.

Members of committees represent the policy of the Federation. If the policy does not state a matter that is being debated contributions have to be made in the spirit of the goals of the organisation. To ensure appropriate representation a Code of Ethics for all representatives of the organisation has been developed and the purpose of the code is described as follows:

The Code establishes the values, principles and standards of behaviour from all Representatives of Federation which includes all Councillors. It provides guidelines on how representatives are to conduct themselves when dealing with members of the public, fellow representatives, community groups, politicians, other Government Departments, other parties and businesses with the work of the Federation. (Report to Council from P&C Executive Officer, 1999).

The Code sets out clearly what the values of the organisation are as in the organisation’s preamble. It emphasises that representatives are to represent the organisation’s view and not their own opinions and that they should not contradict Federation policy in their representational duties. I have asked one of the interviewees whether there are any provisions to expel members if they do not observe these rules, and apparently there are not. From my observation comments are often prefaced with the sentence “P&C policy states...”. yet, just as often the speaker uses a personal example to illustrate the point. Both of these approaches demonstrate symbolic capital in this setting in that the personal example gives the impression of parents personally being knowledgeable and concerned at the level of the local school, while the organisational approach gives the indication that the person is well versed and connected to the organisation.

Direct advocacy occurs when a parent rings the Federation office and needs someone to speak to the school or the Department on their behalf. Most times these issues can be resolved by providing information, but sometimes the Federation has to take a strong advocacy position. In these circumstances a Federation representative may

actually get involved as a mediator at the request of the parent. Interestingly, the Federation did not keep a record of phone calls from parents at the time. Apparently, they do so now. The impression I received though was that the office received a lot of phone calls, some from parents, others from Councillors or departmental staff. Many times these issues related to association procedures and the management of canteens or other infrastructure issues related to P&C business.

The Federation also has quite a high media profile currently, which is a result of a decision taken at a conference in the mid-90s, to increase the membership. The President speaks on as many issues as possible related to the upbringing of children to ensure that the public understands the issues at stake and to ensure that the parent voice is heard. For the relationship with the Department, however, the media profile has not always been conducive to co-operative relationships as the Department felt exposed and undermined at times. However, currently, according to interviewees, relationships are relatively productive. There is at times collusion between the organisation and the Department in the face of a common threat. There has been unity in opposing the Federal government, as the following example illustrates. The Office of the Minister for Education and Training sent a letter of 'quiet appeal' to the parent organisations about Commonwealth School funding issues, it states: "if (parent organisation) is able to provide assistance in responding to Dr. Kemp's claims, it would be very much appreciated" Fax to President, 16/6/2000. On the 23/6/00 a follow up fax was received from the same office containing the letter sent to principals outlining the response of the NSW Minister to his federal counterpart about the proposed bill. In this case the advocacy role of the organisation and its, at other times questioned, potential to influence political leaders is recognised by the Department.

The P&C also works with other interest groups on joint advocacy activities, one of these being the group of three Federations. The others are FOSCO and the NSW Teachers Federation. Representatives of the three groups meet once per school terms or more often if needed, to discuss current issues of concern. While they have different constituents that they answer to, they have common concern as all three are concerned with education in public schools. In one of the minutes caucusing before meetings with ministers and senior departmental staff was suggested by the Teachers

Federation, both FOSCO and P&C accepted the idea (Report to Council by EO about Three Federations' meeting, 1999). Collaboration of this nature can be very attractive as it utilises the symbolic capital of having a large combined representative membership, giving the impression that many people support an idea.

In conclusion, advocacy activities in this organisation take various forms all of which are successful at times and less so at others, although success is not easy to measure in this case nor in the case of other advocacy groups. However, these activities do serve to build an image for the organisation, which makes it appear to be vibrant, involved and knowledgeable on education issues. The higher its positive profile, the more likely it will be supported by many parents which in turn would enrich its representativeness and increase the power it can exercise with power holders. As such, it operates within the regime of truth of advocacy organisations in a pluralist society that actively encourages notions of partnerships and dialogue among interest groups. Although actual effectiveness may well be a hegemonic myth.

As can be surmised from the description, this organisation is quite large and very complex in terms of its decision-making processes and the number of functions it undertakes to advocate on behalf of the education and welfare of children in Australian public schools. The second organisation is much smaller in scope, but not necessarily less effective in its advocacy, because it is equally represented and recognised by government and other stakeholders.

FEDERATION OF SCHOOL COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS (FOSCO)

The second organisation studied is much smaller and in fact the number of affiliated groups is a closely guarded secret. FOSCO's focus is on the early school years and includes pre-schools that are funded by the Department of Education and Training. FOSCO celebrated its 75th year since foundation at its conference in September 2001. At this very same conference a motion of dissolution was also passed due to the difficulties of forming an Executive committee of a workable size. The motion was defeated. However, the bringing of this motion to the conference triggered a

flurry of activities as the defeat of the motion indicated that delegates still felt that the organisation was valuable as a parent organisation and much needed. Interestingly, the response of DET was also one of panic and the Department offered financial resources to enhance the organisation's administrative structure. As pointed out elsewhere, from a departmental point of view, it is important to support parent organisations as they have publicly declared that parent and community representation is an essential ingredient in school decision-making, (see Chapter Two: Theory), however poorly they serve as evidence of true partnership. Interestingly, this organisation is portrayed by the Department as being well deserving of appreciation, although their numbers are small. It is held reportedly in high esteem by governmental staff and parent organisation activists including those from P&C and Teachers Federation. Two interviewees of the larger organisation suggested, however, that it suits the Department's purposes to commend the work of FOSCO in order to divide and set apart the two parent organisations, that is, set them in competition with each other.

For the purpose of this research a summary of the second organisation is provided modelled on the layout used for the first organisation. The summary is brief as operations in many ways are similar to the larger parent organisation as illustrated by Figure 5.2 overleaf.

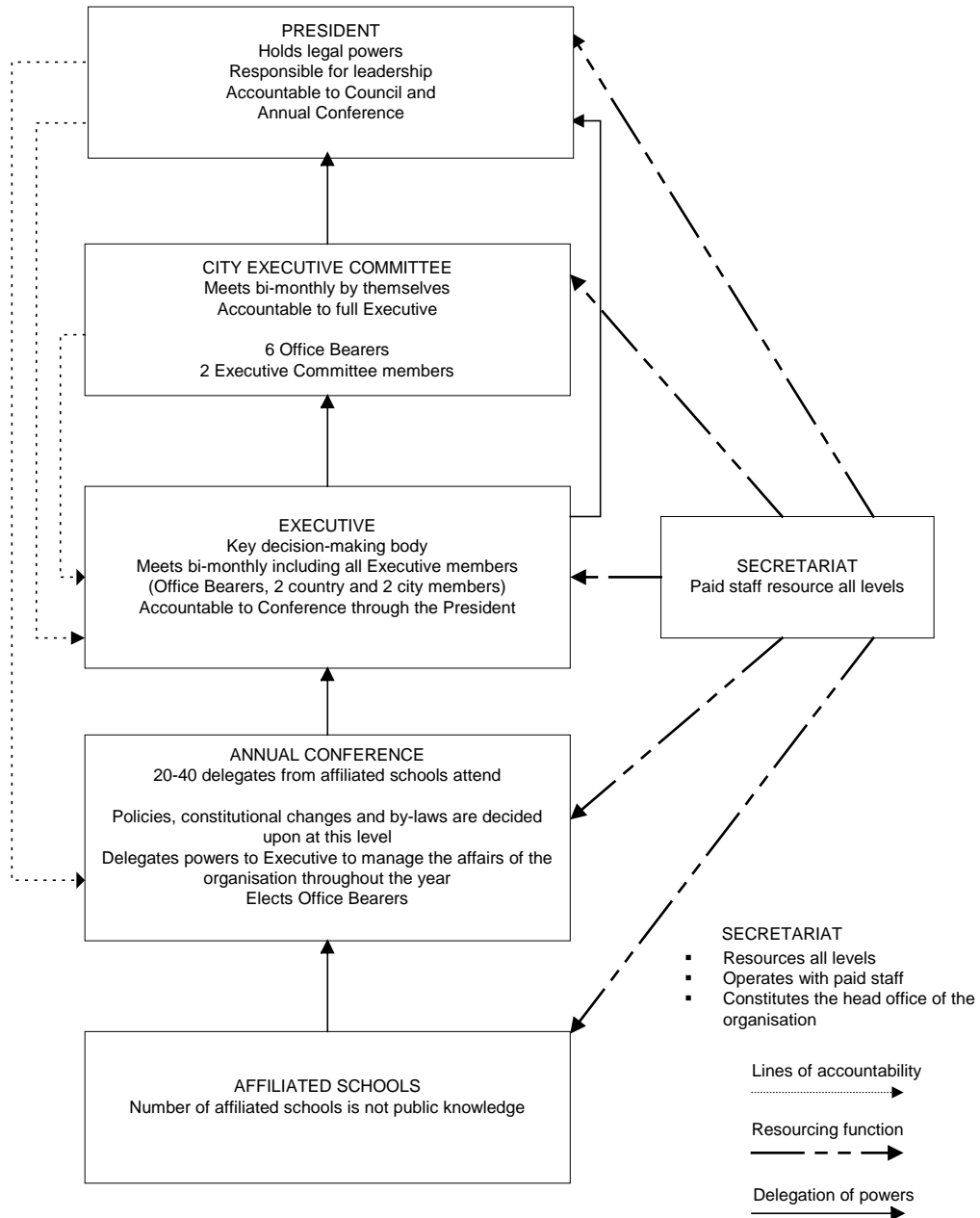
The objects of this organisation, which appear instead of a preamble, are:

- a) to promote the welfare of children in New South Wales government schools by bringing parents, members of the community, teaching staff and pupils into closer co-operation;
- b) to emphasise the importance of the early years of education;
- c) to assist clubs and to act on behalf of clubs when required;
- d) to promote parent education;
- e) to promote community participation in education decision-making;
- f) to bring about an interchange of ideas concerning the work of clubs and show practical sympathy with difficulties encountered;
- g) to advise the Minister on all matters relating to state schools.

For clarification, the word 'club' means any organisation affiliated as a member with FOSCO. Historically, this organisation has been set up to look at the needs of young children in the state school system. At the time of its formation schools were generally divided into infants and primary schools or sections of a school were dedicated as infants and primary sections. FOSCO then was concerned particularly

with infants schools. It was very common to have an infants club at schools, which met separately from the P&C committee, generally in the mornings.

Figure 5.2 Organisational Chart of the New South Wales Federation of School Community Organisations (FOSCO)



The structure and terminology of this organisation is very similar to that of the P&C. Policy decisions are made by affiliated delegates at the yearly conference and the Executive committee enacts the recommendations, attends meetings and follows up action items. As the organisation is much smaller they only have an Executive committee and no Council. They meet monthly as a City Executive committee and quarterly for a weekend that includes Country Executive committee members. Their office is situated in an Inner City school and staffed by two part-time paid employees. The organisation is for all purposes equal to the larger parent organisation, that is, in terms of attendance at ministerial and other relevant committees, negotiating with the three Federations, attending Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) conferences and so on.

As the organisation does not have a large Council meeting from which to draw diverse opinions of parents, it organises (once per term) a general meeting that all parents of school children can attend. As with all of their meetings attendance is quite limited. However, on each occasion I attended (four meetings altogether) new parents were present.

Attendance at yearly conferences fluctuated between 35 and 50 delegates and full Executive meetings consisted of 9-12 people. The City Executive consisted of 8 people on average over the past four years of observation. All members of Executive at the time of observation were women. At conferences the occasional man attended and at general meetings I only observed a male parent once. This maybe due to fathers being less involved generally with the schooling of younger children, but also with the fact that this organisation's profile is quite low in schools for the above reason. In terms of the ages of involved parents newcomers are often from primary schools and younger people, while those who have been part of the organisation for a while are older and have children who left schools or are in High school. Two people already have grandchildren.

The organisation has a policy and constitutional document that guides its action. As such it fulfils the same purpose as the P&C handbook in that it has policy sections, meeting procedures, constitution and by-laws.

Meetings of this organisation, be they conference or Executive meetings were much more relaxed in terms of their procedures, being able to listen to everybody's point of view and voting only at the annual conference after debate was heard, adhering to a minimum of procedures. There were no lengthy speeches by movers and seconders and there were few restrictions of how many contributions one could make. Paid staff was seated next to the President taking minutes of proceedings. As a student and parent I felt much more comfortable in this setting as it was possible to relate to all the participants and they showed a keen interest in me as a parent, not just as a student. Overall the organisation appeared to be less hierarchical with no sense of people trying to make a name for themselves to gain a position of power. On all day meetings, the members would bring in food for them all to have lunch together. There was a sense of a strong bond between the women that extended to any newcomers as well. While this group was also dominated by middle class women, it would have been easier to find a rapport with these women for people from other backgrounds, mainly because these women were friendly and believed in simple procedures. They encouraged anyone to have their say, by being openly encouraging and having discussions with people in the breaks, by actively approaching them and introducing themselves. The size of the meeting would have facilitated this process also.

There seemed to be much less adversity in this group against the Department, although there was much discussion about the Department's position on issues. However, this group saw itself more in a partnership with the Department rather than being adversaries. It appeared that this form of relationship was successful as the group was recognised and valued by the Department. However, as mentioned above, this acceptance may have been expedient for the Department.

The organisation has now disbanded and closed its doors in June 2003. On all accounts the organisation was no longer viable given the declining numbers of parents that were able to commit their time as volunteers of the organisation.

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS (ACSSO)

At the federal level there is the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), which is the national body of school parent organisations. State organisations are affiliated to this national body. Both NSW parent organisations are members. ACSSO's current members are eleven state organisations who represent parents from all States and Territories. The organisation is funded through its fees from affiliated members and a grant it receives from the Commonwealth, a so called 'Grant-in-Aid' grant. The purpose of the organisation is to represent the interests of all children in government schools in Australia.

ACSSO was formed in 1947 to develop national parent organisation policies in education and to represent these policies and the interests of its affiliates at the national level (ACSSO Website www.acsso.org.au/acsso.html).

ACSSO has an Executive Committee, which manages the affairs of the organisation. Currently, New South Wales is represented quite well in the Executive structure of ACSSO as the President, the Treasurer and one Vice President are all members of NSW parent organisations. Interestingly, the President's and Treasurer's position are held by men in a situation where both parent organisations are heavily dominated by women. Also, these two key positions are held currently by the Federation of Parent and Citizens' in NSW. One could therefore assume that the direction of this organisation is somewhat influenced by the leadership taken by New South Wales. And indeed the NSW P&C is also one of the largest parent organisations in Australia.

Policies are decided at the annual conference where each organisation can send a number of delegates. As such the structure of operation is quite similar to the other two organisations introduced in this chapter. Policies however, have to go through a process of consultation with each member organisation before they can be taken to the ACSSO conference. Both State organisations also schedule regular ACSSO reports in their Council and Executive meetings. In terms of Gender Equity policies ACSSO does have a policy which has been recently revisited to contribute to the

Federal Inquiry into the Education of Boys. The topic was a major item developed and discussed at the year 2000 Annual Conference of ACSSO and its content is discussed in more detail in later sections. Both organisations gave input into those discussions although the FOSCO representative was more vocal and influential in this matter as she was part of the earlier policy development process on gender equity.

Overall there is a strong advocacy focus that operates in an overtly political environment where the maintenance of a regime of truth around representativeness of grass roots parents and the power of advocacy groups to influence power holders in a pluralist society, is vital to be maintained. The tension between centralisation and devolution of decision-making to local schools is hardly recognised by the parent groups as their focus is towards negotiation with the Department and the central machine of bureaucracy. During my time there, I have not seen any formal activities that would empower parents to foster change at the local level and for them as a group to be able to increase their influence vis-à-vis school staff and principals. However, I heard from many that the knowledge gained and the connections made with influential people from working within the P&C and FOSCO at the state level gave them personally an instrument to question the principal. “Clever principals have learned to reckon with me and now they ask me first about my opinion before they implement anything”, said one of the interviewees.

CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS OF THE GENDER EQUITY DEBATE

This is the key section of the thesis that deals with gender equity, parent organisations' position on gender equity, the events and debates that have occurred around this issue, including public debates in the media, and situating the debate theoretically, around the notions of positional goods, cultural capital and regimes of truth.

Research of documents and preliminary interviews with parent organisations revealed that the year 1993 was significant in terms of gender equity, particularly the needs of boys. It was at this conference that for the first time a motion (item 19) was presented that pertained to the schooling of boys specifically, in pointing out disadvantages they appear to suffer in the education system. What followed from that debate was a vigorous promotion of the need for a boys' education policy, lead predominantly by a key staff member of the organisation. Representative work was conducted as per constitutional processes, but media articles of the organisation spawned considerable interest from the press, the public and academia. By 1996, after the release of the NSW Gender Equity Kit by DET, the organisation invited a number of key 'men's advocates' for a discussion meeting to gather material that could be usefully included in the new Kit, which the leadership of the organisation at the time, saw as inadequate. Personal frictions occurred between those who advocated for resources for boys' education and those who looked for a more moderate approach to boys' education and who maintained that issues of disadvantage are linked to the nexus of class, ethnicity, indigeneity and rural settings for both, boys and girls. Notable is the absence of promoting the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* in a similarly vigorous form of advocacy by the leadership of the organisation, a fact confirmed by interviewees.

THE GENDER EQUITY DEBATE IN PARENT ORGANISATIONS

In this section, the actual 1993 P&C Conference speeches are presented as these lend themselves to analysis of the various ‘camps’ that evolved around this issue. That year a number of items for the education of girls were on the agenda, but also item 19 that pertained to the education of boys also. Item 19 was a controversial item, because it raised boys’ issues at a time when ‘gender equity’ primarily revolved around girls. The interviewee who put item 19 forward explained that in 1992 a comprehensive policy on education and girls was debated and passed at Conference and it was then that she decided that she will come back with motions on boys’ education the following year, as the statements made at the 1992 conference did neglect to consider the needs of boys in education. She herself had three boys and at that time had at least one still in primary school. She felt that boys’ needs in schooling were generally not recognised although “all three of my boys did well”. As explained in Chapter Six: Parent Organisations and Decision-Making, item 19 was moved after a debate that in effect deferred items 10 and 11 for discussion after item 19. Item 10 and 11 did change as a result of discussion of item 19, in that the text is now more inclusive of boys’ and girls’ education issues, and in fact these three items are still reflected in the 2000-2001 P&C handbook, thus confirming how central the 1993 debate was for gender equity policy in this organisation.

Item 10, reproduced below, highlights (in bold) the changes that were achieved due to debate held during conference.

Item 10:

Gender does not determine the capacity to learn. Girls and boys should be valued equally in all aspects of schooling. Providing a high quality of education **for both boys and** girls is a mainstream professional responsibility for all educators. Schooling should reflect the entitlement of all **men and** women, in their own right, to personal respect, to economic security and to participate in and influence over decisions which will affect their lives (P&C Conference Minutes, 1993).

Item 11 lists a number of gender equity policy statements. But, interjections like those illustrated in this section, had the result that original motions were changed to wording such as “development of gender equity strategies” instead of “development of provision for the educational needs of girls”; inserted the word men and the word

boys instead of using the word ‘girls’ and ‘women’ alone (P&C Conference Agenda, 1993; P&C Handbook, 2000-2001).

Two groups of supporters (leaning towards girls’ education or alternatively boys’ education) were central to the debate on gender equity and their positions were quite different, although not necessarily diametrically opposed. At the surface level they did support some of the tenets brought forward by each side, as illustrated below. It is noticeable that both speakers in their key speech did not include a reference as to what sex their children were. The reason for this is quite simple, the audience would have considered this information as negative capital as they would have thought that the speaker’s arguments are related to self-interests. Self-interest in this cultural field has negative connotations because the organisation is perceived as being an altruistic, volunteer-based organisation. In another cultural field self-interest might be entirely acceptable. Both speakers were at pains to ensure that the audience understood that their interests are related to the school community as a whole, if not society, in other words, that they are concerned with the common good. This is a regime of truth that relates to this organisation’s ethos that they are advocating for the benefit of all children in public schools, thus the discourse in this organisation is one of social justice and representing the ‘common good’. Surveillance, in a Foucauldian sense, is practised with people disobeying the dominant code being undermined and ostracised, see Chapter Six: Parent Organisations and Decision-Making.

Interestingly, the two camps referred to different discourses in arguing their position. One subscribed very much to the ‘scientific’ paradigm using statistics to aggregate numbers that made the impression of something being terribly amiss. It used as the centrepiece of the argument the End of Year Awards of presentation night (see speech below). These awards are endowed with cultural capital in Australian society as it identifies those students who achieved the best educational and at times behavioural outcomes of the year and these awards are indeed very desirable and positional goods (Marginson, 1997). Using the Awards as an example also appeals to an emotional level of each parent hoping each year that their child may be receiving one of these coveted awards. This ‘scientific’ approach, which can be interpreted as positivistic, is endowed with cultural capital by being more easily understood by the audience as it has been embraced for some time and can be very persuasive on the surface. For

example, statistical figures of some sort are regularly quoted in newspaper articles and the scientific enterprise is held in high esteem in the population generally.

The second camp deployed as cultural capital the feminist understanding many P&C Councillors would have developed during the era of fighting for better education for girls. It used more qualitative material and appealed to a discourse of disadvantage, as such it used as cultural capital an appeal to the social consciousness of community activists, citing those they considered as disadvantaged pupils due to their racial and socio-economic background, for example.

One speaker focused on large aggregates while the other disaggregated the material. As such they worked with different approaches, both of which appeal to some more than others and are endowed in this situation with more or less cultural capital depending on who they manage to reach. As such one cannot necessarily anticipate what constitutes cultural capital at a given time. It is dependent in this case on the audience and their values. However, given the appeal of statistics, the influence of liberal feminism outlined earlier, the fact that Conference had some debate about boys and education in 1992 it is likely that the idea of boys as a large disadvantaged group appealed to many. The following speech segment indicates this:

it's (the motion) quite refreshing as it expresses a view I personally held very close, but was too nervous to raise at the P&C, as there are very few males on the P&C (laughter and clapping) I don't want to loose the support you see...ahm,

The last sentence is a humorous reference to 'profiling' as discussed in the last chapter. He continues to say that

when looking at my daughter making outstanding progress in school, and then looking at my very bright son who's behaviour really needs to be modified" he is "certainly most grateful that someone has brought this up at this conference.

It is poignant to notice here that movers were careful not to upset those who believe that girls have special needs and used an ameliorating tactic that aims at reducing the perception of a focus on one group only, thus appearing as if there was no bias either way, which in essence avoids gender equity becoming a desirable positional good. It also tries to use phrases that are devoid of cultural capital in that it appears to give equal weight to what can be perceived as two sides. This latter assertion is also

important to notice in a later context where a parent suggested that the word 'student' might as well replace the words boys and girls. This notion was rejected because people in the end wanted to have the opportunity to provide an emphasis on the sexes, a strategy that enabled the boys' supporters to actively promote the issues of education for boys at the exclusion of girls.

The proponents of girls' education were also careful not to alienate those who spoke up for boys. They used comments such as "I would like to congratulate (X) Public School for moving this motion. I would like to support the motion, but also suggest an amendment" or "I too would like to commend (X) for bringing up this issue". To congratulate the movers of the original motion is designed to reassure them that they are supported and that the doxa of participatory practises where everyone's opinion is valued highly remains in place.

This is the speech that the interviewee put forward to the 1993 Conference for consideration, favouring a gender equity policy for boys:

Debate on item 19:

Mover: As foreshadowed, we do wish to raise this particular item with the ahm, slight change in wording on the forth line to make it appropriate to a policy item which then will be raised in general business this afternoon. Our item, (sigh), is concerned with gender equity and we would like gender equity to be considered at a fairly broad basis. We consider that at the moment gender equity is considered in rather a narrow way. Our education system is based on the cognition of equality of opportunity, quality of opportunity in some parts is consume, ahm, confused with equal outcomes and still is sometimes in educational debates. Equality of opportunity in fact means giving an equal chance of achievement according to someone's capacity. Be it in the gifted and talented range or the learning difficulties and disability range. Provision of resources and programs based on different needs identify the difference in children to enable them to succeed. Recognising that children are different and have different needs, which must be addressed in educational programs, doesn't mean that any group of children is less valuable than any other group. Just that they have different needs, whether it is physical or intellectual ability or disability or any other kind of difference. We started to realise that some of those different needs in fact stem from difference in gender. What's perhaps starting to come through is the insistence of boys and girls being the same and that it's only the way they look that is different and what a guilt trip that has been for parents.

In the opinion of the speaker, guilt feelings arose for parents because they might have perceived a difference between boys and girls and treated them differently, according to their sex, while believing or being made to believe by the dominant discourse that they are the same and should be treated the same. This concern links with discussion

around gender difference and the politics of difference as examined in Chapter Four: Setting the Scene. The speaker further elaborated:

Perhaps what we need is in fact that all children, boys and girls, must be valued equally and must have equal rights and opportunities in society. Well, recent research is now highlighting gender based differences and we do a disservice to both, boys and girls, if we try to insist that they are the same and that they learn in the same ways, desire the same goals and achieve the same ends. It disadvantages both boys and girls, because it does not recognise the differences and cater for those differences. Present gender equity policies need to go much further in addressing the needs of girls and recognising that boys have needs and addressing those needs too. For example, many of these so called gender equity initiatives have in fact been, have simply been, affirmative action policies for girls, essentially based on girls fitting into male models of society. The worthwhile jobs are male jobs, the valuable jobs, they are defined by males, and given value by males. Girls are as good as boys, so we have to have equal numbers of engineers and bus drivers and fitters and turners. In school this translates to the cry for girls to do more maths and science. Surely it is just as undesirable to make girls feel inadequate if they don't want to do physics as it is not to provide sufficient encouragement for those who do. Gender equity is not just affirmative action for girls, but it must mean equality of opportunity for both, boys and girls. To achieve this their different needs must be understood and met. We have already accepted that girls are disadvantaged in various ways in the education system. Strategies have been developed to address some of these areas of disadvantage, yet even the girls' education strategies are quite limited in addressing the real needs of girls. We have not yet recognised that boys may be suffering disadvantage in the education system. Ahm,...

It is assumed in this speech that boys and girls inherently have needs that differ from each other. The above passage is interesting because it critiques the liberal feminist actions' for treating males as the universal human and encouraging girls to aspire to become like boys by getting them to choose subjects that have higher rewards attached and where education delivers the necessary goods for achieving privileged occupational positions. She claims that the discourse of sameness has provided a disservice for both sexes by not recognising differences, yet her discourse of difference is binary also in that it does not recognise that there are differences within groups of boys or girls. Research shows, though, that differences within boys and girls are greater than between boys and girls (Connell, 2002; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). In that sense, this speaker is just as guilty of only engaging in a binary discourse of difference, as the proponents of the girls' gender equity strategies have been in her opinion. In the interview this speaker used the analogy of a 'crab claw' to describe the gender differences in education between boys and girls. Yet, with regard to sexual harassment, which was a prominent focus in gender equity policies at the time of the interview, she pointed out "that there is a lot more harassment between boys than from boys to girls, but by calling it sexual harassment you only think boys to girls" She claims that the term 'sexual and sex-based harassment' are used to influence

people's thinking towards protecting girls, when there would be neutral terms such as 'bullying' or 'harassment' that would adequately describe the issue and are inclusive of boys who often suffer greater harassment than girls. She said: "it's all ideology to keep girls' issues on the political agenda". The strategy of linking a term with an idea of common perception shapes people's understanding of a term. Since women are generally perceived as victims of sexual harassment and men as perpetrators, to use these terms in the context of schooling creates an association of girls being harassed. The reference to ideology is aimed at those with influence in the department who have been dominating the gender equity strategies, in the views of this interviewee. Yet, as education and gender policies formally recognise, one of the most common forms of sex-based harassment is the bullying of boys, especially boys that are effeminate, associate with or defend girls (Kenway and Willis, 1997; Collins, et. al., 1996).

After two minutes extension of time the speaker continued and put forward statistics that appeal to the rational mind of scientists, while being linked to a desirable and positional good where the enjoyment of it by one is to the detriment of the other, in that resources are limited and this speaker appears to think that gender equity strategies will deliver necessary advantages to boys in an environment of competition:

To illustrate the need for an education strategy designed specifically to meet the needs of boys as well as girls we offer a number of examples which range from the local and anecdotal to state-wide figures. Take presentation night of awards at our particular school, which is a large school of 750 children. Figures have been collated for six groups of prizes over the last four years. These are the class prizes for four grades year three to six. Special awards such as citizenship, technology and so on and a special program usually RFF program. That creates 24 lots of prizes over four years. The numbers of boys and girls receiving ahm, prizes, ahm, in each of those groups, ah, sorry in 24 groups over four years was that girls have received an equal number in four of the groups, girls have dominated in 17 of the groups and boys have dominated in only three. The proportions in total numbers have been roughly sixty forty in all groups. The question is why? Perhaps girls perform better at primary school level? If this is the case, perhaps the boys need help. Another the explanation is, could be, that boys are consistently underachieving in this particular school, again, then the boys need help. Another explanation is the criteria for selection for these awards. Are these things that girls are particularly good at such as co-operative behaviour, presentation, neatness and so forth of their work. If this is the case, perhaps boys need affirmative action.

This paragraph shows the importance of Awards as a positional good, because the Awards are used to make a case that boys are underachieving in comparison to girls. The speaker also refers to the habitus girls may bring to schooling in that she indicates that girls' attributes are better matched to the requirement of schools as an institution. In Bourdieu's (1984) analysis, a difference in habitus between boys and girls is

claimed here in that girls' responses to schooling are seen as more adequate by nature of their socialisation process and their habitus they acquired through conditioning when growing up

The habitus, an objective relationship between two objectivities, enables an intelligible and necessary relation to be established between practises and a situation, the meaning of which is produced by the habitus through categories of perception and appreciation that are themselves produced by an observable social condition (Bourdieu, 1984:101).

There is a clear indication by the speaker here of gender equity being viewed as a positional good by calling for a redress of this perceived imbalance between girls and boys through applying gender equity strategies to boys. In the interview with me this interviewee reiterated and emphasised how the present imbalance in girls receiving far more awards than boys irked her and how she thought that this indicates that there is something amiss and that boys are disadvantaged. In the interview she argued that boys are having difficulties in a number of areas:

look at reading recovery, literacy issues, any behavioural issues, it's always boys who are in trouble. Girls are well behaved, neat and tidy and so on....Girls have these attributes everyone would want, quiet sitting on a chair, co-operative learning and so on.

To the questions about class, NESB, rural and indigenous disadvantage she agrees that this might well be the case, but she feels strongly that the category of gender is valid because she suspects that on average boys are more disadvantaged than girls.

The allocated time for the mover to speak elapsed, but the seconder (male) brought up another point that relates to the cultural capital of boys and girls where boys seem to bring negative capital to what is required in schooling, according to this speaker.

It is also very much in the interest of girls and women that male gender stereotypes and expectations are squarely addressed in all facets of school life. A series of male stereotypes were identified in a gender equity program of catholic schools, which are also particularly prevalent in the media and they need challenging. These include: boys should be aggressive and stand up to themselves, bullies are heroes, boys should not show any soft emotions, they should use put downs to intimidate students, boys are not as caring and nurturing as girls, boys are not as sensitive in particular in caring for children, boys should dominate and act with contempt against women and girls, boys friendships with each other should remain on a superficial level, boys must be strong rather than athletic, boys should not see parenting as an alternative to a career or other occupations, boys must succeed at all cost because they are the future breadwinners, boys must keep their problems to themselves. I'll finish up in saying that male stereotypes for boys are just as much a problem as female stereotypes are to girls. So, I commend our motion to you, thank you (some clapping, reluctantly).

This speaker appeals to those who may support girls knowing that it will be difficult to evoke a shift of opinion in those who advocate for girls, but he also advocates for a change of how boys are being viewed. He is conciliatory in his approach seeking to appeal to the person who most strongly represented arguments in favour of girls whom he knows well and who in fact felt betrayed by not having been informed of the motions being put forward (interviewee comment). He is suggesting that the current hegemonic masculinity is not appropriate any longer in this society and that boys need assistance to become different, meaning they need to be endowed with the same habitus as girls, to be successful at school.

A motion was put forward to use the word 'student' instead of 'boys and girls'. Subsequent discussion saw a rejection of this amendment on the grounds that "it diminishes the flavour of the original motion". Another speaker argued that

the motion before us specifically relates to gender that is to boys and girls and I think at this stage Australian Equal Opportunity has got past the stage of initial development and I think X's motion is true equal opportunity as it addresses boys and girls equally and so why not name them as boys and girls as they are entitled.

This rejection links with a positional economy, where the value of a good is diminished if it is generally available. The term 'student' would have not provided an emphasis on boys and girls. To name both sexes individually allows a focus on one or the other and in order to improve their position within the market of education; thus the decision is based on a positional goods sentiment. That motion was defeated on the ground put forward by the speaker below.

Another speaker raised the issue of difference between the sexes again and also argued against the term 'students' by saying:

I am speaking against the amendment, in favour of the original motion and also against the foreshadowed motion (laughter in the audience). Yes, there's been a strong move in education for girls and it is starting to show. Girls are starting to get much better in mathematics than before and even sometimes better than boys do in mathematics. There has also been an improvement in girls hm, proportion of girls and boys in entering universities, in fact a higher proportion of girls are entering universities than in fact boys do. So, that's significant. Even though part of it is a trick as universities have extended the idea of what a university is and universities have now usurped Colleges of Advanced Education, which also included teachers colleges. So, universities also include now a fairly large number of teacher trainees and this profession has been dominated by women always. So the increase of women in universities isn't quite what it looks like. Nevertheless, there have been distinct improvements in the position of women and it's in the later years of employment where the dominance of males is

still great. Another shift that has occurred is that there is much more of a class difference in the extent that women are disadvantaged. There has been some class difference in that the daughters of professionals are much more likely to enter the professions and management careers than young daughters of working class people would. But, that has considerably extended now, the equity strategies we have gone in for has particularly helped the daughters of the wealthy and influential not those who have lower social backgrounds. So, the question that comes up is, is the point where we no longer need to talk about sex differences and we only need to talk about class differences. I don't think that this point has quite been reached. There is still sufficient disadvantage for women that we should continue to have a strategy that reflects the differences between men and women and not in favour of excluding the terms boys or girls or pretending that the differences between them don't exist because you have the differences before you, so my final point is 'vive la difference'! (laughter in the audience).

There is a reference here to the cultural capital of the upper/middle class girls having been instrumental in girls' achievements, meaning that gender equity strategies have advanced those that had most relevant cultural capital already. The same argument is made for the boys by those who suggest that one needs to look at those most disadvantaged, regardless of gender.

A number of procedural motions followed before another woman at the centre of the gender equity debate was able to make her points that suggested that boys' education needs ought to be linked to the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools*.

I too would like to commend (X) for bringing up this issue. I sat on, as representative of the Federation on the Equality of the Sexes, the Education Ministerial Advisory committee and I can assure you although there were many actions for girls there was just as much concern within the committee at the time for the boys who were in all the boys schools or the boys who were prevented if you like for taking those subjects that were not seen as boys oriented subjects and I do remember the great deal of debate that went on at the time between members of the ministry and that certain schools were not offering a full range of subjects for boys as much as girls only schools were not offering a full range of subjects for girls. So, hm, I think that we shouldn't take the view all the time that there has been an either/or. It is important that we recognise the historical perspective of why there has been a girls' strategy, which as X said, has been rather successful and it is time, timely that we have boys understand what's it all about and what their roles will be. I think that the action item would be strengthened very much for instance if we took account of the fact that the Australian Education Council and national advisory committee is indeed developing strategies for boys as it relates to the national policy on the education of girls. I think we need to have a look at that and see exactly what these strategies are. I don't believe its open for , hm...The recommendation at this stage has been that a number of states will develop a framework providing advice for the ministers across Australia for strategies for boys that match up the strategies that have been developed for girls. I think that's the context of the amendment, which (friend) has already foreshadowed and will firm up this particular resolution.

This speaker mentioned the name of a previous speaker who is not necessary supporting her cause in this debate, but by mentioning the speaker's name in a positive context she indicates that she respects him and all those who believe in what

he was saying. This is a strategy to be heard and to gain respect. It assists in creating the regime of truth of participatory democracy, that is, that one is interested to hear other's opinions and that contributions are valued in this organisation. It assures the audience that one will remain courteous, supportive and rationally focused on the issues at hand. In short it reassures the audience. This person also used the opportunity to introduce a new idea when she spoke to the motion, an idea that she knows her friend will put forward in form of an amendment later. As this amendment was disallowed at this point in the debate she assisted her friend by advancing the argument in an allowable framework of debate. These alignments among people are known in the audience, as almost half of the audience consists of Councillors that meet regularly throughout the year. It also constitutes relations of power that operate within the regime of truth framework of the organisation.

Debate was intense over the amendment, which proposed to link the motion of a boys' education policy to the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools*. This was seen as subordination of boys' issues and rejected by the supporters of the original motion. The key argument for linking the motion to the national policy was that it would "strengthen X's motion for boys" as a formal framework existed within which gender equity issues could be addressed. An earlier speaker supported this sentiment in saying "that the amendment would enable the Federation to take a position on the ACER paper when it was released later in the year". A woman, who acted like a mediator, asked X whether they would be happy to accept the amendment or otherwise "the other thing (amendment) could be an addendum". This suggestion was objected to on the grounds of lack of consistency of proceedings as "yesterday, no amendments were put for approval to those who moved the motion". The suggestion of the mover consenting to the amendment indicates the need for an amicable resolution of this problem, a role that this person often plays and which I also recognised in the interview with her.

The original mover responded that they do not know anything about what is included in the national policy on girls and that their motion is straightforward and "could in fact lead to the acceptance of national policies being developed". The seconder of the amendment answered, that "of course the amendment does not guarantee anything..." The chair interjected and contended that one cannot incorporate anything into a

motion that movers know nothing about. It became an issue of trust then, which the mover of the amendment clearly expected to have. In some sense, trust in her was confirmed by Council when electing her as the gender equity representative in September following that Conference. From my observation, this trust was justified in the sense that she always supported the cause for boys to some degree in that she clearly looked at disadvantage in either groups of boys or groups of girls (correspondence and transcripts of organisation). This focus on the most disadvantaged was a reflection of the dominant paradigm of the leadership at the time, but not necessarily of the key staff member who was prepared to see boys as a disadvantaged group as a whole. He is a father of a boy and in the interview he explained that he was most upset at girls having wonderful opportunities in his son's school that were not available to boys.

A new speaker subsequently felt that the amendment was contrary to the original motion (a move that seems to be used frequently as a similar motion was put forward for the amendment above of including the word 'students') because it subordinated X's motion to the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools*. The chair rejected this on the grounds that the audience did not know what was in the national policy at all.

When asked about whether her amendment includes all points of the motion the mover of the amendment referred to the preamble only, but said: "I've only moved this (motion) to support X and to show that we are on the cutting edge of this issue". A woman from the floor asked then whether there is anything in the national policy that "tracks the boys' issues..." The mover repeated her initial points of why she wanted this amendment and she sounded somewhat aggressive in doing so and there was a lot of murmuring in the audience. One male delegate felt he had not heard enough of the arguments around the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* as he considered that the speaker was cut short and he felt that the audience did not know enough about the issues. This was rejected using a process of a dissenting motion on the chair. The chair was reinstated however by the conference, thus rejecting the motion of dissent and then X's motion was carried. There was lots of cheering, laughter and clapping and everyone went for lunch after an 'adjournment for lunch' motion was overruled twice. There was clear discomfort during the end of

the session about reaching an impasse, an indication of the unstated regime of truth that common sense should prevail, that democratic procedures assist in reaching decisions amicably and that everyone is concerned about the well being of children and therefore have the same goal. Embedded in that is the unspoken assumption that a common goal provides a common basis for decision making. The discomfort may also be a reflection of a cultural understanding embedded in habitus that instils a belief that conflicting opinions can be solved by reasoning and a discourse of rationality, an assumption that is greatly influential in Western society (Ritzer, 1988).

In the 1993 debate there was also an action item for curriculum measures with regard to gender equity. Altogether there were two policy items on gender equity and two action items in that year. Interestingly, from that Conference one paragraph that focuses on girls only still remained by the year 2000, which is the following policy statement:

Strategies to improve the quality of education for girls should be based on an understanding that girls are not a homogenous group. Priority should be given to meeting the specific needs of those groups most requiring support to benefit from schooling; such as Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, girls from LBOTE (Language Backgrounds Other than English), those who live in remote areas, and girls who may be at risk of not completing their secondary education (P&C Federation Handbook 2001:48).

This is interesting on a number of accounts. It shows that the audience was not ready in 1993 to look at the differences within groups of boys, but rather wanted to ensure boys' needs were addressed as a whole, that is, they wanted a boys' education strategy. In terms of positional goods, they wanted to ensure that the boys who are failing at the top level, that is, have lower HSC results than girls, will receive attention as opposed to only those who are at risk of having lower educational achievements due to their circumstances in society. They wanted to ensure that lack of achievement was investigated as a gender issue rather than as a class, rural, cultural and language background issue. It is also interesting to see this one policy statement that addresses girls' needs only in the light of the many submissions of the *Enquiry into the Education of Boys* (2000), which proposed that some boys are more disadvantaged than others related to those dimensions alluded to in the above policy statement. It appears that it is acceptable to look at other variables that influence girls' educational

success, while for boys it is still an approach of looking at the whole cohort of boys for improvements.

Interestingly, the 1996-1997 P&C handbook does not include some of the 1993 statements, which did appear again by 1998 and the year 2000. In fact there appears to be a Girls' Education Strategy only in 1996/1997, yet some items do include boys and girls, others clearly do not, but they do so again in later years. However, all three action items as opposed to policy items, do include boys and girls. This situation is entirely possible as action items have to be reviewed after two years and policies may be only infrequently updated. Interviewees suggested that sometimes policy and action items passed at conference directly oppose another policy or action item and "nobody seems to monitor whether it all makes sense at the end".

In summary, the fact that many of the policies in the year 2000 originated in 1993 shows that my somewhat extended use of the debate of 1993 Annual Conference of the P&C is entirely justified and that the debate is reflective of the organisation's thinking on gender equity policies. There were later incidences of action items being moved and at times discussions were heated, but outcomes were not as far reaching in terms of policy as by and large the policy seems to cover what the organisation is comfortable with. Looking at it from a positional goods point of view, this is entirely plausible because the effectiveness of the policy is reduced by it being broad, far-reaching and inclusive. It targets all gender groups equally about most aspects of social and educational life, so that specific targeting of one group or another is not likely, or alternatively, any Councillor, Executive member or staff can focus on aspects that are important to them as occurred at the time with there being an almost exclusive focus on boys as a result to the 1993 discussions. The policy also managed to establish equilibrium between the 'warring' parties, although this did not apply to some of the divisions created by the action of some members and staff of the organisation, see Chapter Six: Parent Organisations and Decision-Making.

ADVOCACY ACTIONS OF PARENT ORGANISATIONS REGARDING GENDER EQUITY

The P&C together with the key staff member promoted the education issues surrounding boys with enthusiasm following the gender equity debate of the 1993 conference. A number of press releases originated from the staff member and the President was also available for some media interviews. But, by and large, the staff member played a very strong role largely due to his own interests in the matter. This was confirmed by interviewees, who also saw as one of the reasons for his high media profile the fact that the President of the time lived in rural New South Wales and was not always easily available. Nevertheless, this is clearly an issue where the key staff member was more active than usual as his own statement below illustrates:

Media attention was forthcoming from major dailies in NSW as well as from radio. Our ABC radio interviews were syndicated nationally and my President and I had the great thrill of doing a twenty minute telephone hookup with the Perth ABC Drive Time program (P&C document of Men's Conference Speech, 10/12/03).

The staff member also reported, that the federation has been invited to give evidence before the State Upper House and Commonwealth House of Representatives especially regarding violence and violence in schools in particular. The NSW State Opposition showed interest also and "we have furnished it with lots of research and reading material in the hope that it will develop an appropriate policy for boys in schools...". This statement indicates that the organisation and some key individuals particularly took the opportunity to promote boys in education issues despite the resolution of the P&C 1993 Conference deciding that gender equity strategies needed to address boys and girls issues.

The key staff member spoke publicly at conferences about the issue of Boys' Education. At a Men's Conference on 10 December 1993, he presented the views of parents and the Federation to the audience. The terminology used and the language arguments were framed in was strong. Statements such as

Parents are deeply concerned about the schooling of boys. ...the understanding of boys and the limiting, some may argue strait-jacketing, effects of traditional maleness is only beginning to emerge". "Boys are much less able – when compared with girls of a similar age – to express themselves effectively in extended written and verbal ways". "Boys who apply themselves

diligently to their class and homework are often castigated by their peers as 'wusses'. ...Anthropologically, this tribe of beautiful young boys needs more members...because, at the moment, they are floundering in isolation. They need all the advocates they can find! (P&C document of speech at Men's Conference, 10/12/03).

These statements allude to issues of hegemonic masculinity and how it limits boys' participation in schooling and the roles they see for themselves in society (Connell, 2000; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). The statement is emotive in its expression appealing to an audience of largely men about the very 'tragic' situation of boys, using language that is enhanced with cultural capital when presented to this audience that included reportedly groups of men that subscribed to 'the lost tribal chief' that men used to be, which is essentially a position of biological determinism or naturalism (Alsop et. al., 2002). However, a published paper on the parents' views (Beckett, 1994:45), that was compiled with the input of the above cited staff member, summarised the position of parent organisations differently:

Given parents' concerns about boys and their problems, they want to see the work on girls' education extended (to boys). As stated earlier, parents want some research undertaken into the educational and social experiences of boys, and they want a report that records what boys and their parents and teachers are saying about boys' education in 1994-5, like *Listening to Girls*.

Here the position is one of reconciling the different views in parent organisations and while a plea for looking at boys' education issues is made, there is a determination not to lose the focus on girls, a determination that was not necessarily shared by the key staff member. The two statements illustrate the cultural capital associated with the settings that these excerpts are drawn from. To publish one's opinion in print calls for a considered approach based on facts, if possible, because cross-referencing is a distinct possibility, while the conference setting allows for verbal embellishment of statements that will capture the audience and emphasise a point made. However, in this case the embellishment of the conference reflects the thoughts of the person as was expressed in a number of other settings, including the media (see section on Populist Discourse below).

A further statement by a parent involved with the Federation illustrates the link with positional goods kind of ideas:

It seems however, that these policies (gender equity) have never been applied to boys' education in the same way ... As a culture we have emphasised the masculine goals and

achievements for all our children. This has been a mostly positive experience for our girls... (P&C Conference statement, 1993).

Gender equity strategies for girls were used to enable girls to compete on an equal footing with boys and in turn has had the effect of making boys' achievements look 'weaker' than before, because girls are now able to reach the academic level of boys and even exceed it at times (see Chapter Four: Setting the Scene). Hence, advocates for boys asked an equal allocation of strategies suitable for them. In a competitive market this renders gender equity a desirable positional good that adds value in terms of behaviour and enhanced achievement for boys or girls, which in essence is what education is about, the way it is framed in functionalist ideology.

In 1996 the Department of Education and Training released a new Gender Equity Kit, which was considered to be inadequate by the key staff member of the P&C leading the campaign for the boys. A meeting was called of key advocates of boys in education. The P&C was looking for material that could be included in the kit, material that they thought was more supportive and relevant with regard to education of boys. A record and interviews about this meeting basically revealed that those present explained what programs and issues they were working on and put forward titles of resources they thought were appropriate for the kit. No further resolutions eventuated from this meeting. There was a sense that issues were in the open now and that the path was clear to undertake more work in this area. There was no commitment from either side to pursue these goals together or in partnership with each other.

By the time of the federal *Inquiry into the Education of Boys* (Australian Government, 2000) the P&C Federation did not display any of the concerns about the education of boys they had in the early 1990s. While the organisation developed a written submission to the inquiry, a call to its Councillors to assist in writing this submission met with little interest. Only one Councillor rang in and she was particularly concerned with raising the issues of low achievers for both, boys and girls. The key staff member, who was very active on this issue in 1993 and onwards, felt that the P&C had made their points often enough. However, he and other staff at the P&C also suggested, as elaborated later, that this inquiry served primarily the purpose of trying to attract funds to certain areas in education, for example, literacy. Other parent organisations from around Australia contributed to this inquiry. All of them basically

reiterated the need to consider girls and boys in education so that they all have an opportunity to achieve educational outcomes according to their abilities.

In 2002 a report with recommendations of the *Inquiry into the Education of Boys* was published. The recommendations themselves include few suggestions that ask for an increase in funding, but rather they refer to what changes education departments ought to implement. Under the guise of being strategies that apply to boys *and* girls the recommendations almost exclusively address boys' identified issues such as behaviour management strategies; increase in literacy learning; boys' different learning styles to girls; the role of fathers in educating boys and so on. One recommendation called for the rewriting of the national policy of gender equity. In critiquing this recommendation a prominent writer on education in the *Daily Telegraph*, Maralyn Parker, criticises the federal Minister for wanting to produce a glossy policy that covers boys' and girls' education, yet is going to be written by consultants who have throughout the decade only advocated for the needs of boys:

Teachers will be heartened to know that 'authority and presentation' are important in getting their attention and adherence to national policy. So 'an attractively produced document, clearly endorsed by ministers, seems the most likely to have the desired impact' (Daily Telegraph, 12/11/2003).

Overall, the P&C Federation approach in advocating for the need of boys was very enthusiastic far beyond what discussions at the 1993 Conference would have warranted. The results were broadly identified gender equity strategies, which essentially provided the freedom to focus strategies in whichever direction one desired. This is precisely what is reflected in the actions of the P&C, the recommendations of the federal inquiry into boys' education and most likely will also result from the glossy policy that may be produced by the federal government.

THE POPULIST DISCOURSE

The key focus of this section is on how the media treated gender equity issues since 1993. As I will demonstrate the media dealt with the issue of gender and education in a binary fashion foremost, but also with an 'outrage' appealing to emotional understanding of parents about their children's education in a fashion that clearly

confirms that educational achievements are a positional good that needs to be fought for and therefore gender strategies are needed that will reinstate the educational outcomes of students and in particular that of boys as they are seen to be disadvantaged.

There is a dialectic relationship between the media and parent organisations. The organisations release their own press releases and have in fact in the gender debate taken quite a strong role in the media, a stronger role than is ordinarily the case. I traced this relationship over the period of this research, that is from 1993 to 2001, in particular as related to the gender equity issues. However, the relationship with the media is also dependent on the interests of the President to engage with the media. The P&C President from 1998 – 2002 engaged on a weekly and sometimes daily basis with the media, while before that time, engagement was sporadic and driven by the office. In the five months after the 1993 P&C Conference, the preoccupation with gathering research, speaking to the media, giving evidence in inquiries, putting the issue of education for boys on the Education Minister's and Opposition Minister's agenda is remarkable, given that my interviewees indicated how slowly the 'apparatus', an appropriate term by Bourdieu (1991), that is, the affairs of the organisation are normally attended to.

My search for media articles on gender focused primarily on the years of 1993, 1994, then 1996, with the inclusion of several more recent articles. The early years are important in that this was the time when questions about boys' education became more frequent, while the year 1996 is important because one of the parent organisations took a number of actions to ensure that their misgivings about the new NSW Gender Equity Strategy was heard loud and clearly. Access to key newspaper clippings was possible through the parliamentary library in NSW, which meant that a comparison between newspapers was also possible. Interestingly, a brief count of articles printed revealed that in 1993/94 more articles on gender issues were printed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* while in the years 2000/01 the *Daily Telegraph* seemed to take more of an interest in these issues. One could theorise that in the early days the focus was on social justice issues with academia and parent activists being able to analyse the different results with their realm of expertise. Also articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, I observe to be written in a manner that appears to refer to

facts and tries to refrain from emotive references. Arguments in the later years utilised a discourse around of market opportunity, which referred to boys' lack of access to employment opportunities because of their perceived disadvantages in education, which is an emotive issue that fits with the more sensationalist reporting style of the *Daily Telegraph*, according to my observations. By 2000/01 the increasing public discourse on education markets reached new heights because of the Federal Government's proposed funding model that provided an increase of funding to private schools, which are firmly located in a discourse of markets (Daily Telegraph, 21/8/00). Hence, while earlier debates focused around a framework of social justice later discussions were posed within a liberal framework and market discourses.

The year 1993 – Education for Boys

In early 1993 the topical issue around gender was the review of single sex classes and the possible encouragement of single sex classes for girls, announced by the Greiner Government in the light of sexual harassment, and lesser academic outcomes of girls in so called 'traditionally male' subjects such as mathematics and science. The debate centred on whether single sex schooling is of advantage for either sexes. Most articles accepted the notion that girls are still disadvantaged: "...while the school curriculum is supposed to represent girls' and boys' interests, there is still a bias towards the interests of boys" (The Australian, 3/4/93). However, towards the end of a different article a need to look at boys is voiced: "A lot of attention in the last decade has been focused on girls' education. It is time to pay attention to boys" (SMH, 19/3/93). This journalist, a mother of boys, supported the cause of boys in a number of articles over the years. Another article revealed the functionalist approach to education in that it said that girls are encouraged to enter science and mathematical fields because scientists are worried about the lack of highly qualified researchers in the future and they suggest that 'feminisation' of the mathematics curriculum may be necessary. The same article also makes the point that boys have gaps in education that need to be addressed (SMH 21/4/93). The feminisation of the curriculum is an issue that was aired frequently in the Inquiry into the Education of Boys (Australian Government, 2000), where respondents claimed that the increased feminisation of the curriculum meant that many tasks now need a high level of literacy which is an area boys have

difficulties with (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). Interestingly, one article on a HSC review and single sex schools mentioned the University Entrance Index of girls that was already 5.4 points higher as that of boys, but the article did not conclude that boys are disadvantaged. The difference seemed to be silently accepted (SMH, 12/5/93). A further article examining the HSC showed that girls are outperforming boys in English consistently and in mathematics and science they almost reach the outcomes of boys apart from the highest level of mathematics. The conclusion of the article is that girls still need to be encouraged to take male dominated subjects, according to the education minister of the time (SMH, 19/7/93). By October 1993 the same journalist raised the concern, that there could be problems in our social fabric arising from the fact that girls are now outperforming boys in education

The baby boomers' battle of the sexes may be just a skirmish compared with the adjustments younger men and women will have to make if wives are better educated than their husbands, earn as much or more money, and want to work full-time in a career, rather than part-time in a job (SMH, 13/10/93).

This statement sounds a warning that the status quo may be changing and that it will cause social upheaval. As such it appears that the warning is about trying times ahead if women indeed were to exceed the achievements of men in the spheres of economics and power. As such the statement is patriarchal and indicates a mode of panic. Yet, these articles do not take up the obvious contradiction that while girls may 'outperform' boys with their educational results, so far men still 'outperform' women in the workplace (Marshall, 1998).

Towards the end of 1993 the call for a boys' education strategy was voiced with conviction and it came from the P&C Federation, which asked the Department to stop providing funds for girls' programs without looking at the needs of boys. The Department defended its focus in that it said that boys' difficulties are being considered in all its programs, including in relation to the education of girls and that the overarching girls' policy "was very broad and touched on many aspects of schooling..." and "although the department did not have a boys' education strategy as such boys' weaknesses were addressed" (SMH, 20/10/93). This call for an education strategy for boys has been repeated, the second time in the context of punishment in schools. In both the P&C Federation was quoted. The media, however, did not take up the issue of funding seriously, apart from reporting the P&C's position on this issue.

Thus, the P&C Federation raised the issue, the Department responded publicly and the media provided a public platform for debate. The P&C Federation then was instrumental in giving credence to the education issues of boys, because it raised the issue first as a representative body of parents.

Notion of moral outrage

In early 1994 a series of articles appeared in all newspapers that highlighted the performance gap based on gender. There were a number of phrases used that showed dismay over this situation (“[name] keeps the cutting as a memento of a time when boys did well at school.” “The boys are being left behind”, “the girls have constantly outshone the boys’ (The Australian 19/2/94). “Girls outsmart the boys” (Sunday Telegraph, 20/3/94), “...now it’s one for the boys” (SMH 21/3/94).

Once boys were far superior in the academic leader pack. Somewhere along the way girls took over, highlighting the stunning success of changes to their educational needs. The boys were left behind (Sunday Telegraph, 8/5/94).

The articles were a result of a report by Dr. Robert MacGann analysing the HSC results and student abilities. The government’s response to the result was an announcement to conduct a review into the education needs of boys as the girls’ strategy had only worked “too well” (Sunday Telegraph, 20/3/1994). The overall tenet of these articles can be summarised with the following quote:

The success of the strategy [girls’ education strategy developed in 1989]...The significant improvements made in both participation and performance of girls has highlighted the necessity to look at this policy in relation to boys. It is important we ensure both boys and girls continue to improve their academic performance (SMH, 21/3/94).

The language used in articles is often emotive. A number of articles directly attacked the feminist lobby for not considering boys in education issues, implying that there is a conspiracy among unions and feminist bureaucrats that sees boys as not being disadvantaged “This effective *stacking* (my emphasis) of the curriculum against boys...” (The Australian, 14/4/00) and

The curious thing, of course, is that when girls had problems 20 years ago, teachers and bureaucrats were only too enthusiastic to publicise these and take (successful) [in original text] action to address them (The Daily Telegraph, 2/6/01).

The media, is being accused of creating a moral panic, for example, the NSW Teachers Federation is reported to have said to “call boys ‘the new disadvantaged’ is ‘untrue’, a creation of ‘media hype and the associated moral panic’ (The Daily Telegraph, 2/6/01).

The frequency with which gender issues were raised in the media give rise to the conclusion that a moral panic campaign had been mounted. A glance over headlines used in recent years illustrates this point: “Charting the way to keep boys in class” (Telegraph 6/6/01); “Giving the boys an even break” (Telegraph, 6/6/01), “Lost Boys” (The Bulletin, 5/6/01); “‘Boy friendly’ push to stop academic slide” (Telegraph, 31/5/01); “Pledge to help battling boys” (Sunday Telegraph, 26/11/00); “But the needs of boys should not be sacrificed on the altar of gender equity” (The Bulletin 5/6/01). “Girls power and all that boy talk” (Telegraph, 16/11/00); “The trouble with boys” (The Australian, 19/6/00); “Girls leave school boys lost for words” (The Australian, 15/4/00); “‘Sex wars’ in the classroom” (SMH 12/1/98); “The boy, girl thing” (SMH, 6/7/98). In these examples one can clearly see the trend of using a binary conception of boys and girls against each other and the perception that boys should be superior generally; that they were suffering a negative image through these perceived academically deficient outcomes. In that sense the girls’ achievement is challenging hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, with its implicit claim that boys should be dominant and women subordinate (Connell, 2002). The boys’ lower position is seen as deviant; challenging of the dominant ideology and value systems around the sexes. Similarly, the arguments also hint at a functionalist idea of education where it serves primarily as a pathway into employment and to enhance the effective functioning of society “the curriculum is not negotiable because it encourages skills that people would need in the future” (Telegraph 16/11/00). The patriarchal conception of who should be dominant is demonstrated with the sentiment of boys’ losing ground of what was and should be theirs. “Federal Education Minister David Kemp said it was vital that Australians tried to understand why boys’ academic performance was lower than girls’” (Sunday Telegraph, 26/11/00), although with the risk of feminist backlash nobody may want to say outright that boys need to do better than girls

Reluctance to trigger fresh outbursts of feminist anger has effectively crushed debate about what Tim Hawkes, headmaster of the King's School in Parramatta, Sydney, calls the 'national scandal' of the poor performance of boys relative to girls in academic tests and exams (The Bulletin, 5/6/01).

This latter article is also interesting in terms of positional goods, as the King's School is a wealthy private boys' school, which would be highly regarded among power holders in Australia, both in government and economic circles. For a school like that to claim a 'national scandal' carries weight because of its social position in the hierarchy of schools and because of its importance in the education market, being a private school with links to the upper class (Connell et. al., 1982). Also, the Bulletin is a magazine that appeals to a business and government related readership, and thus to a group that relates to a market discourse. As pointed out before, the emotive language appeals to a hegemonic understanding of boys under patriarchy and one might wonder whether in fact girls are permitted to have a margin of achievement in their favour.

There were some voices also that presented an analysis of the gender debate, arguing, that the comparison between the best girls and the best boys "tells us little about the other 50,000 students" that underachieve

Despite our apparent aversion to these issues, given they have been raised infrequently in the current debate, old-fashioned notions such as social class, race/ethnicity and location need re-exploring if we are to get closer to the truth about whether there is a gender crisis in education (Dr. Stephen Crump in SMH, 12/1/98).

Victoria Foster compared the achievements of boys and girls and recent HSC results. She concluded that girls fared only slightly better in their results than boys taking all aspects into account in terms of number of enrolments, type of subjects and so on. Her article alluded to forms of sexism and indicated a backlash against girls when she claims that "Before 1995, however, boys dominated the merit lists, a situation which was considered unremarkable" and

The most important aspects of the present claims is the success of girls as top students in the prestige subject, mathematics. The assumption is that this and the other male dominated curriculum areas are the rightful preserves of boys, and girls are cast as interlopers in male educational terrain (Dr. Victoria Foster in SMH, 12/1/98).

This latter position is also indicated in the following sentence that indicates that girls have been top achievers for a while, but it was in subjects that were not coveted by the

boys, primarily because they did not enhance career opportunities: “The girls are also maintaining and even increasing their lead in areas where they’ve always excelled like the humanities” (ABC Four Corners Program, 1994).

An emotive appeal used with boys’ education issues was the reference to a feminist mother, thus, implying that this mother is ‘on the side’ of women and even she thinks that there is a problem for boys in education. This is the introductory sentence to a *Four Corners Program* called *What about the boys?* (ABC, 18/7/94): “The anguish of a feminist mother who thinks it’s now her son who’s playing second fiddle at school”. And later in a statement indicating the positional goods position of gender equity strategies the presenter said: “Such results (list of girls’ overachievement over boys’) are a ringing endorsement of special education put in place for girls. Now the cry has gone up for similar strategies for boys”.

The zero-sum and binary understanding was indicated with the sentence: “But the success of the girls drew attention to the weaknesses of the boys” and “ X is one school that’s now feeling the push for comparable policies to assist boys” (ABC Four Corners Transcript, 1994). Later on into the program a girl expressed the desirability of a girls’ program in a debate that was set up to discuss whether feminism has gone too far. She said: There are only these programs that encourage girls to do well. If it wasn’t for these programs, we wouldn’t be doing well and therefore how can you say that they’re unnecessary?” And the response of the boys is equally revealing in terms of positional goods:

What we all have to realise is as soon as you bring in programs for girls, it must affect boys because the more emphasis you put on girls, the less emphasis there is going to be on boys, thus restricting boys even more, that’s the bottom line (ABC Four Corners Transcript, 1994).

The zero-sum idea of positional goods is here quite clear if one has more the other will have less and thus the call was; get something for the boys, or have nothing for the girls and then we shall see. In addition, Dr. Victoria Foster, one of the interviewees on the program confirmed this position, in that, in her statement of why she did not support a boys’ education strategy she expressed the fear that “it would be used, I think, to take resources and energy away from girls and that’s the way in which it’s already being used” (ABC Four Corners Transcript, 1994).

Treating gender equity as a positional good

Apart from positioning the sexes in opposition to each other, there are also positional goods sentiments in these media articles in that the girls strategy was perceived as being effective and it was expected that a gender equity approach could achieve the same for the boys, as exemplified in the following question: “Is it the boys turn for special help?” and, “more balance to the education system” was suggested by Mr O’Doherty, Chairman of the *Committee for the Inquiry into Boys’ Education* (SMH 19/4/94). Thus, arguments were forthcoming that boys need a gender equity strategy also. At the federal level agreement was reached among education ministers to rename the *MCEETYA Girls’ Education Taskforce* the ‘Gender Equity Taskforce’ so that boys’ needs could be included as part of the brief of the taskforce. Not all ministers were in agreement and one suggested that the push for boys could be at the expense of girls and that one needs to consider the needs of both sexes rather than fragment them so that “the change in focus to include boys and girls would not mean a diminution of concentration on girls” (SMH 30/4/94). This last sentence refers to the fear, in line with positional goods, that the desirability of the goods will change when everybody has access to it. Given the new focus on boys, now the question was, whether there should be single sex classes for boys (Sunday Telegraph 1/5/94) and that article quoted: “A strategy launched five years ago to improve the standard of girls’ performance has worked too well and left boys behind.” The reference to ‘too well’ and ‘boys being left behind’ indicates where this writer thought the boys should be, either in an equal position or possibly in a slightly better position than girls.

In July 1994, a number of articles were published concerned with the public hearing into the Education of Boys conducted by the O’Doherty committee. One academic who spoke at the hearing and was quoted in the papers claimed that the inquiry is a backlash against the education of girls and that she was very disappointed in the process of the hearing. Her contention was that research shows that only certain girls and certain boys do well, that is, those from professional backgrounds with lots of encouragement from home and that anyone who is serious about education would look at “the issue of the climate in schools which would affect boys and girls and should be studied by any group which purported to be serious about education” (SMH, 12/7/94). She then puts forward that issues of harassment in particular towards

girls was a paramount issue in schools. Some of the other respondents to the inquiry made points also about looking at those boys who have issues of detention, suspension and are referred to counsellors (SMH, 12/7/94). Yet, a male academic made a plea for addressing three areas of concern, that is, for fathers to reconnect with their boys, for schools to better provide for the boys and for governments to allocate resources to educating boys appropriately. He claimed, in the light of forthcoming elections that politically education for boys will be difficult to advance as senior public servants appear to be interested in girls only, because “there are some radical feminists in government who seem to be dead against helping boys” (SMH, 2/12/94). Thus, academics with different view points were also arguing against each other in the public eye, one trying to attract resources for the group they were interested in and the other trying to preserve what gains had been made by implementing specific programs and policies. Thus, the competitive nature of positional goods was revealed in that a competition for resources had begun.

Some interesting statements were made by the male academic cited above in that he suggested in an article that “the boys’ strategy will be a vote winner” and “the clear demonstration of community opinion that we heard this week on talkback radio” and “Mr O’Doherty says his committee has been overwhelmed by the community support for boys’ strategies” (SMH 22/7/94). The hint at boys education being ‘a vote winner’ is reflective of the desire to gain resources from the government, which would be grateful to gain votes through its position on certain issues. Interestingly, this article also talks about “the need to set up a boys education network” as “there are many networks set up to push girls’ strategies” (SMH 22/7/94), thus reiterating the point made before about the desirability of strategies used for girls to be implemented for boys because of their link with educational success of what is essentially a positional good. Part of the purpose of naming these strategies is the fact that these were acceptable and proven strategies that worked for girls and thus, fighting with the same means provides a comparative element that can be seen as applying fair justice. For a typical positional goods kind of statement an article, which reported on an education forum said that “Everywhere the fear was being expressed that any concentration on boys would take desperately needed funds away from girls’ programs” (Telegraph Mirror 23/11/94). Thus, there is here a sense of limitations of funds, where only some

target groups can have educational gender equity programs, and targeting a new group will disadvantage another in a zero-sum positional economy.

What also appears from these media articles is an impression that many people stood, potentially, to gain from funding made available for programs related to boys. A number of articles were written by academics themselves or academics were quoted in direct speech. A number of these worked in programs that would benefit directly from grants being made available to their organisations or interest groups. With the demonstration of public interest as evidenced by talkback radio and the repeated focus by the media on this issue increased the possibility of pressure on the government, thus enhancing prospects of funding.

Interestingly, none of the articles questioned the success of the gender equity programs for girls nor whether similar programs would be successful for boys. The benefits of gender equity strategies was taken as a given. Over all the years I examined, a trend of analysing HSC results according to gender occurred annually. This illustrates the perception of the importance of the HSC results as a measure of schooling and educational achievements. However, there was no analysis as to whether matriculation marks are appropriate to measure educational outcomes and whether there were other benefits that resulted from the gender equity strategies for girls. The debate very much operated within the regime of truth that HSC marks measure educational success, provide access to the labour market and long term career opportunities. At the very least for girls these assumptions represent a myth, as outlined in Chapter Four: Setting the Scene. Equally, there was no consideration that at times boys may achieve higher and at other times girls may do so. There was no suggestion as to what educational goals may be desirable for society. It is possibly not an issue that girls achieve by a fraction higher in matriculation marks than boys. As a society maybe a set of competencies by the time of leaving school, which enables one to enter into the work force at a certain level, is more appropriate. There may be no need to express achievement with a single grading.

A key social change, which influenced the question of boys in education is the issue of boys having to change to adapt to current economic needs of society, in a functionalist understanding of education. This was expressed in a number of articles.

Schools, in a functionalist sense, are seen as the institution that is able to prepare the next generation for their duties as citizens and as workers, by developing appropriate skills, provide a level of achievement that matches with job requirements, thus determining their life chances in a Weberian sense. As pointed out in Chapter Two: Theory, it is this scenario of markets in education that makes education such a coveted commodity that leads to many efforts on behalf of parents to ensure that their children are achieving in education.

The binary argument of who is achieving better and each gender group being compared with the group that is doing best at the time, is strongly reflected in the media. This is ostensibly related to education being a positional good where high achievement is valued the most because of its rarity, the high rewards attached to those few who have high educational achievement and the link with outstanding ability. But, the media in itself struggles within a positional goods environment in that it has to sell its products in a difficult market where people have a limited spending capacity. Newspapers are dependent on stories, which appeal to the broad public and the ‘battle between the sexes’ appears to be a thankful subject when one looks at the number of articles written. Thus, the reporting of gender issues has to be seen in the light of the media and its market position.

It appears that the media aimed at those readers who have a hierarchical understanding of gender, who label the issue of boys’ and girls’ educational achievements as a ‘gender war’ and those who like to undermine women and engage in the ‘battle of the sexes’. But, the articles are most likely a reflection of the understanding that people have of education, its purpose and the importance of a students’ achievement, that is, education is to stream students in a hierarchical fashion that allows for selection of the superior ones.

Interestingly, the federal *Inquiry into the Education of Boys* (2000) sparked similar media coverage around the country, that sees boys as disadvantaged and overtly it seems no positive changes have occurred since 1994. Yet, submissions to the Inquiry show that many schools have special programs for boys and they are aware of issues pertaining to boys’ educational outcomes. The interviewees of parent organisations gave a number of reasons about why they thought that this enquiry was launched.

Firstly, the earlier debate was held in NSW primarily; secondly the federal government is said to have a particular agenda, which includes literacy issues (P&C Annual Conference speech, 1998), an issue that is more likely to affect boys. It was hoped that this inquiry would assist in refocussing on literacy and attract extra resources and, thirdly, the rumours were, that a report on gender equity issues commissioned by the government was not received favourably and hence, the government decided to launch a public inquiry instead.

Role of parent organisations and the media

An analysis of the president's media appointments illustrates the relationship between the media and the P&C organisation. For this purpose a six week period was chosen to summarise the president's media engagements in autumn 2001. The President had 44 media engagements with 14 different media outlets and she covered 17 different issues. Media outlets included mainstream radio, TV stations and large newspapers as well as some regional newspapers. Issues ranged from lice infections to capital punishment, to transport issues to teaching scholarships and school restructures. One has to say though that in this period a major news item arose which was the release of a government document for consultation on the plan to close some Inner City schools and to move towards a collegiate schools structure for high schools in that area.

The role of the media was illustrated by Blakers (1981) also, who was the research officer at ACSSO when claiming that the media has a "general propensity for the negative and controversial rather than positive and informative" (Blakers, 1981:8). She asserts that the power of the media is to influence the minister and that the parent community had the opportunity to use the media to influence decision-making. The media has been used extensively in the gender debate to evoke public opinion, both by the P&C and those interested in the gender equity debate for various reasons. It appears that little has changed since the early 1980s

Occupying a special place in these trends (60s rights, women's movements) are the media, which have increasingly offered a channel for criticisms and complaints and for the expression and reiteration of particular viewpoints. The media in the post-war years have developed an influential and sometimes decisive role in the formulation of public opinion and in the shaping of policies. They are an important element in the social context within which demands for parents and community participation in schooling have developed (Blakers, 1981:3).

As alluded to before, the boys' education issue was very much carried by the P&C Federation and the organisation's sentiments were taken as evidence that there is a problem for boys at school and that parents are aware of it and are speaking out on this issue. Thus, the media interest may have been sparked by the Federation's interest in this matter as back then there were fewer media articles printed on behalf of the parent organisation altogether.

Not all Councillors of the P&C Federation agree with a high level of engagement with the media and it is significant that the current leadership appears to be more reserved in this regard as there are few articles in the media that originate from the P&C Federation. Interviews revealed that many thought that debate in the media undermines the partnership with education departments as the Department wants to be able to discuss issues in private so as to have the opportunity to address any difficulties before they become publicly aired.

In summary to the media hype around the boys' education issue a quote from Jane Kenway (1994:28-29) points out the key concerns:

In unstable times, times of significant cultural and economic change, times characterised by unemployment, uncertainty and social conflict, parents become intensely worried about their children's education and their futures.

THE CONTEXT AS PROVIDED BY INTERVIEWEES

Having considered the media and its dominant focus on positioning boys against girls I questioned interviewees about their perceptions around gender equity issues. One interviewee of FOSCO perceived it simply "as they (the boys' supporters) 'having their nose out of joint' because they see the natural order being challenged that has men at the top...". This is a belief statement that Foucault simply called 'the statement', which is the basic unit of discourse (Danaher et. al., 2000). In this case the statement is that boys need to be on top, 'a men's right in the world'. Some interviewees were non-committal in that they said, "it is a difficult issue and everybody is just after those marks" and "if you can blame someone or something for

lack of achieving, then that's what you do..." (two different interviewees). Here the positional goods ideas are confirmed in that the marks are considered to be such a significant desirable good. One interviewee from a northern Sydney High School pointed out that at his school classes are streamed, otherwise "no parent would ever consider sending children to this school". 'Streaming' relates to education being a positional good in that children are streamed into classes according to their results, with parents hoping that their child will be streamed into one of the top classes. These classes, therefore, become desirable and are subject to processes of a positional goods economy (see Chapter Two: Theory). This interviewee was working in that school with boys who were at the lower end of achievement and acted out in an environment where they were not valued. One could ask: what options are there to change the positional nature of education, when somebody is always at the top in a system where comparison is made on an ascending or descending scale? If it would be irrelevant whether one is a percentage point below somebody else than surely it would not matter whether girls rate slightly higher than boys. There are other countries, for example Switzerland, where a particular pass mark and results above that mark, provide access to University where one can study in any course, regardless of matriculation marks (personal experience).

Interesting is the fact that one parent delegate on the Gender Equity Consultative Committee said that she could not understand the fuss around girls and boys as to her it is simply that "boys are boys and girls are girls". This organisation's position though is quite different and certainly earlier representatives and interviewees had a clear position on the issue of gender construction and that it affects behaviour in a fashion that limits choices for both boys and girls. When I asked interviewees how the organisation deals with this discrepancy between personal view and organisation policy, the answer was that representatives have to put forward the policy of the organisation whether they agree with it or not. This organisation (FOSCO) has limited membership to draw their representatives from and they basically ask for volunteers to join committees they have time for and are interested in. An issue of gender equity was debated at one of their conferences and the person after arguing against the dominant understanding in this organisation of gender equity issues eventually withdrew her motion. The issue was resolved amicably, but the person visibly lost interest in the organisation, as she felt at odds with the dominant discourse on

gendered behaviour. This is an example of how regimes of truth are created in that representative's opinions are debated in what present itself as an open forum, yet is dominated by those who have been involved for some time or have knowledge that is based on reading up on relevant material. One could argue, as illustrated in this example, that an induction of the person's duties and policies could occur before they represent the organisation. The person then could have developed their understanding on issues and could have made an informed decision of whether she would be able to represent the organisation adequately. The question arises of whether the other organisation has a process to assess its representatives. As outlined before the other organisation elects representatives to committees on the basis of their knowledge and compassion to an issue, in most cases. An examination of elections revealed that there are often several people standing for each committee. Knowledge about people's opinion is formed when speaking up on issues, which is encouraged through the process of 'profiling' (see Chapter Six: Parent Organisations and Decision-Making).

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO PARENT ORGANISATIONS AND THE GENDER EQUITY DEBATE

Both federations have representatives on the gender equity committees established by successive governments. After the Coalition government of Greiner (1988-1992), that led an inquiry and published a report on the education of boys (O'Doherty, 1994) a Labour government was elected. With the arrival of a new government a change of direction is almost "a matter of cause", as one interviewee expressed it. The new government set up an Advisory Committee where the federations had two representatives both of whom had an understanding and were involved in debating the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* and there were advisers who were also known for their support of girls' education, according to one interviewee. While there was public criticism about a perceived bias towards girls by the Department a booklet published in 1995 by the Teachers Federation within which key representatives of the three sectors, teachers, parents and the education department, presented papers that included the needs of boys equally to those of girls,

provides evidence that policy makers were taking the issues affecting both sexes seriously. Although, at times, the earlier focus on girls still showed through

It also happens that girls harass boys and that boys can be made to feel uncomfortable by the way some speak and behave towards them. This is harassment too and if you are in this position and the behaviour continues after the girl or girls have been told to stop, then you have the same right to lodge a complaint, just as girls do. We are determined that **any** harassing behaviour will be dealt with (NSW Teachers Federation, 1995:62).

From my observations of gender equity committee meetings representatives of the three federations were very welcome. Their input was sought and listened to with interest. However, the Department also liked to see continuity of membership rather than frequent change of representatives, who needed to be inducted again to the work of the committee. Earlier representatives commented on the collegial attitude between committee members and despite working party meetings being very intense at times, committee members were supportive of each other. It was interesting to observe that frequently parent organisation representatives and Teachers Federation representatives supported each other putting forward similar issues.

The parent organisations and the education department also communicate in writing as necessary and initiated by either party. For example, in a letter from Ken Boston, Director General at the time (3/12/93), the following statement was made:

The Department of School Education (DSE) recognised in the 1980's the need for a policy to address gender equity issues. In response, it developed the Non-Sexist Education Policy. In 1989 the Girls Education Strategy (GES) was launched. (File copy, status report to Council on Annual conference items, Appendix E 24/1/94).

This letter was written in response to P&C Conference 1993 item 19, on the need for an education strategy for boys, that the office sent a letter to the department about. The letter confirmed that the department was considering the needs of boys and its final paragraph said:

During 1993 the DSE has contributed to the development of the Australian Education Council's (AEC's) Strategies for Boys Position Paper. It will continue to contribute to the development of this document in 1994 and hopes to be able to support the implementation of its recommendations.

I observed that much of the debate in gender equity and other public policy forums centred on resources and the allocation of resources to any issue. Thus, while the

understanding for the need to support boys was growing, discussions were held around the ability to provide adequately for both sexes. Those who feel girls still need support often claim that there are many resources that benefit boys more so than girls and that there are already funded strategies that address educational issues of boys. These are early reading and literacy and remedial teaching programs, which are mainly utilised by boys. As Kenway (1994:33) said: “It might be interesting to try to compare the resources spent on these programs to those spent on girls’ programs”.

All interviewees from the three groups, Teachers Federation and the two parent organisations were concerned about the lack of funds that are put into gender equity policies and their implementation. It is from this perspective that gender equity programs have come to be seen as positional in that both ‘camps’ were arguing for more resources to enhance benefits for either girls or boys.

In summary, debate in parent organisations around gender equity was heated and observers claimed that it divided the organization as no other topic has before. The dialectical relationship between the key parent organisation and the media complemented each other in that the media was able to exploit the regime of truth that the organisation is broadly representative of parents and the parent organisation in return was ensured that the issues of boys’ education remained exposed in the public sphere, which exercises considerable pressure on political decision-makers such as education ministers.

CHAPTER 6: PARENTS AND SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING

This chapter examines decision-making processes in the organisation and juxtaposes them with the ideals of participatory democracy, an idea based on principles of community participation that are embraced by parent organisations who believe that they are highly democratic and considering people's views in their operations, according to several interviewees.

THE IDEOLOGY OF DEMOCRACY

The parent organisations can be seen as operating in the cultural field of advocacy organisations and by extension the political field (a term of Bourdieu, 1991) in that they incorporate certain principles of operation that are based on rules, conventions, often hierarchical relations, a way of perceiving the world and a belief that social action can influence public policy and therefore political matters. They operate in the field of participatory democracy that encourages participation in decision-making, which in itself is guided by the habitus of social activists that expect certain behaviours such as: debating issues so that people can make informed decisions, trying to hear everybody's views, fighting for a cause by arguing with politicians and other power holders, deciding by majority votes and so on.

In both organisations decision-making is highly structured at each level, although the higher the hierarchical position of the decision-making body, the 'looser' the structure of decision-making becomes (see organisational diagram, Figure 5.1, Chapter Five: The Parent Organisations, for a reminder of hierarchical structure). This is largely due to the group of decision-makers being smaller where discussion can be lead more easily and thus become quite informal, but it is also related to familiarity because participants have contact with each other more often (at least monthly) and there is a strong sense of commitment to the organisation which results in a sense of cohesiveness that evolves out of having frequent discussions and an exchange of views in direct dialogue. For both organisations the Annual Conference is formally the most important decision-making body as it does set the policies for the year, which are a representation of the organisations' policy positions on various

issues. It represents one of the requirements for participatory democracy, which is the ideal of a 'bottom up' approach, where the members or constituency holds decision-making powers that it delegates to others for execution (Midgley, 1986:15). Yet, the informal decision-making and execution of powers operate in quite a different fashion, as it often does (Richardson, 1983:25).

The formal processes appear as openly democratic and objective, as illustrated in the previous chapter with the debate on item 19 (P&C Annual Conference, 1993), but in practice they are restraining, while informal mechanisms of power are exemplified by who chairs the meetings; who speaks in which fashion, how often and in what context; who invests a large amount of hours in the organisation and who has status in the organisation. What one sees here is an illustration of hegemonic power based on the ideology of democracy, where one is made to believe that participatory decision-making is operating at its best and everyone has an equal say and is equally valued. This is reminiscent of Weber's (Parkin, 1982) idea of power, in that class, status and power positions clearly interact here with issues of charisma, even traditional leadership in terms of the president, but certainly also contractual leadership as all actions are carefully monitored and constrained by rules, implicit or explicit. In fact, during the conferences I personally observed, I noticed numerous amendments, standing down from chair, procedural motions, points of order and so on. Everybody appears to be working hard although the process is tiring, yet reflective of many opinions, on first sight, and therefore is overtly perceived as being objective, involving participative democracy to a high degree. On second sight, there are only a third or so that can be considered as active members, the majority of people at conferences are silent and the active one's are most likely the one's that are part of the inner circle or at least Councillors. All in all, the processes serve to reinforce the regime of truth that democratic measures are the best form of decision-making and that parent organisations are particularly careful to remain democratic and hear everyone's views.

The rigid rules of debate allow people to put their views across, constrained only by the time allocated to speak and the numbers of people that can speak to any motion. A speaker can speak to the motion only once, thus, needs to make all their points and is not able to reply to any points raised by others. This is the reason why, at times,

delegates do not introduce an item themselves, because they want to be able to make their points later when they have heard some of the arguments brought forward. On one occasion in the above debate one woman said: 'we (the Council) have been asked to do this,' meaning to put forward a motion, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Woman ox: name ox., Public School, which is in X for those two people who want to know where I came from exactly (slightly cynical undertone here). Ahm, what was referred to us last year at annual conference was the fact that we lack gender equity issues in our policy and in particular girls' educational issues. We do not see this as anti-bias at all in fact I was very pleased to see the item from xx Public School, the item 19 as I think it compliments those (of Council). We want the best education possible for girls and boys, boys and girls, girls and boys, boys and girls and it doesn't matter whether it is one way or the other we want the best for our children. Unfortunately, in some areas girls are disadvantaged and probably they are more disadvantaged educationally in more areas of schooling. And that is why we have been asked to do this. We also recognise that boys are disadvantaged in some areas and there need to be special provisions and strategies made for boys as well as for girls. It's something that I as a member of the hm Board of Studies, Visual Arts Syllabus committee fight for, it is the role of boys and making sure that boys don't drop out of that particular area because that's an area where I think they don't get enough attention (Debate, P&C Annual Conference, 1993).

Having someone else putting forward a motion and another person seconding it also gives the impression that a motion is widely supported. Often the person approached to move a motion was chosen because of the reputation they may have within the organisation, that is, they may have a high level of credibility and thus the item will be more easily accepted. Also, putting the original motion and then having a right of reply as well as speaking on other points related to gender equity could have been 'overkill' and participants at the conference could infer that girl's issues, for example, are a personal issue for someone. The idea of objectivity and having valid arguments, would have been violated by a person speaking primarily on gender issues and thereby giving the impression that one has an interest that is related to personal reasons, because, after all, the policies of the organisation are supposed to be widely applicable to school children. The putting of motions is a strategic move as illustrated in this process. Councillors behind the scene work out who is a good person to put forward a certain motion. This was confirmed in interviews by some of the examples given by Councillors, when asked about working together with others. Around half of the motions at Annual Conference are put forward by Council despite the conference being the forum where schools can make their recommendations. Thus, there are numerous opportunities for Council and by extension the Executive to formally influence the direction of the organisation.

Superficially, this structure looks fair and just, but there might be many more view points that could be heard and a limit on numbers of speakers is not conducive to discussion. While it is of benefit for the speaker not to be interrupted in that people cannot respond directly to the speaker, discussion is in fact stifled, as one has to wait their turn when there may be a number of people who will speak on the topic. To have speakers for and against a motion will ensure that multiple viewpoints are heard so that delegates can make up their mind. But questions and queries one may have are often not answered by any of the options presented. As previous excerpts illustrate, to have one's motions or amendments 'processed' is quite lengthy and only committed and very concerned people are likely to speak up unless they want to 'profile' themselves (see section below on gaining power).

Voting by majority is a means of deciding issues utilising a democratic procedure. It appears as neutral and in this case observes the rule of participatory democracy in that people are informed first on what they are voting on and are given background knowledge to inform their vote as required by Sarason's (1995:7) political principle. One can also say that this form of proceedings tries to keep emotions out of the discussion as it aims at portraying rationality, objectivity and scientific evidence "...the field of politics - ... - always swings between two criteria of validation: science and the plebiscite" (Bourdieu, 1991:190). In fact, conference does not respond to anger and frustration very well, but does respond with sympathy to issues of sadness and suffering as long as it is not a personalised issue, as indicated elsewhere. The handbook addresses the issue of emotionality and personal comments in that it says: "A member shall stand to speak, address the Chair, and confine debate to the question under discussion, avoiding personalities and unbecoming language", (P&C Handbook, 1999-2000:25). Generally, though, it is thought that these rigid rules assist to streamline decision-making and ensure democratic and representative decision-making (interviewees).

This decision-making process at conference has to be seen as a form of 'legitimation' of representative processes (Clegg, 1989), so that the policies that evolve and are used as a platform to lobby government will receive due recognition. The platform and decisions are often brought into question by government and the public, and the stringent procedures aim at giving it credibility, especially as the government always

has some observers in the audience at the Annual Conference. That the procedures are considered as neutral and appropriate, is an idea that is difficult to go beyond as the Western parliamentary systems work similarly and, in fact, sitting in such a conference feels like sitting in parliament.

Thus, the underlying ideology I can see in both organisations is that of democracy, both of the ‘majority rules’ kind and those of participative democracy. In one organisation the idea of objectivity, propriety and accountability are particularly strong with adherence to the rules being emphasised to a very large degree. The handbook of rules is an ideological tool, it acts like a sacred text, that assists in obeying to principles of procedural correctness. This process seeks to ensure fairness, consistency, perpetuation and reproduction of the organisation. The power of the hegemonic belief system is exemplified by the ‘totality’ of acceptance that the democratic procedures used are appropriate and do not need to be changed, an opinion expressed by all interviewees, even by those who feel wronged by the organisation. The regime of truth around democracy appears to be a powerful one indeed.

Infringing on representative principles

The discourse of participatory democracy includes the issue of representation in that individuals represent the will of the group whom they have consulted beforehand on the form and content of representation. The power to represent is vested in the elected person by virtue of them being elected for a particular role and by them having been given some form of guidelines about their representation. Yet, the group is also given existence by virtue of having a representative, according to Bourdieu (1991:204)

It is because the representative exists, because he *represents* (symbolic action), that the group that is represented and symbolized exists and that in return it gives existence to its representative as the representative of the group. One can see in this circular relation the root of the illusion which results in the fact that, ultimately, the spokesperson may appear, even in his own eyes, as *causa sui*, since he is the cause of that which produces his power, since the group which makes him someone invested with powers would not exist-or at least, would not exist fully, as a represented group – if he were not there to incarnate it.

An infringement of these principles and a questioning of the power of the representative undermines the reputation of the organisation and questions its viability as an advocacy organisation that has a right for a representative position around the negotiating table. In the case recounted below a sense of disempowerment of the representative occurred, which undermined the credibility of the organisation and undermined its authority, as it was no longer clear who could speak on behalf of the organisation. The issue developed as follows:

An employee of the Federation challenged in a newspaper article the department's new gender equity strategy and made claims of inadequate coverage of boys' education issues, although the Federation itself was directly involved with developing the gender equity strategy and the accompanying gender equity kit, by means of a representative of the Federation on the departmental Gender Equity Committee. The exact accusation was that there was not enough material contained in the kit for the benefit of the education of boys. The letter from the department to the P&C President in response to the media coverage contained the following statement: "I am surprised and troubled....at your call to rewrite the Department's newly-released Gender Equity Strategy to address the particular needs of boys" and

My real concern is to seek your reassurance as President of the NSW P&C Associations that this Department can place its confidence in future negotiations with your organisation and in the integrity of consultative processes. This requires the outcomes to be dealt with in good faith by all participants....This also requires that your representatives have the confidence and authority of the Association as a whole and its officers (letter to P&C by DSE 26/6/96)

Thus the promise and symbolic power of representation has to be carefully guarded by advocacy organisations and in this case the Federation has lost considerable goodwill as confirmed by interviewees that were active in parent organisations and the department during that time period. One can say that the public denouncement of the kit in the face of having formally been involved in developing the kit, undermined a regime of truth, that of true representation, and it thus revealed that representation is a very tentative concept, that was not taken seriously enough in this instance, at least not in that organisation or by the relevant staff member. But, true representation is a regime of truth as no delegate can really represent effectively two hundred people, which Bourdieu (1991) also identifies as an overempowerment of the representative. In essence, there are many factors that contribute to a decision

(Richardson, 1983:27), but the representatives speak most strongly when they are convinced themselves of their utterances and the sense of power vested in them. They are also heard and recognised particularly if they are not paid to represent and are in fact volunteers, who give their own time to a cause without any overt personal gains. The latter is another regime of truth around altruism and volunteers who often benefit in some form from their work, but it is misrecognised that they are doing so.

REGIMES OF TRUTH

The use of symbolic and cultural capital

In this cultural field of advocacy organisations and parent organisations in particular, key cultural capital relates to the ability to speak in front of many people with an authority supported by expertise and hands-on experience that can be transmitted to other people in such a fashion that they feel touched by it and therefore inspired to act. In addition, cultural capital is acquired by being part of an organisation for a long time, which means that the habitus of these people is being shaped to a degree that their understanding of the organisation is deeply enmeshed in their very being. Their actions become instinctive and ‘strategy-generating’ “enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations” (Bourdieu, 1977:79) To be an expert in these organisations requires cultural capital at three levels: 1) to be a parent of a child, which is linked to assumptions that a certain understanding towards children exists and that parents have certain goals for their children; 2) to have expertise in a certain field of importance to the organisation such as being an education professional, member of the academic community; useful other practitioner; 3) an expertise gained through being an active member that attends meetings regularly and therefore has lots to contribute in debates and the necessary knowledge of organisation related procedures. Many of the more powerful members of the organisations are endowed with cultural capital at all three levels. They are parents and academic professionals and have been in the organisation often as office bearers for many years. Thus, they act as academic professionals do: they analyse what is being said, look for evidence to back up arguments, are able to speak and present well, yet they also reveal an emotional dimension of ‘being a parent’ to support their arguments and so on. They are being most successful participating in what Bourdieu

(1984:12) termed ‘the games of culture’, that is, knowing the best ways within the organisation and among those endowed with similar cultural capital, to be successful. The combination of the three levels may not always be successful, the more emotional reference of being a parent can undermine an argument that is founded on logic, because credibility can be undermined by the reference to one’s personal situation. An example of this is in relation to the gender equity debate, where a revelation of the sex of one’s child would undermine any arguments the speaker brings forward that relates to the sex of the child. In contrast, if a parent has a disabled child and argues for support for children with disabilities the emotional reference to the child may sway the audiences positively towards the speaker’s contribution. This is because the former example is brought forward in an environment of competition for positional goods for a group of people whose disadvantaged status is being disputed, while the latter is a reference to a minority group that appeals to social justice and social-democratic principles of assisting the recognised disadvantaged in society, what I would term the ‘deserving’ disadvantaged.

Language is imbued with cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991; 1984) and the act of speaking in front of an audience is imbued with symbolic capital with the assumption that a speaker has something worthwhile to say and is able to speak in such a fashion that they appear to be credible in their arguments. Looking at the dialogue and speeches, a number of points can be made. The language used is often that of a well-educated person. It is sophisticated in its terminology; ‘educational attainment’, ‘integral parts of’, ‘construction of social practise’, ‘foreshadowing a motion’, the ‘power of the chair’ and so on. Also the reference to Latin words such as ‘sotto voce’ and ‘minutiae’ are words of the ‘educated’ or even ‘elite’ class, that are not used in every day Australian parlance, but in this case, appear to be part of the rules of meeting. An excerpt of a speech (P&C Annual Conference, 1993) illustrates this point:

Chair: Thank you Madam. It’s interesting sometimes the ‘sotto voice’ comments that come through up here (they) may well be amplified (chuckle). Ah, starting with item 10. (silence... yes, (silence..) yes madam? (Waiting for microphone to get to person)

I think it would be a good thing if we dealt with the general things first before we get bogged down with the minutiae of hm whether the clauses are going to refer to boys and girls or whether they gonna refer to girls or are an issue for one or the other.

The language and terminology used in speeches as well as in proceedings are alienating to many and would make one feel distinctively inferior if trying to participate at that level. It is well documented that language is class based (Bourdieu, 1984). To be inclusive and to be representative of all parents the organisations would need to take the issues of language into account. I felt distinctly intimidated in this setting myself despite having a middle class background and university education. The proceedings were just too complex and the speeches well prepared so that I felt that ordinary people could not participate until they had been to a few conferences. Even experienced conference goers and leaders in this setting make many mistakes as evidenced by the following extract:

Chair: X could you just pause a moment. Yes, point of order please (pointing at someone who must have called a point of order).

Woman Y: Mister Chairman, as I understand it.

Chair: Would you give your name and school for the table?

Woman Y: point of order wrong again, yes (little chuckle) Y, (y- school) I apologise to X for interrupting. As I understand it the item should be hm put as a motion and seconded before it is spoken to. Hm, on the point that we have a possible adjournment of this item.

Chair: I don't , I don't like to...The ruling that came from the handbook on our procedures was that the time should be moved and item 10 seconded before in fact the procedural motion to defer it is heard. Now, X is introducing the item, then I will call for a seconder.

Woman Y: I would have thought that you just introduce the item as it's put and then X speak to the motion after it's been presented.

Chair: I get into trouble here because there are several different threads of advice... I, I frankly don't understand what your point of order is?

Woman Y: My point of order is that you have said you want to accept the motion, which I understand, is accepting the motion as printed. It would then be seconded X as the mover of the motion has then the right to speak to it. If she speaks now we may be duplicating something, which will need to come up later today.

Chair: What are.. What are you referring to as accepting the motion? The motion is presented as it is put in the agenda.

Woman Y: that's right

Chair: It is necessary for the motion to be presented before it can be deferred according to our handbook, which we are working to.

Woman Y: That's right.

Chair: Now that's what we are in the process of doing! (Slightly cynical tone by now) Now X is presenting the motion.

Woman Y: The motion is presented as I see it as it is printed in the handbook.

Chair: no, no it is not printed in the handbook, I'm sorry. The agenda item is printed in the agenda but it hasn't any status until it is presented. (Sounding annoyed now and a little bit aggressive) (Brief whispering at the table). Would you, would you finish X?

Woman X: Ah, I...yes, (chuckle) a bit typical...Ahm, yes, I thought I was moving item 10

Chair: you are,

Woman X: but I hear that everybody can read it.

Chair: yes, but finish it.

Woman X: I'm nearly finished and I will just go on to the other point that I was going to say that, this does come from the National Strategy of Education for Girls and relates to the National Action Plan for the Education of Girls. It's something that is an item that came up yesterday and a lot of, hm; a lot of gender equity issues will refer to that. I just don't want to repeat that later on today in 'social context'. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you X. Have we got a seconder for this motion? Yes, XY, you are seconding it, XY?

Woman XY: yes, do you want me to speak?

Chair: Yes, please.

XY: Now, I'm getting a little confused too. Hm, I like to second this motion.

Chair: don't confuse us by not telling us who you are!

Given this complexity of proceedings, it would be true to say here: "The more people are dispossessed, especially culturally, the more constrained they are to rely on delegates in order to acquire a political voice" (Bourdieu, 1991:206). Deference of power to those who demonstrate that they are able to negotiate this system and speak in the interest of the organisation is immense, as exemplified later when discussing the power of the Executive group, President and key staff.

Within speeches there are also 'signifiers' that indicate one's credibility, knowledge and expertise. For example, a reference to being a member of the Board of Studies, or a remark in the opening sentence of: "I'm a lawyer"; "I lecture at University"; "I have been a teacher for X years"; "I am the mother of a child who is disabled". These signifiers often relate to a position in societal structure, a position of status that is generally regarded highly in the community. Moreover, the president often uses reference to what she hears in schools..."this is something I am being told about when I visit schools" giving the issue an air of importance by making a reference to the rightful constituency ("parents out there in the schools"). By referring to those

that the organisation claims to represent, a form of symbolic power is being exercised to strengthen an argument.

There are also conciliatory indicators in the speeches in terms of wanting to ensure goodwill and acceptance by opposing groups. For example, "I want to congratulate X school for coming up with this motion, but..."; "I believe they have put together a good motion, but the reason I speak against this motion..." and so on. These conciliatory remarks serve the purpose of creating symbolic capital of being a harmonious group that has common interests and that appreciates each other's contributions.

The length of time an individual has been involved in the organisation is also central because of the socialisation or more precisely inculturation process one has to undergo to be able to participate effectively in meetings and conference proceedings. There are a number of mechanisms used to integrate and inculturate people into the organisation. A special welcome is given to newcomers at conference, they receive a guide about how conference and voting procedures work and they are encouraged to speak up. For example in the newsletter the following excerpt was to give new members confidence to attend conference by suggesting that they come with other delegates or make contact with a local Councillor to receive support from them and that

When (or if) you speak...please say it is your first time, either at conference or as a participant in debate. ... We are not professional presenters.... Annual conference is not an exclusive club – please feel welcome (Parent and Citizen Journal, term 2, May 2001)

However, in practice matters are different: For instance, I observed one woman who moved a motion at Council that was controversial and she had difficulties formulating it. Others sitting in her vicinity were whispering to her trying to help her. The woman started to get nervous and agitated. The chair then offered to assist her with the motion over lunch so that she could move it in the afternoon. The motion subsequently was not moved. This woman clearly didn't fit with the general picture of membership, her level of language was not very sophisticated, she was dressed in conservative, but fairly colourful clothes and her behaviour and mannerism was one of being quite loud, opinionated, with little research that was backing up her opinion.

One could say though that she was an ordinary parent with an interest for children in schools and opinions that would be reflective of the opinions of many parents.

The complexity of decision-making and the lack of inculturation of new members is also reflected in the remarks of new Councillors who frequently comment on expectations they had when serving Council in that they say: “I thought I would be making a real difference...”. While the inculturation process for Conference is based on attendance alone over the years, the inculturation of Councillors occurs through an introduction book about the role of Council and how it operates. In some years there has been a welcome day for new Councillors, according to one of the staff members. However, that day was more about social interaction than explaining the mechanisms of Council and its importance in the decision-making process. One interviewee lamented the fact that Councillors are not being recruited any longer from the ranks of regional Councils. She asserted that in the past when there were regional Councils, people from individual schools joined the regional Council first and they learned about the broader issues there and only from that forum were they elected to represent the region as Councillors. There was a structure then that eased or socialised people into understanding the broader picture. Now people can be elected straight from their local school into the Council. At times these people come into Council with very little experience indeed and with a view of their local school only. These people find it quite difficult to cope with the complexity and they often leave after a while or just do not come to meetings. This interviewee herself left Council after several years because she felt “she could be more effective in other roles and that she outlived her usefulness on the Council”. She felt that people could not commit themselves any longer for taking one step at the time, that is, move from the local, to regional, then state-wide and sometimes national level of parent advocacy. Time in itself is a reflection of social class, as only a limited number of people have the time to commit to extensive processes and years of active membership that appear to be required for effective leadership and participation. Educated people are more likely to afford this luxury, although research confirms that increasingly both parents of a household are in paid employment, particularly so when their children are older and have started High School (ABS, 1994).

From examining the conference proceedings then one can identify a straightforward contradiction. On the one hand, participation is the doctrine of democratic decision-making and on the other procedural competence inhibits participation to such a degree that it does not allow for people to have an equal say by any standard.

POWER RELATIONSHIPS

As with all organisations there are power structures that can be identified. With formally constituted organisations there are formal structures of authority that relate to the rules that are legally constituted through a form of legal incorporation under a particular legislative Act, procedural rules that govern decisions-making and rules of conduct that are at times explicit and at other times less so, but are rather related to expectations of how one should conduct oneself in a certain setting or in the formal position they hold in the organisation or indeed as related to formal and informal power relationships.

I see the relationship between formal and informal power as Richardson (1983:25-26) concludes:

it is useful to draw a distinction between the notion of 'power' and that of formally established 'powers'. The latter is fairly easily defined in terms of the formal responsibilities delegated to any particular group...But unlike formal powers, power can be neither legislated nor ensured; it is the outcome of a complex process of negotiation between different individuals or groups.

The formal powers in the parent organisations is vested ultimately with the President, who in turn is responsible to Council during the year and held accountable by Conference once per year, from whence s/he was also elected. The President's role is central not only because of the legal powers, but also because of the close relationship to the Executive Officer who only answers to the president. Moreover, s/he offers opportunities to others who may aspire to become President. Profiling for the position of President occurs over years and candidates monitor their chances by the votes they receive when standing for other positions and by talking to their supporters who in turn consult their colleagues to gauge whether their candidate has the numbers.

In order to achieve presidency, one must by decree of the by-laws serve as a Councillor first before one can be elected as office bearer. Office bearers are elected by the annual conference, which means that aspiring candidates have to be known to the delegates at conference to increase their chances of being selected. Aspiring office bearers therefore aim to speak up at conference, so that delegates get to know them. Given that Council puts forward approximately half of the motions at the conference Councillors have ample opportunities to volunteer to introduce Council motions to the conference or second them with a relevant speech, that is, if they are well supported by the President and the key office staff, the latter is very important, according to several interviewees. For example, one interviewee claimed that her candidacy was actively undermined by rumours that she believed originated from the office because she felt that key office staff were of the opinion that they would not be able to work with her productively in the role of president. Additionally, the ten elected Council members to the Executive group, which manages the affairs in-between Council meetings and as such is a group, which has considerable insight into the Federation's operation, may be called upon by the President to attend important meetings at short notice. These members tend to speak up more at Council meetings due to their involvement in-between meetings and their knowledge base being extensive, but also to ensure re-election for the Executive. Given that a third of the delegates at Conference are Councillors this increases the profile of Executive members for the purpose of election as office bearers, meaning that they are increasingly better known among those who are voting at Annual Conference. The pathway to presidency is then via the building of a profile through being active as a Councillor, then being elected to the Executive group and speaking up as much as possible in an appealing fashion, utilising key cultural capital, and representative of the opinions of the majority of delegates at Conference. One has to climb the ladder slowly over the years. It goes without saying that these activities involve a lot of commitment and visibility, which in turn means a high level of attendance at these events. One interviewee used the term 'patronage' to encompass the building of a profile under the patronage of the president.

Building a profile - gaining power

At Conference the chair has considerable powers and these are actively used in profiling those who are under the patronage of the president. For example, the discretionary power of the person chairing a session allows for determination of a process forward. To illustrate this point here is a suggestion made by a Councillor:

Male from X Girls High. I opt to support this proposal for deferral, I wish though, Mister Chairman, that you'd chosen a different procedure and you accepted a motion that would say to deal with item 19 forthwith, rather than going by one motion before another having it moved and seconded and then deferring them in turn. But, since this is the procedure we've got... (P&C Annual Conference 1993)

'To deal with a motion forthwith' could have been put to a vote by the chair. There is a duties and responsibility statement of the chair in the handbook that clearly shows the powers of the chair. There is no rule though about who should be in the chair for any given session so that it is quite easy for a president to give 'patronage' to some over others. Justification of using a number of people to chair sessions rather than each session being chaired by the President rests with the idea of participatory democracy, in that the organisations want to give many people a chance at experiencing how to chair sessions in the interest of their personal development, a goal that is central to community participation ideals (Midgley, 1986). According to one interviewee, at conferences where the president will be elected (every two years, with only one possible re-election) those who the power holders may want to see as President get opportunities to chair sessions, present papers, summarise from workshops and so on, so that the conference can see them in operation, before the election proceedings on the second day of Conference. As the president is elected by conference delegates and not by Councillors, who comprise only one third of delegates, and many people may not know the presidential candidates, keeping in mind that approx. 20% of delegates may never have attended a conference before, profiling at conference is central.

The Executive Officer holds considerable power. He prepares the agenda for the conference and can make suggestions to the chair about who may want to introduce an item, who may be suitable to do this or that, he can suggest last minute things that

need to be done where a candidate can be used to undertake a task: 'I've just asked so and so to present...if you don't mind I suggest that we ask X to undertake Y...'. The first year, I observed an election of the President in one of the organisations, wherein the incumbent won the election by 11 votes only. Analysis showed that the incumbent was supported by Office staff and other power holders as the opponent was only given the opportunity to present the Treasurer's report the day before the elections, while the incumbent was given several opportunities to speak on the conference floor on Friday and also Saturday morning immediately before the elections took place.

This form of patronage occasionally gets attacked by members of the organisation by writing a letter of complaint or a report to Council outlining organisational issues, for example "I remain concerned about the promotion of preferred candidates and the undermining of others" (Letter by a Councillor 15/7/98. A report by the same Councillor (October 1998) states

We have had a number of presidential appointments...It is the principle of some being favoured and others overlooked or thwarted in their ambitions to be nominated and try and win elections.

One of the interviewees also contended that there is now an observable bloc on who votes with whom and what opinions are put forward and given more credence than others. In the past there had been a time when four members were called the 'gang of four', which included the President, the Publicity Officer, the Executive officer and the Senior Vice President. The following statement directly represents the views of at least four interviewees "What we seem to have is a rule by a few, a power bloc of those who hold the power, and who very often do not share the responsibilities and the voice".

On interviewing the person that lost presidency by a narrow margin I learned that she since then feels actively and consistently undermined by the current leadership who made flippant remarks, ignored her wish to speak and made deliberately undermining comments. The narrow results of the election were an unfortunate outcome as it meant the organisation divided into two camps. But, as outlined above the position of the rival was from then on undermined with vigour including failure to ring her from

the office to undertake representational duties. And, the less representational duties one has, the less reporting one is required to do, and fewer opportunities exist to profile one self. Significantly, at subsequent elections this candidate did not gain this level of votes ever again, although the President that won the election at the time subsequently sparked incredible controversy, that included a call for a vote of no confidence from some of the Executive team and Councillors (my observations).

To illustrate the process of building profile, an examination of the level of attendance at Council meetings, speeches made at conferences on behalf of Council, as recorded in the minutes, and subsequent election to the Executive group revealed that those who attend most frequently and hold speeches every year at the conference are most likely to be elected to the Executive group and later as office bearers, provided that their conduct is approved of by others. The latter point is illustrated by the fact, that there are a number of people who have tried to build a profile using the mechanisms described, yet they have never been elected to the Executive group. From observation these are people whose 'profiling' is too obvious, meaning their efforts of increasing their profile, or others feel that their contributions are not of sufficient substance to warrant speaking up so often or they have a relatively conservative stance towards education, which does not concur with the ideology of those who are currently in power and almost by default not that of the majority of the delegates. I use here the wording 'almost by default' deliberately as those in power have more opportunities to influence those present in any meeting by utilising mechanisms that I am illustrating here.

The dominant ideology is a significant factor in determining who will receive patronage. A theoretical account of divisions with parents and parent groups assists in illustrating where the dominant group (at the time of this research) was situated in terms of ideology that they reproduce by means of their position of power. From my observations, by and large, parents in the organisation can be 'ordered' among a continuum where the poles at each end refer to more social democratic notions of education and more liberal notions of education. While an artificial divide as proposed here bears a risk and it cannot be assumed that on every vote people are consistently voting according to the position they hold on this continuum, by and large a trend is observable. Interviewees confirmed that people who belong to a

certain faction in terms of ideology orient their vote on what their colleagues are saying, which is a good example of how power is exercised by many means and resembles a network of power, as Foucault suggests (Shumway, 1989).

The liberal notion of education is a predominantly functional view of education that subscribes to concepts of freedom of choice, meritocracy, links education with employment skills, puts individual rights over common rights. It may agree to address disadvantage, but within existing systems, rather than looking at fundamental change (Kenway, 1990a). For this group individual achievement, as measured by marks and principles of competition, are important.

Social democratic notions of education are linked with ideas of social justice and look at systemic disadvantages as related to an analysis of class, gender ethnicity and so on. They look at redressing disadvantage largely by changing the political system, they hold governments solely responsible for schooling, believe that education should be free, they believe that resources need to be invested targeting the disadvantaged as outlined in Chapter Four: Setting the Scene.. In the words of an interviewee, who claimed that there are ideological factions in the P&C Federation:

If you bring up the issue of school fees and you say they should be compulsory you have a whole lot of people who are against that because they basically believe that education should be free.

By and large, at the time of the research, power holders fit into the social justice camp, as exemplified by the rejection of market principles within education (P&C Annual Conference, 1998) and the very narrow loss of the debate on selective state schools and freedom of choice to choose the school of preference (P&C Annual Conference, 1999). As to the latter one has to say that a number of power holders had children in selective schools themselves.

Also, in the interest of ‘profiling’, I observed the ‘inner core’ and in particular the president and vice president striking up a conversation or raise an issue that they know people will be interested in debating or gossiping about. For example, the conversation could start like this, “have you heard what X organisation did...” or “have you heard the department’s newest ideas...” or “isn’t it terrible, these kids in

that school...”. The issue then may lead to an intense debate taking up the first hour or so of the Council meeting where office bearers who want to increase their profile get an opportunity to be heard. According to interviewees, there are a number of tactics used to avoid difficult decision-making, for example guest speakers are scheduled for the meetings without consultation of the whole Council. This takes up time and in effect recommendations are often only dealt with on Sunday afternoon between 2-4 pm when many Councillors have to leave to catch their planes and so on. This process resembles Lukes (1974) notion of the second face of power on ‘non-decision-making’.

The role of the Council is important here, given its formal powers of managing the organisation during the year until the next Annual Conference occurs. Yet, out of the 100 members, that in reality consists of a maximum of 90 members only as there are often vacancies, 18 % are Executive members of which in turn almost half (8/18) are elected office bearers by Conference, that are for all purposes the power holders of the organisation. This, together with the fact that members of the Executive are more familiar with each other and attend generally all meetings of Council renders the power of Council questionable. And indeed some interviewees have considered Council a ‘toothless tiger’. This is confirmed by a historical account of the P&C Federation, where a parent summarises:

In particular, the question of the importance of the Executive Committee came to a head in the mid 1960s and again in the early 1970s, and the difficult relationships between the various bodies is still an issue in the early 1980s (Wimmer, 1981:45).

However, Council provides a platform for debate and one half of the motions to Conference are put by Council, which gives an opportunity for those aspiring to positions of power to present motions on the Conference floor. The subcommittees of Council often formulate the motions that are then put to Council for vetting and it is at this level of subcommittees, where it is decided who is presenting a motion. This can happen quite informally where one approaches the other strategically to present or second a motion. According to one interviewee, if someone has an interest in a particular issue then the organisation lets them “ride with it”, unless someone contests the same position to be on a governmental working party, for example, their expertise is accepted and their ideas can then be tested on the Conference floor.

The Executive as a decision-making forum between Council meetings has considerable power. It essentially acts as if it constituted Council. They only take an issue to be resolved to Council if “it is a boring issue or one that could be very tricky”, according to one interviewee. Minutes of the Executive meetings go to Councillors and on the Council agenda there is an item where Councillors can ask questions of the Executive with regard to decisions taken. However, the decisions usually stand. An example of the power of Councillors versus the power of Executive members and office bearers was illustrated by the fact that a censure motion was served on a Councillor who was in the organisation for less than 12 months. A life member who had been in the Federation for 20 years said that there had never been a censure motion before and certainly never on a new Councillor. Apparently the Councillor had communications with his local member that showed up in one of the e-mails that he had sent around, but it was just an address among others. The issue was that he criticised something contained in a press release that an office bearer had written and that was heard in the middle of the night on the radio. The interviewee claimed that the Council was very disillusioned as policy seems to be made ad hoc and mostly reflects personal opinions rather than a considered position of the organisation, based on its policies and practises. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the Executive is an entirely cohesive group. After all, most presidential candidates are drawn from this group and therefore at any one time there will be rivals within that group. However, at Council meetings, they often have lunch together, they assess how the Council meeting is progressing, they confer with the officers, they group around the president or the ‘opposing party’ and then there are those that keep a neutral position and sit somewhere in the middle, that is, they are supportive when they feel it is deserved.

Power has many faces and among conference goers and Councillors there are other informal mechanisms that are utilised to form opinions. Conventional conversation occurs over coffee, in hallways and at lunch. Regrouping occurs over lunch, as people do not eat in one room together, they in fact have lunch at various venues in smaller groups according to their own determination. This is interesting. The arrangement exists for financial reasons as people pay for their lunch (opinion of power holders) but really it is very suitable for planning and re-grouping purposes. It allows power holders to regroup and plan strategies for the next session. Even though

Councillors are careful to ensure that they are not seen to be aloof, as they want to be seen networking with and supporting people. But, from my observation key power holders group together, after all they have already networked for years, while newer Councillors or those that are not part of Executive try to mingle with the groups from their geographical area as much as possible. There is lots of discussion and gossip among delegates of the business that just has passed in the previous session and of business to come. Discussion arises over who is acting how, why and who is in who's camp and so on. In contrast if people had lunch together in a hall with people circulating or activities being held there would be less opportunities to 'regroup'. Overall, there are a number of inclusion or exclusion practises that can be observed, both into the organisation or into the groups that hold formal powers.

Practices of inclusion and exclusion

If one looks at who is participating in developing policy, increasingly many of the motions are put forward by Council, as mentioned above. Many of the schools that put forward motions are situated in areas where many people of middle class background live and looking at who actually puts forward the motions on the day, one can clearly, even just from the language used, decipher the social background of speakers. A comparison of an earlier conference in 1993 and one in 2000 showed that Council by 2000 put forward half of the motions. In 1993 there were 30 motions, 8 from Council, 13 from rural schools and 9 from metropolitan schools, altogether 14 individual schools put forward motions; at the 2000 conference there were 73 motions, 35 from Council, 28 from rural schools and 10 from metropolitan schools, altogether only 16 schools put forward motions, which means half the motion are from a single source and only 16 schools out of 2000 actively participated in putting ideas forward. While this lack of participation is lamented, Bourdieu's (1991:218) analysis provides useful insights:

With the institutionalisation incarnated in the party worker (*Councillors in this case*) and the organisation, everything is inverted: the organisation tends to monopolise power, the number of participants in the assemblies diminishes. It is the organisation which *calls* meetings and participants serve, on the one hand, to demonstrate the representativeness of their representatives and, on the other, to *ratify* their decisions. Party workers start to reproach ordinary members for not coming often enough to meetings, which reduce them to these functions.

At the Conference there are a number of key groups missing, namely those who do not participate in the organisation by and large. Parents of non-English-speaking background, Indigenous background, low socio-economic background and to some degree metropolitan parents are under-represented in comparison to the number of children that go to school in the metropolitan area. Confronted with the question of the unequal demographics of active parents, interviewees commented that maybe newcomers and especially those from non-English-speaking background get “smothered too much with attention and therefore feel even more overwhelmed because they feel people want something of them”. The same interviewee and two other ones said that the problem is that the local schools do not put people forward of the different backgrounds and that at the local P&C groups, certain people dominate and these are the one’s who are sent to conference and then may join the ranks of Councillors. This interviewee also felt that this could change in future as the organisation is inviting people personally to conferences from the information sessions that they are now frequently holding in schools. However, research in a number of countries showed that ethnicity and social-economic class factors inhibit parents from being active in schools. As Lareau (1987) suggested parents of those backgrounds do not possess the necessary cultural capital to engage effectively with the schools and Moles (1993) claims schools are not skilled in working with these parents also:

Both educators and disadvantaged parents suffer from limited skills and knowledge for interacting effectively. For many disadvantaged parents, a serious handicap in supporting their children’s education is their limited education and their lack of fluency in English (Moles, 1993:31)

Interviewees acknowledged that the process of decision-making at conferences is complex and somewhat cumbersome, but they did not see a need to change proceedings suggested instead to redress the ‘shortcomings’ in people, that is, provide a buddy system, assist them in formulating motions, acknowledge them, provide them with warm words of encouragement. One interviewee though agreed that procedures are too unwieldy and do not allow for productive discussion. This interviewee though was mainly a participant and loyal to the smaller parent organisation. Thus, members of the ‘establishment’ believed in the regime of truth around democracy that appears to dictate such a complex decision-making process.

There are also underlying codes of practises and expectations that Councillors and Executive members have of each other. Failing to conform to those can lead to a sense of exclusion. An example of these expectations was given by two interviewees who both had a vivid recollection of the same incident. The incident evolved out of a motion that was brought to conference from a school level. The seconder of the motion was an experienced Councillor. A fellow Councillor who opposed the motion expressed her disappointment of not being informed of the controversial motion beforehand. Her belief was

I was the elected representative for the organisation and we had worked together (with the seconder of the motion) on some subcommittees so he knew me quite well. It would have been just courtesy to inform me...

Yet, the motion was there in writing and discussion of it occurred openly. Her sentiment reflected more an indication of 'you should work along with the establishment', that is the in-group which is part of leadership such as the Council and Executive, rather than with the outer group, the delegates that only get together once a year, but are 'hailed as the decision-makers'. On the other hand, the party that put the motion forward was outraged, that there was an expectation of being informed prior to the motion being put forward. She believed it would have been undemocratic, as the other person would have been then in a position to prepare counter arguments. "So much for objectivity of the process" she said. This interviewee indicates that decision-making appears to be a question of having opportunities to work on positions rather than the opinion of delegates being central to decision-making, that is, the convincing powers are at issue here, not necessarily the arguments. There is also a clear signalling of them and us, the Councillors and Executive members and delegates at conference.

While powers and therefore division of responsibility are clear between groups, what occurs at informal levels is more difficult to ascertain and analysis of relationships of power have been manifold and are still issues sociologists grapple with (Clegg, 1989; Richardson, 1983:26). Similarly, in this organisation, power relationships between volunteer activists are complex, but relationships of power between paid staff and volunteers even more so.

THE APPARATUS

Staff and volunteers

The office with paid staff fulfils the role of a Secretariat according to the handbook of the organisation and a detailed description of the work of the office is given in Five: The Parent Organisations. While the office operates as an administrative hub for the organisation, the Executive Officer and the research Officer have considerable opportunity to influencing decision-making and at times are called upon to openly voice their opinions. What gives them an advantageous position is the fact that they have been there for many years. For an organisation where all formal decision-making positions are held by volunteers and presidents come and go, an Executive officer that has been with the organisation for sixteen years has corporate knowledge, years of experience in managing the organisation and a monopoly on historical facts and network relationships that are difficult to dispute. This key staff member then has cultural capital valued highly in the organisation and as such this Executive officer exercises considerable power as his advice is sought frequently on issues such as procedure, rewriting of motions and records and strategies the organisation should engage with. An excerpt of a conference (P&C Annual Conference, 1993) where the Executive Officer was consulted by the chair, illustrates this point:

Chair: just a moment, please. (silence.. shuffling of paper, whispered discussions at the front desk. I, I, I'm uncomfortable with it, but hm (more whispering), yes, yes,.. to confirm with the procedures we have in our, our handbook (very reluctant speech here) procedural motions should be deferred until somebody has actually moved the agenda item number 10.

Additionally, there are informal and passive resistance kind of mechanisms that these employed staff can practise explicitly. They can always claim that the paper work necessary is not ready yet, that information on a particular issue is not available, that they did not have any time to follow an issue up and they can also keep quiet about an issue and wait until somebody raises this issue again, if ever. A number of these examples of passive resistance were cited by interviewees. Moreover, key staff members are not shy of speaking out on behalf of the organisation or of voicing their personal opinions at times. On one occasion one staff member gave me the liberty to print his opinion about an issue that other members of his organisation were reluctant

to mention and the other participant organisation in the meeting explicitly asked not to be quoted on the matter. One could conclude that the staff member violated the principle of decision-making being vested in the representative volunteer structure and elected members as he took on leadership on issues and disregarded democratic principles. The outlined process here can be linked to Bourdieu's (1991:196) analysis of the apparatus and the professionalisation of the apparatus:

...the choice of those who will be able to enter the struggle for conquest of the non-professionals depends on the outcome of the competition for power over the apparatus that takes place, within the apparatus, between professionals alone.

There are many 'belittling' and cynical comments made among office staff about Councillors and their expectations and idiosyncrasies. But, there are also criticisms made of the organisation in particular with regard to the representativeness of parents. For example, staff may comment that if most motions come from Council, how much are these issues actually relevant for individual parents at the school level. One staff member explained that a survey sent to all affiliated schools often produces more results than those that come through the formal channels of the organisation because people take the time to return the survey, but do not really want to get involved in the organisation.

There is a sense of the office and the rest of the organisation being somewhat hostile towards each other. Especially the office staff seem to resist the volume of work they need to undertake and recent calls for more accountability. Admittedly, a lot is demanded of them when one looks at the volume of written material that is distributed to Councillors and Executive members. Division between the volunteer structure and paid staff is not new for this organisation. A history booklet of the P&C Federation outlines earlier disputes around the role of the office staff (Wimmer, 1981). Yet, there are many opportunities of interaction between paid staff and office bearers who are the formal leaders of the organisation. For example, the treasurer comes in every week, the media officer is there several times a week, the president is there almost every day. Opportunities for informal decision-making are many and the president has to continuously make a judgement as to where she should take an issue for decision-making to and so does the Executive Officer. He decides whether a staff issue or office administration issue should be presented to the President or not. On

inquiry I learned that there are no rules or terms of reference around this issue. Essentially, the office then is free to present issues it sees fit.

Employees do not have a formal means of putting motions forward that enhance policy making. But, due to frequent contact with the president, executive officers and key Councillors, they at any time can make suggestions as to what should be taken up as an issue and a resulting policy. However, employees may feel more or less empowered to do so, as there is a lack of formal structure for this purpose. An anecdote from one of the employees illustrates the means that can be used to have a motion tabled at the annual conference:

...A Councillor from XX, a school who always put forward progressive notions had once a chat in my office and we talked about suspensions and expulsions from schools. I told him that we have no policy on such matters. He said, that we really should have one. I offered him to write a couple of motions that maybe he could take up. He said, yeah, that would be good, I get my school to put them forward. He said the school would have no worries doing that, they trust him on his judgement. These motions went to the conference and got through no problems. Nobody knew that I put them together (interviewee).

In many ways this is a sad indictment of the organisation as it does not give any means to its employees, who are experts in education matters and formally qualified, to make formal recommendations as to the policies that are needed. In my view this is related to the underlying idea of democracy again, where the input is sought from the formal constituency, that is formed by 'democratic' mechanisms the organisation had decided upon over the years. It does not pay regard to the employees being parents also and having children in public schools. Nor does it utilise the principles of participatory democracy, that is, the notion of people having a say on issues that are of concern to them. In this structure their voice could only be heard legitimately if they were a delegate from their local school at the Annual Conference. Yet, while there is little formal power for employees, means to influence decision-making are numerous.

Outside influences on decision-making

Like in many other advocacy organisations reactive measures to policy and events that need a position by the organisation, trigger action. For example, the recent

proposal to amalgamate some Inner City High Schools by the Minister of Department of Education and Training (Sydney Morning Herald, 1 March, 2001) sparked a number of reactions and subsequent actions by the organisation. Press releases and media interviews followed the announcement and meetings among the parents of the schools under consideration. The organisation itself has not a clear policy as to amalgamation of schools, or the proposed structure of colleges per se, but rather a policy that states that

Federation believes that the individual needs of students can only be addressed: (among other points) by co-operation between schools and school communities in locally identified drawing areas or clusters to provide the widest possible subject choices and other appropriate diversities (P&C Handbook, 1999-2000:38).

An action item related to this policy reads as follows:

Federation calls on the Department of Education and Training to promptly, thoroughly and publicly investigate, in consultation with P&C Associations in the area and the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, the implementation of a cluster model of secondary education in the Inner West of Sydney and other areas" (P&C Handbook, 1999-2000:38).

These two items were formulated at the 1999 conference in response to schools losing pupils and in the context of an education market (see Chapter One: Introduction). Thus, a policy exists that lends itself to some application in the context of the schools proposal from the Minister, but it does not talk about closing schools and selling off the land, it doesn't include the Eastern suburbs and it does not include the model of colleges and regional schools that lead children away from the area they live in. Interpretation is, therefore, possible as outlined above. Nevertheless, the above issue is clearly one of interest to public education, which fits with the aim and objectives of the organisation and serves for the purpose of this research as an illustration of how the organisation reacts to an issue on the basis of its policies. The objections of the Federation included the short time frame that was allowed for feedback, the selling of education facilities that are publicly owned, the fact that the Minister made public announcements of the proposal without working the proposal through with the organisation, thus triggering a strong reaction from parents who had no idea that any proposals were in the pipeline. Had the Federation known about the proposals it would have informed the local schools that work was being done and

local schools would have been invited to participate in the discussions. Thus, in this case the organisation reacted to an event specifically.

The department also frequently sends position papers and draft policies for consideration to the parent organisations. They in turn consider the policy, consult their own policies as to what their position should be and then respond accordingly to the department. If possible at all, they quote relevant policies from their handbook, which will give weight to the arguments they are putting forward, as they are then able to claim that the organisation as a whole is supporting their position. Again, there is a certain amount of interpretation of policy necessary to respond to such papers. The government exercises power in this scenario in a number of ways: it limits to some degree what is being debated in organisations by providing them with possible agenda times inadvertently and keeping them busy by driving the agenda, keeping potentially the more substantial matters successfully out of the debating arena. And, by setting up advisory groups and task forces it assists in issues being lost in bureaucratic red tape, yet it is able to give the impression that participation and consultation is active, meaningful and welcomed, thus also subscribing to the regime of truth around democracy.

Education professionals and parent organisations

There are a considerable number of parents active in parent organisations that themselves are teachers by profession or they are lecturers in the field of education. There is a potential for a conflict of interest here when the advocates themselves are employed by the target of the advocacy activities, in this case the State government. For example, the parent organisations provide a venue for grievances one might have with the employer. This issue of membership is brought up at Conference frequently as heard in a speech from the 1992 P&C Conference. The concern is that this membership can also influence people's perception of representativeness, but on the other hand inside information can be useful. The major concern is the opinion of the department itself on this matter. The relevant paragraph of the handbook says:

Speakers at Federation's Annual Conference and Council, when contentious issues are being considered, are encouraged to declare any vested or pecuniary interest in the possible outcomes (P&C Handbook, 1999-2000:39).

Interesting here is the word 'encouraged' and indeed in practice, delegates at conferences declare being a teacher or lecturer as claim to cultural capital, to enhance one's speech rather than to declare an interest and therefore undermine one's utterances. On the other hand, I have also observed that questions raised to politicians or senior departmental staff are never raised with the prefix of 'I am a teacher' as this would carry negative capital as it would bring into the open a potential conflict of interest. According to interviewees and speeches a motion to limit access of those professionals to the organisation has never been successful, because people felt that there is enough of a balance in terms of ordinary parents. Yet, judging from those that appear to be active in the organisation as evidenced by transcript of speeches and my interviewees, education professionals exercise considerable influence in parent organisations.

At the local level of parent organisations professional educators have a strong influence as they answer the questions of parents that are directly related to a particular school. With the advent of School Councils and local partnerships in education, one can argue that decision-making at the local level is being strongly promoted at least in the ideological stance of the government that is actively promoting partnerships and local decision-making. However, in practise much of the power rests with the School Principal who judges in essence, what he or she sees as important issues in the school. A principal who I interviewed explained to me how he prioritises policy issues and material that is sent to schools. He claimed that the most important directives are those that the Minister of Education feels strongly about and wants to see enforced. These are generally the same ones that the District Superintendent is keen to implement. Anything else that he receives in form of education kits, education policies and so on, he may show to the Executive team of the school and occasionally to Council if he personally feels that the material could benefit his school. Much of the material is never even seriously considered. This is a significant issue when looking at Gender Equity policy, because it can mean that efforts of central office in addressing issues of gender at the local level may well be fruitless. On closer investigation, the interviewee also revealed that many of the schools he knows do not even have a School Council that meets regularly and therefore parents have very little formal input. At times consent is even sought from

School Council members over the phone. The locus of power in schools provides a challenge to parent organisations' centralised structure because they essentially focus on a power holder that now has limited power at the local level itself, thus their efforts towards change may well be futile.

In summary, one can speak of the above outlined procedures and rules as fulfilling a particular purpose, that of reproducing a regime of truth which proclaims fair decision-making, a value and belief system for the organisation that then can be used to shape the identity of the organisation and serves as a tool for representation of the organisation. But, it also serves as a tool to acculturate delegates and Councillors into the organisation so that they equally take forward this hegemonic notion of functionality, objectivity, neutrality and representativeness.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The parent organisations that form the substantive focus of this thesis utilise a complex decision-making process that reflects a regime of truth around democracy and notions of representation in a pluralist society. In presenting an insight into those historical events and ideological positions that influenced the debate around gender equity and that still influence the contemporary state of parent decision-making in schools, I have argued that they are based on a regime of truth concerning ideas and ideals of participation in schools and participatory democracy. The complex structure of decision-making, while overtly participative, in practice is familiar and welcoming to the educated group and far more difficult to engage with for 'ordinary' parents. However, the organisation insists that it represents parents of public schools broadly, which reflects another aspect of the regime of truth of participative democracy, that is, representation.

Moreover, I have argued, that the centralised structure of parent organisations has limited value in a decentralised system of schooling that is increasingly based on self-management. While it may be important to have an organised group that is able to engage in dialogue with the government, it is the local school that most likely will need to drive change. Hence, to remain effective, the centralised structure must engage differently with local schools, which may also allow the organisations to engage with minority groups within schools more effectively. In this light it is perhaps not surprising that one of the parent organisations folded recently, as it had not enough members that were interested to participate.

This thesis has illustrated that discussion on gender equity for boys has oscillated between a social justice position and one that is essentially based on a positional economy where in a dichotomous setting of two sexes only one can be a winner. Debate was heated because of the positional nature of educational achievement and because of the regime of truth around marks that perceives them as direct link to career opportunities and long term life chances. Yet, the perceived success of gender equity policies and strategies is based on flawed assumptions. They are based on the regime of truth that matriculation marks are the most important determinant of one's life chances and employment opportunities. In particular, in relation to girls, it is

clear that their long-term career outcomes are influenced by other factors, such as discriminatory practises in the workplace rather than educational achievement.

Cultural capital and by extension habitus is a key factor that affects education of both sexes. Cultural capital arguments were utilised by those in parent organisations who argued that school achievements are lower for those who are from a low socio-economic background, and/or are disadvantaged because of their ethnicity or of indigenous background. The interaction of positional economy, cultural capital and the regime of truth over educational achievements, has meant that many parents broadly supported gender equity measures for all children, others particularly for boys, yet others, with their experience and background, were arguing for a close examination of those groups of children that need extra support in schools based on their class, ethnicity, indigenous or rural background. In order to accommodate these different positions parent organisations developed very broad policies that then were used by proponents of boys in education to mount an extensive campaign, beyond what would have been warranted as a result of the debate at their annual conference.

The intensity of the debate around gender equity leads me to the conclusion that the positional nature of education is central in influencing parents' actions as well as the actions of the media and that parents most likely want to get involved broadly speaking when an issue threatens the value of the positional good vis-à-vis their own children's potential in achieving highly. This proposition is also confirmed by the fact that other policies that potentially affect matriculation results have been rejected also by the organisation, even though they would have been of benefit to students in general, for example, the abolishing of selective schools.

In addition, the success of the campaign around the boys' issues is also a result of the engagement by the media with this issue. The dialectic between the parents and the media supported the campaign in that the media ran a debate that appeared to be rational, based on opinions from many perspectives, while the parent organisation was able to publicly use its 'trump card' of representing parents in New South Wales broadly, an assumption that is false as stated above.

Furthermore, I have argued that the assessment of education as a positional good is a result of the perception that there is an education market that is increasingly based on competitive principles under the economic system of capitalism. Parents' choice of schools, the increase in numbers of students entering private schooling and privately paid coaching all indicate the development of market principles that affect the perception of education. Even gender equity strategies were perceived as having a direct influence on the outcome of education, because, in arguing over resources, parents and the public wanted to gain access to gender equity strategies for boys, which then, the people in the media particularly argued, needed to be withdrawn from girls. In other words, gender equity strategies were treated as a causal variable that would determine educational success.

Having a fixed amount of funds meant that gender equity was contested in a zero-sum environment, where sides stood to lose resources if one side was favoured over another. In practice though, to appease parent bodies and the men's movement, as well as those that still argued for the needs of girls, policies were framed in general terms, which essentially undermined the value of gender equity strategies. I have argued that because they became broadly available to all, their value in a positional economy was reduced. This means that gender equity was politically less contested and therefore was more likely to disappear from the political agenda and a focus would be lost, as well as, potentially, funding. This assessment is confirmed by the fact that over the past ten years, from 1993 when the boys' education issues arose in the public arena to when the recommendations were released from the Inquiry into the Education of Boys at the end of 2002, gender equity funding recently, at least in New South Wales has not increased, gender equity policies receive little attention by schools and gender equity staff battle against the fiscal imperatives of reducing public expenditure.

In addition to the political and fiscal benefits, broadly identified gender equity strategies provide the freedom to focus strategies in whichever direction one desires. This is precisely what occurred in parent organisations and with the federal inquiry into the education of boys. While the recommendations for the *Inquiry into the Education of Boys* similarly lists strategies to be applied to boys *and* girls, the recommendations almost exclusively address boys' identified issues such as

behaviour management strategies, increase in literacy learning, boys' different learning styles to girls, the role of fathers in educating boys and so on.

For the P&C the revised gender equity policy allowed for those that supported the boys' cause to advance their arguments in a public manner, while conveniently overlooking needs of girls. In contrast, a balanced gender equity policy could include identified goals for boys and girls taking into account other areas such as ethnicity, socio-economic and geographical background. However, an open ended policy is much more expedient as illustrated throughout this thesis.

I further argued that feminists and education departments played a role in the way the debate of boys versus girls focused on a binary constellation of gender, because liberal feminists equally have fought for better educational outcomes with a focus on improving the matriculation marks of girls. Girls were measured against boys' outcomes and now girls became the new measure that boys were measured against. Yet, girls are still disadvantaged in terms of their career outcomes, despite the higher matriculation marks. Instead, I suggest, society ought to consider the educational goals it wants to set for all children, goals that may expose education to a lesser degree to market forces.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that parent representation through parent organisations and educational success as measurable through matriculation marks, reflect partial truths only. Parent organisations while operating within the regime of truth of participative democracy appeal only to certain groups of parents and, long term career outcomes are dependent on matriculation results only to a limited degree. Yet, the regime of truth around matriculation marks can lead to extraordinary debates as presented in this work.

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