

PARENT ADVOCACY: A PRIVATE ROLE IN A PUBLIC INSTITUTION

by

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Abstract

Parental involvement in schools has been contested for decades. Although it is clear that parents have a responsibility to care for and nurture their children, the legislated role of schools to educate children leaves somewhat ambiguous the role of parents.

Using Hannah Arendt's notions of public and private and the emergence of a social sphere this conceptual research examines the complex relationship of parents to schools. Using the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) Parent Advocacy Project as one model, this study illustrates how parents can play an important role in the public school education of their children.

Parental involvement and legislated governance of schools have emerged as major educational issues in Canada. The struggle for control in education has its roots in the history of public education, legislation, the emergence of unions and the postindustrial global production/consumption market place economy. These issues reveal the emergence of a "social" sphere blurring the public/private distinctions, dominated by bureaucracy and alienating citizens from their political responsibilities to determine a good life.

The emerging role of parents as advocates for their children in the schools may restore some balance to the public/private relationship, however, it may also reveal some of the problems of power and control within the system.

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Chapter One

Introduction

More than thirty years as a teacher, school and district administrator and twenty-five years as a parent had not brought me any closer to understanding the role for parents in the public school system until I returned to university in 1998 to continue my own education. It was during the first year of the Educational Doctoral Program in Leadership and Policy at the University of British Columbia¹ that I first came into contact with the work of Hannah Arendt and her notions of “public and private” space. This was a revelation to me and helped me refine my thinking and understanding of the relationship between parents – largely based in the “private” domain - and the public school system – a product of the “public” domain. This thesis examines the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Council (BCCPAC) Parent Advocacy Project as one model of a role for parents in the public school system. I use my own experiences and the work of Arendt and others as a lens to view and explain the complex relationship of parents with schools.

I use the work of Hannah Arendt, writing about the public and private and the rise of the social sphere to examine the relationship of parents to schools and the influence of the social sphere on public schools. Using these conceptual frames, I argue in Chapter Two that parents are responsible for the guidance of their children’s education from the

¹ The Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of British Columbia is a cohort program, which integrates theory and the practice of leaders from a wide variety of educational settings. The writer is a member of the second cohort, which entered the program in July 1998.

privacy of the home to the more public realms of the school and society at large. Using Arendt's description of the rise of "the social" and the absorption of public education into the realm of the production/consumption economy of the global market place, I illustrate why parents must begin to question the common assumptions that form the accepted reality for all involved in the education of children.

Hannah Arendt was born in Hanover, Germany, in 1906. She studied at the Universities of Marburg and Freiburg and received her doctorate in philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. In 1933 she fled from Germany to France and then in 1941 she moved to the United States where she became a citizen in 1951. Her early life and education were set against the backdrop of the developing Nazi Germany and the persecution of Jews. The resultant totalitarian regimes and her resettlement in the United States formed the basis of much of her thinking about speech and action and living in a democratic society. She died in 1975, having become one of the most significant women political thinkers of the twentieth century (Baehr, 2000).

Arendt wrote extensively about the "public" and the "private" and her concern for the blurring of the distinctions between them. Weintraub has described this dichotomy:

The distinction between "public" and "private" has been a central and characteristic preoccupation of Western thought since classical antiquity, and has long served as a point of entry into many of the key issues of social and political analysis, of moral and political debate, and of the ordering of everyday life. In Norberto Bobbio's useful phrase, the public/private distinction stands out as one of the "grand dichotomies" of Western thought, in the sense of binary opposition

that is used to subsume a wide range of other important distinctions and that attempts (more or less successfully) to dichotomize the social universe in a comprehensive and sharply demarcated way (Weintraub, 1997, p. 1).

Arendt argues that there has been a loss of the private and public space in western society. Both have been diminished by the rise of what she calls the social – or the preoccupation of political life with the necessities of production and consumption. In the case of home and school this blurring between private and public has become especially problematic. Arendt expresses grave concern for children in the loss of distinction between private and public:

The more completely modern society discards the distinction between what is private and what is public, between what can thrive only in concealment and what needs to be shown in the full light of the public world, the more, that is, it introduces between the private and the public a social sphere in which the private is made public and vice versa, the harder it makes things for children, who by nature require the security of concealment in order to mature undisturbed (1968, p. 188).

Children need to be protected from the glare of the public to grow and mature, not only in their personal and physical development, but also in relationship to the world. They need to be sheltered from the influences of the public, political world, until they can understand it and learn how to participate in it. Arendt places the primary responsibility for protecting the child with the parents, who, having summoned the child into life, have also brought the child into the public world against which the child must be protected. She explains that:

the child's "... traditional place [is] in the family, whose adult members daily return back from the outside world and withdraw into the security of private life within four walls. These four walls, within which people's private family life is lived, constitute a shield against the world and specifically against the public aspect of the world" (p. 186).

When the child moves from the home into the "in between" of the school, in preparation for entry into a more public realm, protection is still needed so that the child can grow and learn without all of the consequences inherent in action taken in the world. The classrooms and the school itself need some protection from the glare of publicity to continue to protect the child. What is the relationship of parents to education and to this place we call school?

Parental involvement in education has been contested for decades. The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) states: "The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance: that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents." It is clear that parents have the responsibility to nurture their children and to guide them through the early years of their development. However, the legislated role of schools to educate children between the ages of six and sixteen years leaves somewhat ambiguous the role of parents. What rights and responsibilities lie with parents; which rights and responsibilities lie with the school? How can parents, often with little training or knowledge of either the education system or their legal rights, play a significant role in guiding their child when so much of that role has been delegated by the state to public schools and professional educators? A number

of writers have characterized the relationship between schools and parents as problematic, often citing the organizational structure:

The current structure of public schooling does not invite public engagement, but instead reinforces a hierarchical and bureaucratic pattern that gives neither students nor parents an official voice. Instead of opening up and encouraging genuine parental participation, the school structure eliminates anything that might erode the power equilibrium (Fege, 2000. p. 39).

However, Fege goes on to point out that families have changed:

Although schools have resisted change the family has restructured. The result: 21st century families attempting to partner with 20th century school organizations. The institutions of families and schools are crashing into each other, which leads to conflict and instability in school systems (p.40).

Unfortunately, many of the attempts to restructure schools have only paid lip service to this conflict between parents and schools, often seeing central government disguising their efforts at centralizing control behind somewhat limited parental participation in decisions through such efforts as parent councils. In Chapter Three of this thesis I explore the issues of parental involvement.

Over the past decade in the western world and specifically in Canada, there has been significant change in the legislated involvement of parents in educational decision-making processes. The restructuring and realignment of school district governance has occurred in almost all provinces with the emergence of school councils as a significant indicator of growing parental demand for consultation. Cullingford (1996), Fleming (1997), Cutler (2000) and others have discussed efforts to move the oversight and control

of schools from school districts to other levels of government. In Chapter Four I review the status of school boards and school councils across Canada and examine the degree to which these changes have or have not increased parent participation in the education of their children and the degree to which this emerging governance role helps parents fulfill their responsibilities for the education of their children.

Much has been written about parental involvement in education and its impact on the achievement and success of children. Literature dealing with parent advocacy in education often deals with the concerns of parents with special needs children rather than the more general responsibility that all parents have for their own children within the public schools. There is, however, an emerging body of literature on the advocacy role for parents in dealing with institutions, such as schools, in agency driven society. For example, Margolis and Salkind contend (1996, p.1):

Parents are the most suitable advocates for their own children, whom they know well, care for and wish to succeed. They already serve as role models and gatekeepers, and parental advocacy is the most practical possible arrangement. Moreover, parents, unlike other agents, can perform many advocacy tasks simultaneously.

In Chapter Five I review the current literature on parent involvement and advocacy.

In Chapter Six I present in some detail an example of a model to support the involvement of parents in their children's formal education, the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils Parent Advocacy Model, drawing upon my own experience as a Superintendent of Schools in the school district in which a group of parents first initiated the role of parent advocates. Using a scenario based upon an

incident of parent concern with the teacher of her child, I illustrate the emergence of parent advocacy in one school district

Efforts to increase parental involvement in formal education often lead to conflict with the established institutional arrangements. Accordingly, I briefly examine the role of teachers, administrators and boards of trustees within the public school system, including the influence of unions and the loss of authority of teachers and principals to determine curriculum and methodologies as the forces of globalization and production/consumption have absorbed our society.

The relationship between parents and schools has been characterized as a struggle for control.

The confusion over the meaning of "parent involvement" reflects the conflict of interest inherent in the governance structure of public education. On the one hand, school boards and teacher unions are supposed to protect the public interest in public education. On the other hand, in representing the interests of teachers, teacher unions frequently place the interests of teachers above the public interest. ... As a result, although union rhetoric pays great deference to the parental stake in education, the interests of teachers and teacher unions, or what is assumed to be in their interests, is predominant in practice (Haar, 1999, p. 26).

In Chapter Seven I attempt to bring together the various issues raised throughout this thesis and to examine how my findings affect my own understanding and practice in education.

Chapter Two

The Public and the Private

There often seems to be tension between the home and the school. Not only has this been true in my experience, but also there is a history in western culture of stress between parents and schools over the education of children. I have personally experienced this tension as a classroom teacher, a school principal and as a district administrator. I also felt the division as a parent when my own children attended school. What creates this tension? Part of the answer, I believe lies in the loss of distinction between private and public in our society – a topic which has been the subject of interest since ancient times and which continues to fascinate writers – and the emergence of what Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) has termed “the social sphere”. Arendt has been among the most helpful of the recent political philosophers in helping me to understand the relationship between parents, children, families, schools and the state. Using the concept of “public” and “private” and the “social”, I examine here some of the issues which are of concern in a discussion of the relationships between home and school, parent and teacher, children and education.

I have considerable help with my research: the history of private life has been extensively documented in Aries & Duby’s five-volume work The History of Private Life (1987-1991). Much of this history is based upon Western societies where the concepts of family life tend to be quite recent and refer primarily to the 19th century to the present day. In this more recent conception family has been a private unit composed of the

parents and their children, often surrounded and supported by an extended family of grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and a supportive community. The immediate family unit tended to be a life-long arrangement, providing a secure and structured environment into which the child could be born and raised and educated to the norms and values of the family. There was generally a head of the household, usually the father, who was accorded absolute power in an authoritarian arrangement that ensured that the necessities of life were provided by work and labor both within the household and beyond (Prost, 1991, p. 67). Although the nature of a family has always been dependent to some extent on the cultural and class backgrounds of its situation, most often the family unit existed within a community where all adults took some responsibility for the children, who could roam relatively freely, but protected from most dangers by watchful adult eyes. Frequently this community required attendance at church or some religious gathering place where further support could be counted upon. The father was usually the one who left the home to work in the public world where he became part of a community of workers (p.68). Mothers frequently met socially with other women, forming a network of support and advice. Children were educated in the home and/or in the local community through arrangements by the parents with the church or a local teacher. This education for most children ended as soon as they could enter the world as productive workers or, for the girls, assume the household responsibilities that generally fell to the female members. The family could take care of itself and its needs but could count upon the extended family and the larger local community in times of distress. There was little need and not much opportunity for help from the greater society.

This picture of the traditional family is probably familiar to most of us and comes from our notions of family developed through the decades since the 19th century and probably lingers in many minds today when issues of family and parenting enter discussions. However, it is also somewhat mythical, in that it is a picture of a middle class patriarchal family rather than either a poor or a wealthy household. This is, perhaps, particularly true when educators discuss the responsibilities of parents for their children and their children's education, since many educators come from a middle class background. The reality today is very different for the majority of families. Family units become smaller and very much more mobile, moving their household to wherever work is available, leaving behind the extended family and original community. Far fewer families participate in organized religion or community associations. In families with two parents, both generally work. At one stage this was to provide the necessities and extras they perceive they need to have a satisfying life but today other factors are also important. Work helps to provide identity, security and satisfaction; factors often absent for women working exclusively in the home. Household responsibilities tend to be shared in an environment where women are more and more recognized as equal partners in the family unit (Prost, 1991, p. 67). Children are often included in family discussions about decisions affecting them. Authority is shared rather than imposed from the top. Many families break up and reform with a "blended" family arrangement including children of different parents in the newly assembled household. Others are reduced to single parent status by death or divorce, while others never enter into a binding relationship and common law status is afforded the couple living together. This couple is no longer necessarily a binding of opposite genders, but may consist of same sex

individuals choosing to live together and raise children. Unmarried teenagers having children are choosing to keep and raise those children. All of these significant changes are reflected in a gradual erosion of the privacy of the family and the intrusion of the state into what was once not considered a public domain. Simultaneously, however, the public sphere has also undergone change.

The Western concept of a public space is grounded in the *polis* or political arena of Athenian times. This space was where citizens (the heads of households) participated as equals in discussions about the good life. Habermas, in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989), contends that this public space continued into the Roman Empire as the *res publica* but disappeared after the collapse of the Roman Empire and the emergence of feudal society, where public and private were represented by distinct populations: the public noble and the private serf. Not until the development of bourgeois society in the 17th and 18th centuries was there an opportunity for private individuals to participate in public life in Western society, although again on a limited scale. “The salons and coffee houses of London, Paris and Berlin allowed writers, artists, civil servants, aristocrats and business people from different classes, religions and genders to gather, debate and be seen and heard by others in this new kind of *polis*, albeit a restricted one” (Coulter, in press). Over the course of the industrial revolution, just as families and the private household underwent change, so did the public sphere. Public debate and discussion gave way to concerns about markets and the economy and bureaucracies were developed to manage and control what became a giant housekeeping role. As the population became more educated in reading and writing, the public sphere expanded to include more than the educated bourgeois class. Parallel to the economic

change came the emergence of the mass media and the development of a mass culture. (Habermas, 1992). "The changes in both the public and private spheres resulted in a "refeudalization" of society in the 19th and especially the 20th centuries in which bureaucracies assumed public power while the administrative state penetrated what had been private ... leaving no genuine public or private space..."(Coulter, in press). These changes have had considerable influence on education and schooling.

Education has been recognized as important to individuals and society since ancient times. Public schools, however, are a relatively recent phenomenon in Western society, and there is much discussion, and confusion, over the role of the public school in the education of children. Prost points out that the extension of years of formal education has been significant in the second half of the twentieth century (Prost, 1991, p. 70). Not only did this result from the need to introduce training and technical skills in preparation for apprenticeships, which were no longer available through the home, but it also reflected the need to prepare children for the ways of society. Whereas the home and the family were once society's "basic cell" (p. 71), as work moved out of the home and prosperity revolutionized housework, the need for children to learn the skills of "living" were diminished and this role fell more and more to the schools.

The liberalization of family education shifted the burden of educating youngsters for their future life in society from the family to the school. The schools assumed responsibility for teaching young people to respect the realities of time and space and the rules of social life as well as how to relate to other people (Prost, p. 71). The distinction between the family and an individual's existence within the privacy of the family, and the public world and the role individual citizens' play in that world has

evolved and changed. I believe that these issues lie at the heart of the important and ongoing tension between the home and the school and between parents and teachers. In addition, politics, power and control surface in the discussion of the private/public relationship of homes and schools and these are reflected in issues of governance, bureaucratization, and the apparent erosion of the boundary between the public and the private sphere.

The Importance of Private and Public Spheres

It is important to understand the distinctions between the notions of “public” and “private” when examining the home and school relationship. While parents remain their children’s first teachers, the state, through public schools, also shares the responsibility for educating children to live in the world and to live good lives. Hannah Arendt’s writings are helpful in understanding this distinction. Arendt’s notions of public and private are based on her interpretation of Aristotle, who draws a sharp distinction between the functions of the household (*oikia*), or private realm, and the political or public realm (*polis*) (Villa, 1996, p.18). The household realm includes the economic and productive activities that aim at “securing life itself”. This includes the provision of those necessities required for the preservation of life and the continuation of the species. In Aristotle’s view, “...the household presumes relations of inequality. Relations of domination – master over slaves, husband over wife, father over children ... There must be a ‘head of the household’ if this unit is to fulfill its basic economic functions” (p. 18). In contrast to the household is the political realm, *the polis* that “makes the good life possible”:

The good life is one of noble and just actions, of ethical and intellectual virtue.

The political association makes it possible by endowing its members with freedom and equality. Liberated from direct concern with the problems of maintenance, citizens (the heads of households) are free to devote themselves to the pursuit and preservation of virtue in their community (p.18).

It is through the polis that citizens become fully human and free. The household makes it possible for the polis to exist; it is a means to the ultimate end of securing the good life through the political or public arena.

This base of clear separation of public from private is fundamental to much of Arendt's work on modern day, western democracy. Like Aristotle, Arendt sees the need for a clear distinction between the public realm of politics and the privacy of the household – the difference between “freedom and necessity”. Arendt explains “...it was a matter of course that the mastering of the necessities of life in the household was the condition for freedom in the polis” (Arendt, 1958, p. 30-31). The private, which provides the necessities of life, allows people to be free to participate in the public. Freedom and action are the foundation of political life, which are concerned with “the good life”(p. 36).

The private/public distinction has been characterized as one of the “grand dichotomies” of Western thought (Weintraub, 1997). However, the basis of the dichotomy, the Athenian household and the *polis*, raise some important and problematic issues. The ancient household is characterized by its hierarchical nature, with the father as head assuming absolute authority over his wife, children and servants. The household is engaged in all of those private activities to do with reproducing and sustaining life –

the necessities of shelter, food, clothing; conceiving and nurturing the young; love and intimacy. The *polis*, or political public arena is where free “men” (not women, children, foreigners or slaves), as the heads of households, gather to be seen and heard in discussion and debate about the good life. The private provided for the necessities of life, allowing the freedom to participate in the public. Arendt draws upon the work of Socrates to illuminate the problems of the ancient polis. Socrates was not, in her view, a professional philosopher, but both an actor and thinker, that is, someone who both engaged in the discussions of the polis about the good life and contemplated what it was to lead a good life. However, Arendt characterizes Plato, Socrates’s student, as a different kind of participant in the polis. Plato avoided the dangerous polis and the world of action by withdrawing into the superior sphere of contemplation. Plato, Arendt contends, uses Socrates “to introduce the division between those who know and do not act and those who know” (Arendt, 1958, p.223), and that by “sheer force of conceptualization and philosophical clarification, the Platonic identification of knowledge with command and rulership and of action [or practice] with obedience and execution overruled all earlier experiences and...became authoritative” (1958, p.225). Thus, the polis is privileged over the household and the life of the mind - contemplation (*vita contemplativa*) is privileged over the life of action (*vita activa*).

These distinctions are problematic in modernity. The power structures, dominated by a privileged male class of citizens who control the future of the world, subordinate the functions of home and family and the roles of women, children and non-citizens – slaves, foreigners, etc. The privileging of the academy, knowledge and thinking over speech and action and retaining them in the hands of an elite, virtually eliminated

the original conception of the polis as a place of discussion, debate and action. These distinctions are unacceptable in our modern, western democratic culture which aims at equality amongst people regardless of gender, race, religion, social or economic class. Also, the notion of all aspects of production, labor and work which support the economic market place in the provision of the necessities of life, being relegated to the private, subordinate role of the household are no longer possible in complex capitalist societies. In Athenian society, the boundaries between private and public were clear and our modern concerns for equality were not at issue. Arendt attempted to remedy some of these problematic issues in the use of the private/public dichotomy by re-conceiving the life of action and rescuing it from subordination to the life of the mind.

In The Human Condition Arendt goes to great lengths to describe the distinctions between the public and the private, which, in turn, depend on separating *praxis* (action) in the public world from *poiesis* (labor and work: making) in the private world. She defines three human activities of the *vita activa* or life of acting in the world: labor, work and action. Canovan is helpful in clarifying Arendt's notions of labor, work and action (Canovan, 1992, pp. 122-135). Canovan reviews the attributes Arendt assigns to labor: it is natural and dedicated to meeting biological needs; it is cyclic, being part of nature's growth and decay process; it is arduous, a form of toil and pain, analogous to the pains of childbirth; it is necessary, forced upon human beings by their biological condition; it is fertile, like the reproductive process and has the potential for limitless growth; it is private, each person needing to meet his or her own biological needs. This notion of labor is an important one in considering the private realm and the preparation of the young to participate in the public world and to take care of their own basic needs. While

preparation for a life of labor was traditionally in the home and concerned with meeting basic human needs, it has become central to the functioning of society and preparation for labor has become an essential role of schools.

Again, Canovan is useful in explaining Arendt's distinction of work from labor. "...[W]ork means making things, solid objects meant to last, to be used rather than consumed and to contribute to the world, the durable human artifice that provides men with a home upon the earth" (p.128). Whereas labor is cyclical and continuous, work has a distinct purpose, a means to an end – the finished product. While work is also a private activity, the products, which result, are part of the public world and continue to exist beyond the life of the worker. Again, the significance of work in the preparation of the young is critical in understanding Arendt's views of education and the contemporary world. It is here that Arendt develops the link between the private world of labor, and the public world of action. Work was traditionally carried on as part of the private sphere and training was in the home or through private apprenticeships. Today, preparation for labor and work is a focus of schooling, moving from the private to the public sphere. The rhetoric of education and schooling today have largely become concerned with preparation of the young to enter a world of labor and work to maintain the global economy and the national "competitive advantage."

Action, for Arendt, is the highest form of human activity. "It is the very broad category of human activity that covers interactions with other people that are not matters of routine behaviour but require personal initiative" (Canovan, p.131). Action is very closely related to speech, which is essential to the two features of Arendtian action: plurality and natality.

Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the two-fold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was or ever will be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood (Arendt 1958, pp. 175-176).

Plurality separates humans from the animal world. Born into the world as unique individuals, human beings have the capacity to interact with others on an equal basis, sharing a common or public world. Arendt saw plurality as the basis of politics and the basis for judging the goodness of action in the public sphere.

Through speech unique individuals with unique ideas can discuss and debate, and through action together, change the world. That each individual has unique ideas, capacities and possibilities forms the basis of natality – and agency, democracy and freedom. Children are born into the world as individuals, but according to Arendt, without the capacity to participate in the adult world of speech and action. First children must develop, in private, protected from the adult world of politics. Children grow and are shaped in a sheltered environment where they are subject to the authority of their parents and other adults as they learn about the world and develop the skills to participate in that world. They do not live in a democratic world of pre-adults, such as that envisioned by such educational thinkers as Rousseau, but learn through a socialization process how to live and work with others for the common good. This preparation takes place first in the home and then in the school. It is a gradual process of moving from play

to work (or from labor to work, in Arendtian terms), from concern with the necessities of life to concern for others and the world. Education is then a preparation for the time when children are ready for freedom, to participate with others in speech and action to make their own unique contribution to the world. An essential component of education is the protection of natality and the preparation for plurality, learning how to live and interact with others as a unique individual in a pluralistic society. For Arendt, this preparation could only be possible when children were sheltered from the world in a private place. The home and the school are these private places where children can develop, make mistakes, and learn about their role in the world while not yet fully participating in it.

The Rise of the Social Affects Private and Public

Arendt's divisions are significant for the preparation of the young to enter the public world. Not only are the distinctions between public and private, necessity and freedom, labor, work and action important, but they also are significant in determining the relative roles of parents and families on the one hand, and schools on the other, in the preparation of the young to enter the public world. If, as Arendt contends, and as I discuss in the next section, the public realm has been overrun and consumed by the private needs to sustain life through work and labor at the expense of action or political discussion, then what is the role of the modern day school in the preparation of the young? Are schools in fact continuing to introduce children to the world so that they may have their opportunity to participate as citizens in the political discussions about the good

life, or are they preparing the children to become obedient, productive members of the production/consumption economy in the world market place? And what of the role of the parents in guiding and overseeing the education of their children, both in the privacy of their homes and in the more public sphere of the school? Are our public schools institutions where children can be introduced to the world of action (politics), a sort of “in between” place, neither fully private nor fully public, or are schools part of what Arendt calls “the social,” that is merely bureaucracies maintaining the status quo? As parents become advocates for their children in schools, will parents lobby for preparing the young to be productive workers or active participants in shaping a better world, or, perhaps for both of these roles? As Arendt might ask, is education about caring enough to allow our children to reinvent the world or is education about ensuring that our children conform to the world they inherit from us and become productive workers, laborers and consumers to satisfy the global, capital marketplace? Arendt expresses her concerns about how public and private distinctions have disappeared, swallowed by what she terms “the social.”

Arendt’s explanation of the emergence of what she terms “society” or “the social” details her concern for the loss of the distinction between the private and the public realms.

The emergence of society – the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices – from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two

terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen (Arendt, 1958, p. 38).

It is most likely that Arendt's background as a German Jew, fleeing Europe and the Holocaust, and her reflection on totalitarianism, greatly influenced her thinking about and interpretation of society. Her first major attempt to grapple with these issues, The Origins of Totalitarianism (1966), outlines the rise of anti-Semitism and the emergence of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union under Stalin and in Germany under Hitler. She raises issues of mass or mob society and the loss of politics to bureaucratic control. According to Canovan, Arendt had shown anxiety about the reduction of human beings into a uniform species and the destruction of humane civilization:

'Society' in her sense is contrasted with an authentic public realm in which individuals are united in such a way that their plurality is preserved and made manifest. This is possible where they are held together by a common world, which lies outside and between them, so that in the public space, which they form, reality can appear in its mansidedness. 'Society' by contrast, is a kind of pseudo-public realm, a distortion of authentic public life characterized by a combination of conformity and egocentricity. In society, human beings are bound together, but the concerns that bind them are essentially private, to do with production and consumption in a common economy and a common mass culture. ... they are not gathered around a common world that would allow them to be plural individuals (Canovan, 1992. p. 117).

Canovan goes on to suggest that there are two common strands in Arendt's thought; "one of them economic, concerned with the increasingly 'socialized' mankind united by

production whose advent was hailed by Marx; the other cultural, concerned with the uniformity of mores and lifestyles castigated by theorists of 'mass society'" (p.118). In ancient civilizations, the distinction between the private – family and home - and the public – the polis was clear. Work and labor to maintain life itself occurred in the privacy of the home and family. Citizens participated in the public political arena to join in speech and action to determine the good life. After the fall of these civilizations and during the dark ages, the public sphere ceased to exist (except perhaps through the church) until its reemergence in a new form at the end of the Middle Ages.

The development of a market economy taking in more and more of the population meant that material concerns that had formerly been the private affair of each separate household became a set of bonds tying many households together, while increasingly self-conscious spokesmen for the new form of commercial wealth began to demand that a new public authority, the state, should protect and promote this network of private interests (p. 118).

Over the course of three centuries, this new phenomenon, "society", emerged and developed with material interests becoming the collective concern of the whole nation and the care of the state. "Since the take-off of economic modernization and the binding of ever-widening circles of people into an interdependent economy, the tendency has grown to regard the political order as the handmaiden of economic purposes" (p.118). Schools, as instruments of the state, became places where the young could be prepared for their place in this economic order, rather than for their role in the political world of action and speech.

The other aspect of 'society' that troubled Arendt has to do with the emergence of mass culture, from its initial beginnings in the "aristocratic milieu of royal courts" of Europe, to the current western obsession with conspicuous consumption, social status, and fashion (p. 119). Both the economic and cultural aspects of society represent for Arendt "deformed versions of public life, characterized by conformity rather than plurality" (p. 120) and destruction of scope for natality.

Arendt's notion of "the social" is subject to substantial criticism. Pitkin (1998, p.4) in her recent book compares Arendt's notion of the social to a work of science fiction:

Arendt writes about the social as if an evil monster from outer space, entirely external to and separate from us, had fallen upon us intent on debilitating, absorbing, and ultimately destroying us, gobbling up our distinct individuality and turning us into robots that mechanically serve its purposes.

Pitkin takes issue with Arendt's imagery of the social, but seems to concur with the underlying notion that there is a real-world problem with "... the gap between our enormous, still increasing powers and our apparent helplessness to avert the various disasters – national, regional and global – looming on our horizon" (p. 6). Pitkin (p. 196) explains:

The social is Arendt's way of talking about a collectivity of people who, though they are interdependent and active – their doings therefore continually shaping the conditions under which they all live – behave individually in ways that preclude coordinated action, so that they cannot (or at any rate do not) take charge of what they are doing in the world.

Pitkin, while agreeing with Arendt that there is a problem with our ability to deal politically with major issues facing the world, does not accept the concept of “the social” or, as she describes it, “the blob” as some extraterrestrial monster over which we have no control.

Pitkin finds in Arendt scope for human agency – the expression of natality - to overcome the Blob. Pitkin addresses two factors that underlie Arendt’s concerns for the state of our world. The first has to do with institutions and organizations: the market and bureaucracies. “Looking around our world, it seems to me that people are indeed increasingly organized into one or other of these two forms” (p. 254). Society has come to believe that the market will produce for it the desired life, and when this fails society introduces administrative measures through bureaucratic regulation. In contrast, Arendt saw the answer in “politics” where we all participate in “public space” or “arenas” that encourage action and provide ordinary people with the opportunity to engage in “expressing, discussing, and deciding” (p. 257). Arendt did not see our current models of representative democracy as fulfilling the need to have us all participate. Rather she envisioned these systems complemented by local councils where those who want to participate can do so – and with sufficient power to make a real difference in matters that affect them (p. 258).

The second factor, which limits human ability to enact change in the world, has to do with structural conditions which are “profoundly resistant to policy intervention and appear to set limits on what is institutionally possible” (Pitkin p. 258). These conditions include the global economy, the growth of world population, and increasingly elaborate technology.

A global economy without political direction, a burgeoning population that strains resources and crowds facilities, a technology traveling its own trajectory – it is a daunting list of conditions underlying our institutional systems of bureaucracies and markets and obstructing any efforts to reduce the social. Yet even these structural conditions are continually reproduced only by human activity. They are not inherent inevitabilities (p. 260).

Pitkin concludes that society needs to reconsider its institutional forms and structural conditions with a view to reducing the social and enlarging the possibilities for freedom:

We need to seek out, invent, and cultivate organizational modes – official and unofficial, large and small – that politicize people and encourage their participation in the active shaping of their shared public life: institutions that facilitate creative initiatives from below and encourage not just the expression of ordinary people's views ... but widespread deliberation about public affairs that connects public policy to what really matters to people and that lets them experience themselves jointly improving the shared public conditions that limit their personal choices (p. 260).

Pitkin brings agency and hope for the future to Arendt's discussion of the rise of the social.

Arendt's contention is that the social has absorbed the private and the public and that nations have become one giant household, caring for the natural needs of humans rather than focusing on the good life in the political arena:

The emergence of society – the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices – from the shadowy interior of the household into the light

of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has changed almost beyond recognition the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen (Arendt 1958, p. 38).

She saw this loss of clarity as problematic, especially for the children:

The more completely modern society discards the distinction between what is private and what is public, between what can thrive only in concealment and what needs to be shown to all in the full light of the public world, the more, that is, it introduces between the private and the public a social sphere in which the private is made public and vice versa, the harder it makes things for children, who by nature require the security of concealment in order to mature undisturbed (Arendt, 1968, p. 188).

Clearly, Arendt saw the emergence of the social as a significant problem for the children and their security in the privacy of the home and family. Children need to grow up in a sheltered space where they can develop not only their physical well being, but also their characteristic qualities and talents, which make them unique in the world. School is placed in-between the sheltered space of the home and the fully public world, to allow the child to be gradually introduced to the world while still protected from it. The emergence of the social, and the loss of distinction between the private and the public, has changed, to a large extent, the nature of the role schools play in the education of the young.

These discussions of the social, institutions, bureaucracies, and structural conditions, are very relevant to the notions of public and private and the relationship of parents to schools. Indeed, the very nature of schools and their role in preparation of the young to enter the world and to be able to participate to change the world are fundamental, I

believe, to the discussion of the involvement of parents in school and to the forms of governance of Canadian schools. Further, the notion of bureaucratic control of institutions is at the core of parental alienation from schools. Pitkin brings a sense of hope to this discussion and I believe that schools can be changed to restore their “in-between” role in the public/private dichotomy. The role of parents as advocates for children and for other parents is one of the ways to address or redress the imbalance of power and control in the public school system. These are the key issues of my thesis and fundamental to understanding how the tensions between parents and schools can be reduced.

The Impact of the Loss of the Private on Schooling

The notion of natality is of great significance in understanding Arendt’s view of the world, the importance of sustaining private and public spheres and, the importance of the education of children. Children are born into a family, in the privacy and security of a household. The act of birth, like labor, is a natural act, which ensures the continuation of the species. However, children are also born into an existing world where others have come before and they must take their places in this world and in doing so, reshape it.

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born (Arendt, 1958, p. 247).

Arendt makes it clear that she sees birth of children into the world as the salvation of the world,

...not our world or some pre-imagined future world, but the world, a world in which humanity still counted. It was the world represented by the dynamic, ever-changing 'web of human affairs'... It was reinvented by adults who had been prepared as children through education to initiate changes to make the world more human (Wiens, 2000, p. 164).

Education of children leads them to a second beginning, as they enter the world as adults with the ability to renew the world.

Natality represents the potential for new relationships, new boundaries and new horizons. It represents the possibility to interrupt existing institutional arrangements, legal and political relationships and, of course, to threaten safeguards as well as obstructions and barriers to human advancement and improvement.... It was because of the fact that each child offered faith and hope to humankind that she (Arendt) talked about education as "where we decide whether we love our children enough" (Wiens, 2000, p. 167).

Natality is central to Arendt's understanding of political life and the importance of education.

At the most fundamental level it refers to the fact that humans are constantly born into the world, and are continually in need of introduction to the world and one another. This is what makes natality the 'essence of education'. Each newcomer brings with him/her the possibility that the world might be invigorated (Levinson, 1997, p.436).

While each newcomer has the capacity to renew the world, the process is never completed. "The world is never set right once and for all. It is constantly in need of the renewal that natality makes possible (p.436).

Belatedness

Levinson writes about the paradox of natality in Arendt's educational thought. Levinson acknowledges Arendt's belief that natality signifies newness in relation to the world and the possibility that it might bring about something new in the world; however, Levinson also raises the issue of what she terms "belatedness".

"[P]articularly disconcerting for many of us, is the fact that the world does not simply precede us but effectively constitutes us as particular kinds of people. The resulting social identities position us in relation to one another, to the past and to the future in particular ways, putting us in the difficult position of being simultaneously heirs to a specific history and new to it" (Levinson, 1997, p. 417).

In addition to being born into a particular time, place and social context, we also live in a world of others who are also acting and taking initiative in ways that mean that the outcomes of our actions cannot be predicted. This belatedness is of considerable significance when considering Arendt's discussion of plurality. Plurality means living together in this world as equals and as distinct individuals. While we may be born in to this world with all the potential to act to change the world, our circumstances and position in the world are determined by our initial birth. Arendt then sees natality as "like a second birth" and our uniqueness is revealed to the world through our speech and action, without which we are not human: "A life without speech and without action...is

literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be human because it is no longer lived among men” (Arendt, 1958, p. 176). Natality refers to our ability to “break into the world” and through speech and action, to change it.

Trapped in the Private

Arendt saw education as very important to the world, but also saw in it the potential for both good and evil. “The essence of education is natality, the fact that human beings are born into the world” (Arendt, 1968, p. 174). One of the primary functions of education is to introduce “...the continuous stream of newcomers to the world” but “... education must create the conditions for what Arendt calls, the ‘setting-right’ of the world” (Levinson, 1997, p. 441).

In “The Crisis in Education”, Arendt carefully distinguishes between this idea of creating the conditions for natality to emerge and the opposite tendency, to which many educators are prone, of teaching as though the world were either impervious to change or already transformed and thus no longer in need of alteration. Both tendencies worry Arendt; they alert us to the frailty of natality and the power of education, which can open or constrain possibilities for natality to emerge.

(Levinson, 1997, p. 442).

Education, according to Arendt, is the most elementary and necessary activity of human society since the world is constantly renewing itself through the birth of new human beings. “Thus the child, the subject of education, has for the educator a double aspect: he is new in a world that is strange to him and he is in the process of becoming, he is a new

human being and he is a becoming human being” (Arendt, 1968. p. 185). Arendt places the responsibility for the education of the child, first with its parents:

Human parents...have not only summoned their children into life through conception and birth, they have simultaneously introduced them into a world. In education they assume responsibility for both, for the life and development of the child and for the continuance of the world.... the child requires special protection and care so that nothing destructive may happen to him from the world. But the world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation (pp.187-188).

Parents have the responsibility to protect their children from the world, so that they may grow in the shelter and privacy of the home and the world needs protection from children who are not yet ready to take their place in the world, protection which is offered by the school.

Forced into the Public

School is intended to be a place that introduces the child to the world, a sort of “in between”, neither the private of the home, nor the public of the world. However, school is not the world and, according to Arendt, must never pretend to be. “[I]t is rather the institution we interpose between the private domain of home and the world in order to make the transition from family to the world possible at all” (pp.188-189). Because attendance at school is required by the state (the public world), not by the family, “...school, in a sense represents the world, although it is not actually the world” (p.188).

Teachers, then are partly representatives of the world and they must take responsibility for the world, even though they did not make it and they may not like it the way it is.

Arendt draws a distinction between the “authority” of the teacher and the qualifications of the teacher. “The teacher’s qualification consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about it, but his authority rests on his assumption of responsibility for that world” (p.188). In “The Crisis in Education” (1968), Arendt regrets the loss of authority in the modern world, and sees it as a rejection of responsibility for the world. She claims that the modern loss of authority in public and political life is being reflected in the loss of authority in the family and the school – and it is this that has led to the “crisis” in education. She is concerned that we not treat children as equals and that we continue to exercise authority over children as caring adults rather than peers. She insists that we cannot forgo authority, or the traditions upon which education is founded:

That means...that not just teachers and educators, but all of us, insofar as we live together in one world together with our children and with young people, must take toward them an attitude radically different from the one we take toward one another. We must decisively divorce the realm of education from the others, most of all from the realm of public, political life, in order to apply to it alone a concept of authority...appropriate to it... and must not claim a general validity [for this authority] in the world of grown ups. In practice the first consequence of this would be a clear understanding that the function of the school is to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living” (p.195).

What I understand Arendt to be saying here is that school must be a place that takes children from the home and family and prepares them for their participation in the world and for their own return to private life. As such, schools, and teachers, along with parents must act with authority in teaching the children about the world. Arendt's use of the term authority here is to emphasize her concern that we keep a clear distinction between children and adults. This authority, for Arendt is based on the natural superiority of adult knowledge of the world and is a temporary state while children grow and develop to emerge from childhood as adults themselves. Adults must not simulate the world and its equality or leave the children to their own devices. It is the teacher's role to represent all adults and say to the child: "This is our world" (p. 189). Arendt is very concerned about the line drawn between the world of adults and that of children, insisting that children not be left in a world of their own or treated as adults, although, she concedes, the line may vary greatly from country to country and in respect of age and from one individual to another. Education must focus on the preparation of children to live in the adult world, and Arendt sees this as being a special responsibility of the educators in schools.

Arendt was very critical of modern educational philosophies based on the ideas of Rousseau. The concepts of child-centered learning based upon Rousseau's belief in natural relationships and the necessity to make childhood a time of freedom and expression, conflict greatly with Arendt's view of the education of the child.

Rousseau both advanced the concept of childhood and sowed the seeds for its demise with his educational agenda, according to Arendt. The main reason was that he theoretically created an adult-like world of children apart from the adult world, a theory which informed progressive education (Wiens, 2000, p. 170).

In essence, Rousseau's model placed children in a public realm, albeit a public realm of children. Arendt condemns this "progressive education" for its emphasis on freedom for children to live in their own world, free from the authority of adults; for its lack of rigor in the training of teachers to teach content as well as process, and the assumption that children only learn from doing and not from learning a body of knowledge. This latter point, Arendt contends, led to an emphasis on play in schools rather than on work, and the breakdown of the "...natural relationship between grown-ups and children, which consists among other things in teaching and learning..."(Arendt, 1968, p. 184). It seems to me that Arendt takes a singular approach to the ills of modern education without reference to other significant educational thinkers such as Dewey who also considered education as a preparation for life.

Arendt emphasizes the importance of the relationship between adults and children and specifically our attitudes towards natality, "...the fact that we have all come into this world by being born and that this world is constantly renewed by birth" (1968, p.196).

She goes on to say:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide if we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of understanding something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (p.196).

Arendt's views on progressive education and the problems it creates in the child-adult relationship, and in teaching and learning, have major implications for the parent teacher and home and school relationship. At the heart of this is the notion of private and public space, protecting children from the glare of public exposure until they are fully prepared to enter as equal and distinct adults. Arendt clearly believed in structure and control in her use of the term "authority" and applied it to both the school and home environments of children. When there is incongruence between understandings of authority, discipline and the methods of education, conflict arises. Many of the issues of communication between parents and teachers have to do with issues of pedagogy and discipline and it is these issues which have raised the importance of parents advocating for their children and for parents to be assisted by advocates in dealing with their concerns about their children's' education, which I explore later.

The Impact of the Loss of the Public on Schooling

The Erosion of the Public World

Other writers besides Arendt have added to the discussion of the role of schools and education in preparation for a life in the public world. Fernstermacher (1997) provides some useful insight into these complex matters of the importance of education in a democratic society and its role in sustaining a public space where each is free to pursue life, liberty, and happiness to such an extent that someone else's pursuit of these same goods is not unduly curtailed. He explains: "Education performs a crucial role in

forming this public setting. The norms, standards, values and rules... are taught and practiced in the course of gaining an education” (p. 61).

Walter Feinberg contends “...the role of public education is to create and recreate a public by giving voice to an otherwise inarticulate, uninformed mass” (Feinberg, 1990, p 181). Education and democracy in Canada go hand in hand; democracy requires an educated public: “... in order for a public to come into existence, it must be aware of itself as an entity and it must have a general conception of its own well-being” (p. 181). This awareness of the public self and its well being comes through education.

In these times, many educational policy makers and practitioners give little consideration to the critical links between education and democracy ... educational policy makers force the debate over America’s schools into a teapot of comparatively puny issues such as academic standards, measures of academic achievement, and getting children ready for school ... Many theorists argue that the rhetoric of standards, goals, and test scores must be halted in favor of a far more proactive agenda on behalf of a ‘civil society and civic culture’ (Fernstermacher, 1997, p. 61-62).

The restoration of the distinct public and private spheres is therefore important to the continuation of a democratic society and the restoration of distinct public and private spheres will not be easy - the challenge facing public education is daunting, as other authors have shown.

Public Absorbed into an Expanded Private

Sennett (1976) also traces the disappearance of a distinct public sphere in Western Society over centuries. He draws a parallel between the fall of the Roman Empire and the problems of our society today: "As in Roman times, participation in the *res publica* today is most often a matter of going along, and the forums for this public life, like the city, are in a state of decay" (Sennett, 1976, pp. 4-5). However, he suggests that the difference lies in our concept of the private life. The Roman private, family life was characterized by a principle of "religious transcendence of the world" whereas, today, we tend to live our private lives in self-examination of our psyche and see the world only through this lens. Thus, I believe, Sennett is suggesting that our preoccupation with individual feelings, the inner workings of our emotions and our own personal life histories, makes life in the public seem "stale and empty" (p.5). Our anxiety about these feelings derives from "broad changes in capitalism and in religious belief" (p.5). This has led us to the cult of personality, both in the private realm and the public. Just as individuals within their families are concerned with whom they are, so it is in the public realm. "Community has become a phenomenon of collective being rather than collective action..." (p. 221).

Change in private life both for the individual and the family has continued throughout the twentieth century. Prost talks about these changes as "democratization of private life" (Prost, 1991, p. 7) and Aries, (1989, p.9) explains:

As I see it, the entire history of private life comes down to a change in the forms of sociability: from the anonymous social life of the street, castle court, square, or

village to a more restricted sociability centered on the family or even the individual (Aries, 1989, p. 9).

The differentiation of life into public and private occurred at different times and in different ways for groups such as the bourgeoisie, farmers, and urban and rural dwellers. Perhaps the most significant factor in the change was in the changing nature of work, workers and work places. The change took two forms:

One was a differentiation and specialization of space: workplace ceased to coincide with living space. Hand in hand with spatial differentiation came differentiation with respect to norms: the household ceased to be subject to rules pertaining to the work formerly performed in the domestic setting, while at the same time work, no longer subject to norms of private order, came to be governed by collective contracts (p. 9).

Great change has also occurred in the ways in which families raise children and in the nature of the private space of the home. Training in the skills of the workplace, formerly passed on from parents or through apprenticeships or indentured trades, has shifted to schools and colleges. However, the major changes are in the socialization of children. The family, constrained by the economics of necessity, had to be disciplined and worked best with an authoritarian head who ensured that the necessities of life were taken care of: food, shelter, clothing, etc. With the disappearance of such restraints within the family, the move of work and labor out of the household, and increased prosperity and revolution in domestic life (housework), parents became less authoritarian, more liberal, and more permissive (Prost, 1991, p. 71). This change shifted the burden of education of children for their future life in society from the family to the school. "The

schools assumed responsibility for teaching young people to respect the realities of time and space and the rules of social life as well as how to relate to other people” (p. 71).

The Impact on School

This shift of responsibility for educating and socializing children from the family to the school has also led to the development of new centers of private life, which compete with the family (Prost, 1991, p. 75). The expansion of the private has meant change and adjustment. Adolescents rebel from institutionalization of formerly private activities, reluctantly accepting the institutional norms of school because of its association with the public world of work. Similarly, the family must work out its operational rules through a process involving compromise, adaptation and negotiation rather than coercion (p. 75). Further, schooling has become the place in which a child's future place in society is determined, not only through occupational training, but by the influence of socio-economic factors, testing and selection practices: “Only good students have a real choice; the rest take what they are given” (p. 76).

Public intervention has not been limited to the schools. The government takes an interest in the child almost from conception. Health and welfare of children is supervised by the state.

Parents have relinquished to the schools the responsibility for teaching the rules of social life to their children. The responsibility to feed, clothe, and above all love their offspring is still that of the parents, but now the state ultimately judges whether they have adequately performed that task (p. 77).

It is little wonder then that the role parents find for themselves in this new world of private/public relationships, is confusing at best.

These dramatic changes in the family and the emergence of the individual have very serious implications for the role of parents and their relationship with the school. This relationship is twofold, not only have parents to make extra ordinary efforts in their communication with their child's teacher and school, but teachers and schools have to recognize that the traditional roles, responsibilities and assumptions about the family have changed so much that new ways of interacting are necessary to ensure that both the private interests of the home and the public interests of the school are met to the satisfaction of both.

The Social is Ascendant

Schools become Bureaucracies

Schools are public institutions, set up by the state through legislation. In Canada, the responsibility for public education rests with the provinces and each has established an Education Act, Regulations and Ministerial Orders, which govern the operation of schools. In Chapter Four I review the various forms of governance, which exist in each province and territory of Canada. In almost all provinces, legislation calls for the election of local boards of trustees to enact policies and administer funds. These boards hire administrators to whom falls the responsibility for the day to day operation of the schools: at the district level a superintendent of schools and at the school a principal. School boards are elected, administrators are appointed. Fundamental to the issue of the

public establishment and operation of schools in Canada are issues of democracy and representation. In her writing on the public and the private and the rise of the social, Arendt raises concerns about representative democracy and the rise of bureaucracy. These are important concerns to parents in their efforts to be involved in the education of their children in the public schools.

As outlined earlier, the rise of the social, or the attack of the blob as Pitkin characterizes Arendt's analysis, appears to divide mass society into two areas of activity – the economic marketplace and bureaucracy. The result of turning the public sphere into “one giant national household” is the construction of a society that is preoccupied with the necessities of life – the market economy. The political sphere is now engaged in the same activities as were formerly conducted in the private sphere and the home. The household was assumed to need a hierarchical, authoritarian arrangement to achieve its goals of sustaining life and providing for the necessities. This hierarchy is now manifest in various aspects of the public sphere. Arendt describes the boundary between the private and public spheres becoming blurred, allowing the social to emerge:

It is true that one-man, monarchical rule, which the ancients stated to be the organizational device of the household, is transformed in society – as we know it today, when the peak of the social order is no longer formed by the royal household of an absolute ruler – into a kind of no-man rule. ...As we know from the most social form of government, that is, from bureaucracy (the last stage of government in the nation-state just as one-man rule in benevolent despotism and absolutism was its first), the rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule; it may

indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of the cruelest and most tyrannical versions (Arendt, 1958, p. 40).

Arendt contends that, like the household, the social excludes the possibility of action (which occurs only in the freedom of the public sphere): "Instead, society expects from each of its members, a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to 'normalize' its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement" (p. 40). It is her belief that with the emergence of today's "mass society" we have reached the point of one huge family, which embraces and controls all its members equally and with equal strength (p. 41). Arendt contends that we have become a society of jobholders and laborers, unable or unwilling to pursue the political life to bring about action to change the world.

What does this argument have to do with schools and governance and control of education? Pitkin summarizes Arendt's view:

Our bureaucracies, as Arendt suggests, are like onions rather than pyramids: they would work just the same if no one was at their "head". Those nominally in charge and setting policy are the most isolated from reality and dependent on their organizational systems for information. Because of the huge size and complex interconnectedness of these institutions and their pervasiveness among us, they generate enormous inertia (Pitkin, 1998, p. 255).

I contend here that bureaucracies have indeed taken control of our schools and that the elected policy makers (ministers and trustees) are often isolated from reality and dependent upon the system for information. The systems have become large and impersonal. Change is difficult and the system works to maintain itself and the status

quo. This, of course, makes it very difficult for individuals, such as parents, to deal with the system and to bring about change.

Pitkin differs with Arendt in her discussion of power and powerlessness in this mass society. Pitkin believes that there are some who have power and they make decisions with enormous consequences for the rest of us: "Yet these decisions are mostly market-driven and ...the power to make them is institutional, resulting from the people's positions in the 'major hierarchies and organizations of modern society'"(Pitkin, p 256). Much has been written both positively and negatively about the influence of the capitalist, market driven economy and the bureaucratization of school governance and administration (Osborne 1988; Witherspoon 1991; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Lawton, 1995; Saul, 1995). For the purposes of this chapter, it is sufficient to suggest that schools are part of this institutional connectedness and that much of the role of the school in preparation of children for entry into the world is preoccupied with the ability to fit children into an existing world, with its global market economy, as workers and laborers to maintain the necessities of life. The public and private roles of the schools in preparation of the young to participate in a pluralistic society of equals to discuss and decide upon "the good life" seem to have been largely eclipsed by expansion of the private household into the public and the emergence of the social. The loss of the distinction between public and private has changed the nature of the "in between" role of schools to one that is predominantly about the needs of the social. Clarification of public and private roles is needed to be clear about the roles of school, which, in my view, need to address not only the private/social global economy but also the public need for discussion about what is good and worthwhile.

Bureaucracies Outside Public Control

It is Arendt's fundamental contention that the good life can only come from the political arena, what she terms "the space of appearances." In this political arena, citizens are equal but distinct. Arendt draws this political scene, from the ancient Greek polis. Despite its weaknesses and limitations, Arendt promotes this ideal as a concept for Western nations. She condemns modern politics because of the tendency of the "social" to invade the public realm so that administration of social and economic life "has overshadowed the political realm since the beginning of the modern age" (Arendt, 1978, p. 226).

One especially damaging organizational strategy is representative government. Arendt explains:

Representative democracy consummates the triumph of economics over politics, the triumph in the public sphere, for the most part, of the private and self-regarding over the impersonal and the worldly. ...the very notion of a public or common interest seems to vanish in this greedy roughhouse" (Kateb, 1984, pp. 117-118).

Since, for Arendt, the common interest is about preserving the world for future generations, she sees modern representative democracy as about "selfishness and self-regardingness" (p. 119). "If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men" (Arendt, 1958, p. 55).

The governance of education should involve public discussion and debate about the common interest and preserving the world. Can this be achieved through representative democracy? The fact that there is little or no opportunity for participation in educational governance between elections is especially problematic for Arendt who makes a clear distinction between representative democracy and direct democracy. "...Arendt conceives of representative democracy as a system that works by means of an essential passivity, the passivity of the large mass of individuals who live under it" (Kateb, 1984, p. 124). Kateb explains:

Whenever the pursuit of happiness is the declared principle, and happiness is understood as private rather than public, and understood as 'getting and spending' rather than as achieving a public identity through action, the reign of passivity is established, and with it and as part of it the confirmation of human isolation. (p.125).

The devotion of life to the pursuit of (private) happiness creates the willingness to be governed. The willingness to be governed is the sacrifice of active citizenship. However, in theory, when the people consent to be governed, as they do in a representative democracy, the people are supposed to rule those who govern them (p. 126). Arendt sees the problem with representative government that the people are only free and participating in their democracy on election day. "Even if there is communication between representative and voter, between the nation and parliament ... this communication is never between equals but between those who aspire to govern and those who consent to be governed" (Arendt, 1962, p. 281). In a representative democracy, the people consent to be governed; in a direct democracy all of the people

participate in decisions and actions. "Representative democracy leads to a forfeiture of participatory politics: - discussion, deliberation and persuasion that lead to decision-making" (Kateb, 1984, p. 125).

Issues of representative democracy are also of importance when considering the relationship of parents to the public school system. The public schools with their accompanying bureaucracies are established by the state partly to prepare the young for the transition from the privacy of the home into the world. These bureaucracies are legitimated through representative democracy. However, the 'clients' or active participants in the public schools, the students and their parents, are represented only as any other citizen through the election process as prescribed in the various legislative acts.

Parents' ability to participate in the basic decisions about the public schools and the education of their children is limited to their role on election day – casting a vote for a provincial government (electing representatives of a political party by majority vote) or for a school trustee (a local citizen, who may or may not represent a political party view) to serve on a board of trustees within a school district. Legitimate participation in the democratic process often ends here for parents. The next opportunity to voice approval or dissent comes at the ballot box – up to 5 years hence for provincial governments or 3 years (in British Columbia) for school boards. Between elections, parents often remain politically passive, other than talking with or otherwise petitioning their elected representatives, as individuals or through organizations, such as Parent Advisory Councils (PAC), District Parent Advisory Councils (DPAC) or provincial parent organizations (e.g. The British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils – BCCPAC).

The shortcomings of representative democracy also present problems for parent organizations themselves. Although parent participation in PAC is legislated through the British Columbia School Act, most PAC are organized and controlled by elected parent representatives – often those with the time, skills and resources to devote to this volunteer activity. Parents, whose lives do not permit them to become active in such groups as PAC, DPAC and BCCPAC, must rely on other parents to represent them.

Representation presents many issues, which have been addressed, in a variety of ways by writers over time. Some claim that effective governments represent the will of the people; others argue that no government can be truly representative. What is the appropriate role for the representative, "...should he act on his own judgment of what the national interest is, or should he be a faithful servant to his constituency's will?" (Pitkin 1969, p. 7). All too often in elections at all levels of government, the representative is supported by only a minority of the votes cast, and, particularly at the school board level, very few of the qualified voters bother to cast a ballot. This brings into question the whole concept of representative democracy being reflective of the public will. How do parents, in particular, have their concerns heard? How can they influence policy, programs and bureaucracies to ensure that their children receive the best possible education?

Remedies

Maxine Greene recognized the loss of the public realm and the ability to question what is happening around us:

...because of the proliferation of bureaucracies and corporate structures, individuals find it harder and harder to take initiative. They guide themselves by vaguely perceived expectations; they allow themselves to be programmed by organizations and official schedules or forms ... I am suggesting that, for too many individuals in society, there is a feeling of being dominated and that feelings of powerlessness are almost inescapable (Greene, 1978, p. 43).

She goes on to illustrate this with the example of school:

...we scarcely notice that there is a hierarchy of authority; we are so accustomed to it, we forget that it is man-made. Classroom teachers, assigned a relatively low place in the hierarchy, share a way of seeing and talking about it. They are used to watching schedules, curricula, and testing programs emanate from 'the office'.

They take for granted the existence of a high place, a seat of power (p. 44).

Greene's answer to this dilemma of social control and perceived powerlessness is what she terms "wide-awakeness". She suggests that individuals need to remember that they are free, after all, and that they can choose courses of action, with others, and become moral agents, in other words, reclaim the public sphere and the true political arena. This is not, in Arendt's view, the role of the children, or schools, but it is the role of schools to prepare children to take on this task when they emerge in the world as adults.

A crucial issue facing us is the need to find ways of educating young persons to such sensitivity and potency. As important, it seems to me, is the matter of wide-awakeness for their teachers. It is far too easy for teachers, like other people, to play their roles and to do their jobs without serious consideration of the good and right (p. 46).

Greene then, is optimistic about the ability of individuals to overcome their feelings of helplessness in society and to engage in action for the common good – thus recreating the public sphere.

Parents, unlike teachers, are not part of the bureaucracy Greene describes. They are part of the private sphere of the home. This has some disadvantage in that they are not able to see the whole of the organization and only interact with some small parts of the system. They are often seen, as outside some of the system's bureaucratic trappings such as employee contracts, board policies, professional codes of ethics, schedules and availability and they feel excluded. However, they do have the advantage of some freedom to question and challenge the system, not only in their private role as parents but also in their public role as citizens. The role of advocacy, as I will discuss more fully in Chapters 5 and 6, can provide a basis for parents to be "wide-awake" and to intercede on behalf of their children in both private and public ways.

The public private dichotomy is complex. I have attempted here to illustrate its importance in understanding some aspects of the relationship of parents to schools. The concept of "the social" has serious implications for the future of our society and its ability to overcome what seem like insurmountable problems globally and locally. Pitkin reminds us that we are "the social" and have the ability to rise out of our inertia and bring about change. Education in our public schools is the crucial link in enabling us to regain our freedom to take action together to create the "good life". Our school system, however, is part of the "social", a bureaucratic system, governed by representative democracy and very difficult to change. It prepares children for the social, not authentically private or public life. Parents can be the catalysts to bring about change.

In subsequent chapters I will address the emerging role of school councils in the governance of education and the role of parents as advocates for their own child and for systemic change.

Chapter Three

Parent Involvement in Education

Early in my tenure as Superintendent of Schools in District No. 69 (Qualicum) and working with the Board of Trustees, I initiated a steering committee to organize what became the "First District Partners' Workshop" in February 1993. This workshop involved two days of group discussion among 150 people from the community. The participants were drawn in equal measure from the school system's "internal" public (students, parents, staff, administration and trustees) and the general public (including seniors, post secondary education, business and professional people). One of the defining activities of the workshop was an electronically facilitated discussion and decision process, which elicited a group consensus on vision statements to carry the school district into the next five years. Of the many hundreds of vision statements generated, the highest ranked consensus choice of the participants at that workshop was "Parents are actively involved in their children's education." This statement provided a springboard for expansion of parent participation in the activities, not only of the schools but also in the decision-making processes of the school district.

On the surface, this outcome of the workshop is not surprising. However, if one delves a little into how a consensus was reached, it quickly becomes clear that this is no simple, unitary concept agreed to by all, but a multifaceted notion which means quite different things to different groups within those represented at the workshop and across the school community. In reality, the various vested interest groups came to this consensus for very different reasons and their interpretations of the meaning of the term

“parent involvement” are just as varied. Parents themselves are probably the least united in their understanding of parent involvement. Many parents see their active involvement as being supportive of their child at home, overseeing homework, and attending conferences with teachers. Other parents, active in Parent Advisory Councils (PAC)² see their role in a variety of ways, from participation in decision-making to fund raising and any combination of such activities. Still other parents see their role as defending their children against the bureaucracy of the school system. Parents of students with special needs are often very vocal advocates for their children and work tirelessly to ensure that resources and services are provided within the school system to meet their child’s individual needs. Other groups of parents demand “choice” within the system: choice of teacher and classroom, program and/or school. Thus, while parents may fall into one or more of these generalized categories, they are by no means of entirely like minds when it comes to defining “parent involvement”.

Teachers are also not necessarily united in their understanding of “parent involvement”. While many teachers want to see the parents of their students at conferences, they will often comment that the “wrong” parents come out to such meetings. The parent of students achieving well in academics, sports or fine arts are often the most frequent attendees at parent teacher nights, while parents of less successful children are less inclined to meet the teacher to hear bad news. Some teachers are happy for parents to involve themselves in fund raising, field trip supervision and, to a lesser extent and depending upon the individual teacher and grade level, to have parents work as volunteers in their classrooms. All of these activities have to do with helping the work

² Parents in British Columbia have been able to form Parent Advisory Councils since 1989 under Section 8 of the School Act.

of the teachers and the school. However, my experience suggests that many teachers are less than enamored with parents who want a real voice in decisions about the operation and administration of the school, content of the curriculum, and policies such as discipline and codes of conduct. At the union level, teachers are ambivalent at best about parent involvement, paying lip service to the general notion but rarely adopting policies at general meetings or allowing inclusive contract language to permit greater parent involvement.

School trustees have also been reluctant advocates of parental involvement beyond the traditional activities of fund raising, volunteering and parent teacher conferencing. As I will show in Chapter 4, the emergence of legislation to give parents greater say in the public school systems across Canada has not been welcomed with open arms by school trustees – elected in their local communities to hold the public system in trust for all taxpayers. Trustees not only see some conflict in the respective roles of school boards and school councils, but, as in New Brunswick, fear their replacement entirely by councils of parents appointed by Ministers of Education to administer local schools along with school principals. School administrators themselves have often found it difficult to deal with growing demands from some parents for a voice in school decisions affecting their children. These demands, often seen by administrators to come from rather small, select groups of parents representative of themselves and their own vested interests, can place school principals and vice-principals in conflict with Board policies or with other, less vocal parents.

Thus, the leading visionary outcome statement of the Partners' Workshop "parents are actively involved in their children's education" is clearly an interesting one

which leads to detailed analysis and conjecture about what each individual and group at the workshop meant by their support for this position. In this chapter I examine these complex issues surrounding parent involvement. This involves looking at the history of the relationship of parents to schools in Canada and other western nations; examining the role of parents in the relationship of the home to the school; and reviewing the various partner group positions on parental involvement, including the influence of teacher unions and the role of school boards and governance. These issues are fundamentally tied to issues of the public and private as understood from the previous chapter on the work of Arendt. The rise of the “social” and its impact on schools and education cannot be underestimated when we examine the tensions between home and school.

Why has “parent involvement” become an issue in the dialogue about public schools? Surely, since parents bring their children into the world, raise them from birth, and teach them such fundamental skills as walking and talking, then the continued involvement of parents in the education of their children should be a natural extension of their parenting role. However, especially in the past three decades, and in many countries of the western world, there has been intense discussion and various efforts to “involve” parents in public schools and the education of their children. To begin to understand this pressure to include parents in the public schooling of their children we need to look at the historical relationship of parents to education and schooling.

The Historical Relationship of Parents to Schools

The school system as we know it is a relatively recent development. Prior to the industrial revolution, schooling was limited either to religious denominations or to those

social classes that could afford to have their children educated either by tutor or through various private schools established for the purpose of educating the ruling, property-owning classes. In Britain, for example, compulsory education came into being in the 19th Century when there was a need for a semi-literate workforce, which would arrive punctually, work long hours for little reward, in a disciplined environment (Cullingford, 1996, p. 1). That is not to suggest that ideas about education and schooling are recent, indeed they date back in various forms many thousands of years. Our current thinking about education has been influenced by some of the greatest thinkers who ever lived.

Notions of education and schooling date back to the beginning of recorded history and before. Aristotle and Plato were the great philosopher idealists who linked education to the good life in the polis, the centre of the Athenian republic – the cradle of western democracy. As students of Socrates, Aristotle and his fellow students pursued questions about goodness, truth and beauty, giving rise to the Socratic doctrine that knowledge is the source of the virtuous or reflective life (Gutek, 1997, p. 14). In the Socratic approach to education, the teacher challenges and prods the students to think – to examine beliefs, to cast off false beliefs and opinions. During this time a clear point of conflict arose between Plato's academy and its dedication to knowledge, truth and beauty, and the relativism of the Sophists: "Was education to cultivate the liberal culture of the person as a generalist or was it to sharpen technical expertise?" (ibid p.19). Arendt points out that Plato privileged "contemplation" over "action", claiming superiority for the "philosopher-spectator" and, since contemplation is about fabrication rather than action, he also privileged work over action (Arendt, 1958 pp. 223-230; 301-304). The debate over liberal and technical education and the superiority of research over practice is still

prevalent in education today. However, public schooling remains the basis of educating successive generations of citizens to participate in the democratic life of the state and should be about a combination of labor, work and action. In chapter two, I outlined how Aristotle's notions of the good life and the educated citizen influenced the work of Hannah Arendt and her notions of private and public life and how these remain significant in our thinking and dialogue about the role of parents in public schools.

It was Aristotle, the Greek philosopher and student of Plato, who advocated a system of compulsory public schools, supervised by state authorities (Gutek, 1997, p. 38). He envisioned three levels: primary for children aged 7 to 14 years, to develop skills and moral dispositions; secondary (which in his time in Greece was only for young men) for ages 14 to 21 to further develop intellectual skills; and higher education to cultivate reason and character. Aristotle's ideas formed the basis of our present day emphasis on development of intellectual skills and the study of liberal arts and sciences throughout the education system, and in particular at the "academy" or university level. Much of our current worldview is the product of Aristotle's quest to find out what things are and how they work. "His quest to discover the structure and function of reality has shaped Western thought and education" (Gutek, p. 40). Although Plato and Aristotle were amongst the first to conceptualize the notion of the state providing a forum for education, education and learning in fact predate them. Parents and families were the original teachers of the children and role modeling was the major teaching strategy (Mannan & Blackwell, 1992 p. 286).

Long before formal schools were conceptualized and introduced into society, parents and family communities taught life skills and passed on societal values and rules.

Parents had a vested interest in the education of their children, both as productive members of the society making their contribution to survival of the group, but also as the means of the very continuance of that society. Whether it was participation in hunting and fishing, crop production, or home making, children learned and contributed to the well being of the family as they learned the skills passed down from generation to generation. They also learned the language of communication, and the history of family and society through storytelling. Often, the elders in a community shared a responsibility for passing along the folklore and value system, while parents maintained the day-to-day essentials of life, providing food, shelter, clothing, and protection. This model can still be seen in primitive, isolated communities and was, indeed, the way of aboriginal peoples around the world until western "civilization" brought "the new ways" to enlighten them.

The earliest approaches to formal education witnessed the sharing of children's education between the home and the school (Mannan & Blackwell, 1992, p. 287). In the early Greek schools, in the 6th Century B.C. parents shared the responsibility for the education of their children with the school, teaching reading, writing and swimming. Initially schools were private but Aristotle argued that the education of children was too important to be left to the financial ability of the parents. Children needed to be educated to fit the needs of society. Early educators such as Comenius (1592-1670), Locke (1632-1704), Rousseau (1712-1778), Pestalozzi (1774-1827) and Froebel (1782-1852) proposed child development theories and child rearing practices for parents to use to prepare their children for schooling by society. Gradually, the theories became more complex and the expectations of what parents should accomplish became higher. As more recent theorists became interested in child development and behaviour, these expectations grew. Hall,

Freud, Skinner, Erickson and Piaget, to name a few, generated expert opinions, which helped to shape the way children were raised in the home. Professionalization and certification of teachers led to the elevation of teachers above the parents as specialists in the education of children. Gradually, society took over the role of educating the young and the influence and participation of parents, particularly after the early years, diminished.

A number of significant social, cultural, political and economic events through the centuries have influenced the relationship of parents, home, community and the school. While education and schooling of certain social classes of people dates back to earliest recorded history, the establishment of public schools for the masses is relatively recent. The industrial revolution was probably the most significant time for the development of public schooling on a scale that foreshadowed the system we have today. As industrialization swept across the cities of Europe, employers realized that they needed semi-literate, punctual workers to move into the towns to work in the factories. Education was needed on a larger scale for the workers. Social activists such as Robert Owen (1771-1858), realized that the by-products of bringing workers and their families into the towns to work in the factories, was social breakdown on a scale never before experienced. Working in New Lanark where he purchased the cotton mills in 1799, Owen set about making social reforms, including regulating the hours of work and banning children under the age of ten from working in the mills (Gutek, 1997, p. 222). Owen founded a general school and an infant school for preschoolers aged 2 – 6. With the addition of adult education, New Lanark became an early model of total community education. These concepts became widely recognized as contributing to the success of Owen's

factories and the development of New Lanark as a progressive social community. The ideas spread across Europe and to America. However, Owen was far beyond his time in his theories of communitarian ideals, and social engineering and eventually his efforts to develop a utopian community in New Harmony in the United States failed. Nevertheless, his legacy brought us closer to the growth of public schooling and the recognition of the rights of children.

Some of the social and cultural outcomes of the industrialization of western societies led to the distancing of families and parents from the education of their children. The emergence of children's rights and the move away from "children as chattels" to "children as persons" shifted the absolute and authoritarian role of the parents and began the movement of state and public interest in the affairs of the home and family and the breakdown of the public/private distinction. Industrial society led to the breakdown of the extended family, as it had existed for centuries, as workers moved from the agricultural villages into the towns to find work and in the hope of greater prosperity. Social dislocation, family breakdown, poverty, depression and all of the other social ills associated with the inner cities of industrial nations led social reformers to seek solutions to problems through society's institutions – often the school. Again, the merging of the public and the private led to less authority resting in the privacy of the home. More recently, the move to dual income earners and women into the workforce, have left society expecting schools to fill in for what is seen to be missing in the home. Roles and responsibilities have shifted between what once was clearly dealt with inside the privacy of the family unit to an increasing involvement of society and its institutions, the social realm.

The balance between the roles of the family and of the social institutions are gradually shifting in favor of more reliance as well as faith on the social institutions in protecting and nurturing our children.... Whereas social institutions invoke legal rights in protecting and nurturing our children purportedly leaving the moral rights and responsibilities in the hands of the family, in reality the confusion in our society between the moral and the legal blurred the distinction between the two (Mannan & Blackwell, 1992, p. 288).

The concreteness of legal rights becomes dominant and the moral rights are invaded. This has created a vicious circle with the weakening of the bonds of family and the creation of dysfunctional situations, giving institutions further reason to involve themselves in the private lives of families. This is a critical issue in the discussion of private and public roles. While it is the responsibility of the parents and family to protect and nurture the child in the home, who holds the responsibility to protect those children when parents do not? I believe Arendt would argue that the loss of distinction between public and private and the breakdown of the family has created a situation where the state has had to become involved in the protection of children from abuse and neglect, but that the institutions created by the state have become bureaucracies, a part of the "social" which now invades the private.

The historical development of education in Canada has been influenced by a number of factors unique because of Canada's "founding nations", its First Nations and its more recent multicultural heritage. Early examples of education can be found in the way of life of First Nations people. Education was crucial to the fulfillment of material needs and cultural survival (Wotherspoon, 1998, p. 47). The land and natural environment

were the first classrooms and all adults were responsible for teaching the children. Although this was a very informal and unstructured system, there is evidence that complex knowledge was passed on by oral story telling and visual symbols. This informal system of education was also apparent with the early settlers and traders. The earliest organized schools in Canada were established by missionaries and religious orders, primarily targeted at replacing traditional and indigenous lifestyles with European concepts of morality and consciousness (p. 48). Today we are seeing the long-term devastation of this colonial attitude and approach to education, which took away the traditional ways and attempted to assimilate the First Nations peoples and ways into the European-based life conditions. Residential schooling and relocation of families and Nations led to the fracturing of families. Harsh discipline, total separation from family, culture and language led to many of the social dislocations experienced today by First Nations people.

The children of settlers of British and French origin were often educated by missionaries or religious orders contracted to maintain the connection with established European ways. Education among the general population tended to be sporadic. The elite and relatively privileged groups hired tutors or sent their children away to boarding school, while the laborers, traders and general labor force had little or no access to education and schooling in the early days of settlement (p. 51). Increased immigration and political and economic forces led to the increasing demand for free universal public schooling. The growing diversity of the population also led to the establishment of a secular public school system. The dual purposes of the school system became evident early on. The traditional formal learning opportunities of the curriculum, transferring

skills and knowledge, to assist in the economic development of the nation was the basic intent. However, the other purpose in schools was to reshape and model identities to conform to the needs of the emerging society. Emphasis on discipline, rules and regulations were seen as important elements to build a strong workforce to contribute to the building of the Canadian nation (p. 52). School buildings came to symbolize the formation of communities, and they were often built and named as monuments to great people.

In Canada, as elsewhere, early social reformers saw schools as places to act out society's growing need for conformity and discipline amongst the people, underlining the public role of public education. As early as the 1860 legislation was written to enforce compulsory attendance in schools to keep the children off the streets, teaching them rules of discipline, proper conduct and basic skills. Parents, particularly of the poorer classes were seen as weak and unable to provide proper guidance. Schools and teachers were given control in place of parents through laws such as one in Prince Edward Island: "If then, from the poverty, the cupidity, or the apathy of parents, the education of their children be neglected, it is surely the duty of the State to interpose its authority in their behalf, by means of a compulsory law" (Wotherspoon, 1998, p.56). The introduction of such state intervention in the home as compulsory attendance laws underlines the shifting boundaries of public and private control over the education of children.

In the past three decades, in most western democracies, educational discourse has placed major emphasis on the importance of parental involvement and made enthusiastic claims about the future (Keith & Keith, 1993; Epstein, 1996; Feurstein, 2000). Parent involvement is credited with increasing academic achievement (Keith & Keith, p.474).

Parent involvement in governance is seen as a means to hold the traditional educational bureaucracy accountable for achievement and fiscal responsibility. Parental choice will bring the rigor of the marketplace to the previously non-competitive arena of public schooling (Feurstein 2001,p.31). However, parental involvement today is also fraught with conflicts. Will parental involvement lead to a more equitable school system, or will it favor the children and communities of the dominant culture and limit the opportunities of the less privileged? Will parent representation in decision-making in schools and districts lead to a greater consensus amongst parents, or will it reflect the views of the politically motivated individuals who seek to be representatives? Finally, will parents and schools find a way to work in harmony for the ultimate goal of improving the education of the children to allow them to successfully participate in democratic society and to enjoy ‘the good life’ – and will we agree on what that good life is or should be? The questions raise issues around the emerging public role of parents and whether parents should have a greater voice determining the directions of educational policy.

Parent involvement in schools.

This brief review of some historical aspects of the development of education and schooling shows how, since the earliest times, schooling has been in something of a conflict position with the role of the home and parents. As I have outlined in the previous chapter, this tension has much to do with the shifting boundaries between private and public roles and the emergence of the “social” in our society. This point of tension continues today as various interest groups or stakeholders vie for control of the public

education system. Parents, as individuals, family groups, or as organized representatives, struggle with their relationship to schools and the education of their children. This struggle appears in many dimensions. Writers, theorists and researchers have looked at many definitions of parent involvement covering a range of possibilities. I will use five basic categories of parental involvement, each of which reflect different variations of the public/private relationship: (a) school choice, (b) decision making through formal structures or site based councils, (c) teaching and learning, (d) effect on the physical and material environment, and (e) communication; (Dimock, O'Donoghue, & Robb, 1996). These categories were constructed from a review (by Dimock, et. al.) of the literature and research on parental involvement in education and by clustering the variety of forms in which parents are involved in the schooling of their children (p. 11). Underlying the discussion of parental involvement in education is the assumption that "involvement" is in someway "good" and will make a difference to the education of children. However, the promotion of parental involvement is motivated by a number of important factors. During the 1980 "... an amalgam of political and economic forces combined to orientate governments in the Western world to adopt policies of economic rationalism and corporate managerialism which impacted in particular their public sectors" (Dimock, et al, p. 8). This economic rationalism and corporate managerialism stressed efficiency and economy, effectiveness and performance, and outputs in the public sector, all of which combine to achieve the goals of the state including incorporating private sector models of administration and applying them to the public sector, including public schools (p. 8). This required a "...leaner, tighter, more precisely defined management structure, and more precisely articulated goals, as well as the devolution of action (though not power

and authority) to the service agencies at the workplace” (p.8), Thus, a major thrust of governments to legitimize the subsequent restructuring and to secure reform has been to emphasize the right of parents to participate in the education of their children. This has occurred in most Western countries including Britain, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada and the United States (p. 10). It has created for parents an expectation of new and changing roles and relationships with schools, leading to increased “...turbulence, complexity and uncertainty” (p.9). It has also raised questions about the authenticity of the claims that choice, involvement in decision-making, teaching and learning, physical and material environment, and communication really do improve student success. How is that success defined, and by whom, and do these concepts contribute to the underlying public role of schools to afford equal opportunities for the young to take their place in the world and to participate as unique but equal members? In fact, I believe, this is all about issues of what Arendt calls labor and work and not about action. The emphasis on modeling schools and education on the private sector policies of economic rationalism and corporate management and the resultant move to have parents involved in these five basic categories reflects the “social” role of schools, the enlargement and distortion of the private, to prepare the children to enter the world as productive workers and consumers rather than as actors deliberating about what in life is good and worthwhile.

School Choice

The issue of school choice, while always a factor, seems to have been much more public and contentious in the past three decades. Historically, in Canada, parental choice

of school has been associated with religion and specific denominational choice of school. Unlike the United States, where church and state must remain separate, the Canadian Constitution and its forerunner, the British North America Act, not only allowed, but also encouraged denominational schools. Originally, protestant and catholic schools, and later other religious schools have been available to parents for their children's education since shortly after the first European settlers landed here. "Fundamental to the creation of a system of free and universal education was the notion, then common, that education and religion were inseparable and that the state had a responsibility to foster, wherever possible, a harmonious relationship between the two" (Wilson & Lazerson, 1982. p. 2). The Canadian practice essentially became one of subsidizing some religious minorities in "confessional, separate, and dissentient schools".

The accommodation of these minorities was made for educational not religious reasons, reflecting a concession that the parent is an important agent of education and that schools should be responsive to parental demands in matters relating to moral and religious education (p. 3).

All Canadian provinces have had some form of subsidized denominational and separate schools since the British North America Act, except British Columbia, which waited until 1977 to enact legislation. Until that time, British Columbia only supported a non-denominational public school system. Although the original provisions related to Protestant and Catholic denominational schools, legislation has made it possible "...for educational authorities in Canada to subsidize Jewish Schools in Quebec and Hutterite schools on the prairies, to condone Amish schools in Ontario, and to permit the Salvation Army to develop its own schools in Newfoundland" (p.4).

Another factor in school choice in Canada is that of language. “ While the BNA Act in Section 93 protected the schooling rights of denominational minorities and omitted language rights; section 133, which prescribed the use of French and English, made no mention of schooling. Religion and language were to remain legally distinct” (p.10). It was not until 1969 that Canada was legally described as a bilingual country, which required that parents have the right to an education for their children in either English or French. Successive Supreme Court of Canada decisions have upheld the requirement that, where parents request it, schools will be established with instruction in the first language (English or French) of the parents. Thus, some degree of parental choice of school based upon official language is available in Canada.

More recently, issues of choice have arisen around ideologies. Wilkinson has summarized the three main factors normally associated with debates around school choice which appear in discussions of such phenomena as vouchers and charter schools: “...concern over the declining quality of education in Canada in the face of increasing international competitiveness; concern over the kinds of values transmitted through schooling; and frustration over the lack of responsiveness to change within the educational bureaucracy” (Wilkinson 1994, p. 17). Parents voice concern about these issues, often driven by other’s agendas. Business, industry and most western governments have sounded alarm over accountability and standards in the education system (p. 18). Fundamentalist Christian groups have questioned the values in schools and champion such phrases as “back to basics”. Still others express concern about equity and social justice within the schools system and reject market driven changes (Wotherspoon, 1998, p. 200). The influence of the “social” sphere, as described by

Arendt, is clear here, where public issues of production and consumption are influencing the private roles of parents to guide their children's education. The arguments used to press for educational choice have much to do with labor and work and preparing children to enter the competitive market place.

I believe that parents often become caught up in the rhetoric magnified in the media about school failure and the consequences of unemployment and perceptions of greater competitiveness in the global village marketplace (Wotherspoon, p. 129). Organizations such as the Fraser Institute have issued dire warnings about Canadian Education's lack of competitiveness with other countries (Hepburn, 1999). The drive for accountability through testing has been supported in part by most governments in the west, with international, national, provincial and local testing being used for all manner of ranking and judgments about the quality of education in schools (Economic Council of Canada, 1991). Some organizations in Canada, such as the Fraser Institute³, have tried to emulate the British concept of league tables, publishing test results, Grade 12 examination results and other accumulated data on a school-by-school basis.

Parents who respond to these competitive signals tend to demand change in the system to allow them to choose their children's school by some accountability measure (Hepburn, p. 4). New Zealand has the most widely cited experience with charter schools and since 1989 school jurisdictions have been required to develop charters as part of an initiative to deregulate and privatize government services. In Canada, while vouchers have not taken hold as yet in any jurisdiction that I am aware of, charter schools have appeared in several provinces.

³ The Fraser Institute is a Canadian "Think Tank" founded in 1974, which has published three "Annual Report Cards on British Columbia's Secondary Schools."

Charter schools operate on the basis of a 'charter' or agreement between particular schools and governments that identify specific mandates and features of governance by which each school will operate in conformity with general principles of public education. They are premised on the notion that parents are educational consumers who should be provided with effective input and choices in order to make rational decisions about their children's schooling (Wotherspoon. 1998, p. 204).

Advocates of charter schools argue that alternatives are needed because school standards, in the hands of bureaucrats and educational elites have been declining because educators have attempted to be all things to all people (p. 204). Charter schools, they claim, offer the best components of public and private schools, and are publicly funded. While open to all students, they are considered schools of choice by parents. Opponents of charter schools stress that the public school system is intended to be responsive to all social groups, but that charter school parents tend to represent groups that have the most economic, political and social capital. These Charter parents are the ones most likely to gain individual competitive advantage for their children while the children of the socially, politically and economically disadvantaged, who often need the most assistance, are left with reduced resources and services (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, pp. 210-211). Parents become the "clients" of the system and "consumers" of its products and services and are caught up in schooling as part of the social.

The issue of choice underlines the dilemma of the private role of parents to guide the education of their individual children and the public role of the state to provide an equitable educational opportunity to all children, regardless of their economic and social

background. Arendt believed that it was inherent in the private role of parents to be able to choose the school that their child attended. She saw a distinction between what she termed the “private”, the “political” and the “social” in decisions about where a child might attend school.

The right of parents to bring up their children as they see fit is a right of privacy, belonging to home and family. ...The stake of the government in the matter is undeniable – as is the right of the parents. ...Parents’ rights over their children are legally restricted by compulsory education and nothing else.... This involves however, only the content of the child’s education, not the context of association and social life which invariably develops out of his attendance at school....For the child himself, school is the first place away from home where he establishes contact with the public world.... This is not political but social, and the school is to the child what a job is to an adult. The only difference is that the element of free choice which, in a free society, exists at least in principle in the choosing of jobs and the associations connected with them, is not yet at the disposal of the child but rests with his parents (Arendt, 1959, p. 242).

Arendt was making the controversial argument against the forced integration of children in southern schools, claiming the inherent right of parents to choose free association for their children. However, she allows that the state has the right to determine the content of education and, although parents may choose their child’s school, what is taught remains a public concern.

Once again in British Columbia, the government is promoting the right of parents to choose the school which their child attends and is encouraging different models of

schooling and curricula content (Times Colonist, Wednesday July 18, 2001 – “Parents to have pick of schools as Liberals overhaul education”). The introduction of competition and the perception of parents and children as clients and consumers of schools perpetuate the ascendancy of the “social” role of schools. The language of “competition”, “production”, “consumption”, “clients”, “achievement” and “success” are notions which emanate from the global market place and reflect the labor and work of the social rather than the action Arendt contemplates in the public sphere.

Decision-making

The school reform movement of the past three decades has promoted decentralization of decision-making and inclusion of partners in decision-making bodies. As one of the key partners, parents came to expect that their voices would be included in the process. This is an interesting shift in parental focus from the private role of guidance of their own individual child’s education, to the more public role of participation in decision-making about public education in general. The most frequent examples of such parental involvement are in the formation of school councils. Here, parent representatives participate in discussions about all manner of organizational and educational issues, both at the school and the district level. However, the success of school councils depends very much on the manner in which they are implemented and the distribution of power within the system. Most often, parents serve in an advisory role, with the school principal retaining responsibility and accountability for the final decisions.

Clearly, the public role of the school and the school principal have been given more positional power by the state than the parent, representative of the private sphere of the home and family. In Chapter four I discuss in detail the events of the past decade that have seen school councils play an increasingly important role in school and school district governance across Canada, and in other western nations. However, it is again clear to me that one of the motivating forces behind governments encouraging parent involvement in decision-making is to disguise the centralization of control while leaving accountability at the school and district level. Parents are thus drawn into the social sphere of the schools as part of the bureaucratic organizational structure and process.

The discourse around parent involvement in education is influenced by the political rhetoric and official legislation and policy of the time. Initially, parents and local communities controlled the local governance of their schools. Gradually, higher levels of government, following social and economic policies, took over the major role of determining society's interests in the education of the young. Legislation in North America placed local control of education in the hands of elected lay boards of trustees representing the local taxpaying community. Today, various jurisdictions are rethinking governance of education and schools, and often appear to place more control in the hands of parents through such mechanisms as school councils, while at the same time moving real power back to central governments. More will be said about this later in Chapter four when I examine the current legislation across Canada and the changes and implications for parental involvement in educational decision-making and governance.

School boards often find themselves in conflicting positions with regard to parent involvement. Clearly boards are elected to represent the community and to hold in trust

the schools and the education of the children for that community. However, the community consists of more than parents and in many school districts, parents form a relatively small minority of the tax paying public; often representing less than 20% of the voters. This places a burden on school trustees to respond not only to parents but also to the larger community including business and seniors, who may not hold strong convictions about the priority of education and the level of public spending on schools. School boards are also subject to the influence of other partner groups, especially the powerful employee groups – teacher and support staff unions, who often influence the outcome of local school board elections by urging their members to vote and support specific individual candidates.

School board policies influence the practical application of parent involvement. In British Columbia, Parent Advisory Councils (PAC) are recognized in legislation and may be formed at any school by parents. However, the constitutions of these PAC are subject to scrutiny of school boards. The willingness of boards to be actively supportive of PAC is often a determinant of the success of PAC in their aspirations to be involved. Boards can and do enact policies to encourage or limit the active involvement of parents, particularly in the area of decision-making. They also negotiate contracts with their employees, which often contain language limiting the rights of involvement of parents in such roles as volunteers or in complaints about staff.

In general, however, the discourse on parental involvement sends a variety of messages and school boards share the responsibility for mixed messages about the role of parents.

One view is parent as savior (Lageman, 1993), what I also term parent-as-protector; Bring parents into the school, let them have decision-making power, and the schools will improve (Fine, 1993; Lewis & Nakagawa, 1995). This view suggests that parents must protect their children's interests because schools will not. Alternatively, parents are viewed as a deficit (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) or considered a problem. Parents do not do enough, and without parental support nothing else matters (Nakagawa, 2000, p. 5).

This representation of parents as both problems and as protectors places them in what Nakawaga calls a "double bind... a situation in which a person is faced with contradictory demands or expectations, so that any action taken will appear to be wrong" (p. 5). It is often described as a mechanism used by those with power against those without. For parents, they must choose to be involved in the ways that the school or school board dictates or else they will be construed as a problem. School boards have become absorbed into the bureaucracy of the school system and can be prone to use conflicting approaches to parent involvement to maintain their control over the agenda of schooling and resist changes to the status quo.

School boards themselves are caught in a bind. Their existence is through legislation enacted by senior levels of government, in Canada the provincial governments. Over the past several decades this power to govern locally has been eroded as parental and student rights have increased thorough such vehicles as the Charter Of Rights and Freedoms and the office of the Ombudsman. It has also been reduced by government attempts to amalgamate school districts in the name of efficiency and accountability. A major change for British Columbia boards was the loss of their power

to tax at the local level, they now receive almost 100% of their funding directly from the provincial treasury, often with specific grants and caps imposed to shape policy direction. In most provinces the call to increase parental involvement in education and schools, driven by the global market economy and pressures to compete in science, technology and production, has placed parents in various positions to influence decisions formerly the exclusive purview of school boards as I will outline in Chapter four. The ultimate threat to Boards came in New Brunswick, where school and regional councils of parent representatives replaced boards in March 1996. It is no wonder that trustees remain highly suspicious of parent groups asking, if not demanding, representation on decision making bodies dealing with everything from bussing to boundaries, to curriculum and textbook selection.

Teaching and learning

Parent involvement with their children's learning and support for the teaching process are perhaps the most important of the roles identified for parents by most other partners – especially teachers. However, all of these involvements tend to be to support the work and labor of the school staff rather than to consider parental ideas about their child's education or to address their issues or concerns. There is a growing body of research evidence that suggests that when parents are involved with their children's learning, achievement increases. "Education has 'rediscovered' parental involvement, and the popular press, policy makers, and school administrators have pounced upon parental involvement as the latest panacea to improve school learning" (Keith and Keith,

1993, p. 474). A study of eighth grade students in the United States suggests that “...parental involvement has a powerful effect on eighth grader’s achievement ... a substantial portion of the effect of parental involvement was through homework; parents who are more involved influence their children to do more homework ... and that homework, in turn, improves students’ learning” (p. 484). Consistent with the Arendtian notion that labor and work are now part of the social (Chapter Two, pp. 17-18) the significant measures of success outlined in this research are tied to the notions of labor and work (the social sphere), with little or no attention to the action which education should also be about (the public sphere). The study concludes:

Parents can have high expectations for their children, and they can communicate those expectations to their children. They can reinforce those expectations by inquiring about what their children learn in school, and by providing a home environment that values and is conducive to learning (P. 486).

The relationship between the home, parent and child has a great bearing on the parallel relationship of the school, teacher and student. The research would suggest that the greater the cooperation and communication between the private space of the home and the more public setting of the school, the better the anticipated outcomes should be for the preparation of children to labor and work in the “social” sphere. In the context of the public/private dichotomy this relationship raises some important questions. Unless a balance is struck protecting the inherent roles of both the parent and the school, there is the possibility of the school “colonizing” the home and drawing the parent into “social” role of the school. It is not infrequent that parents are the recipients of guides and directions from their children’s teachers about what activities parents should engage in

with their children to ensure success in school (achievement and outcomes). The reverse is also, of course, true, where a willful parent can invade the public space of the school and teacher by demanding excessive control over what goes on in the classroom. Parents may attempt to influence the particular reading program being used in the primary classroom or dispute the choice of novel in the high school English class.

This parental interest is also shown when parents volunteer at the school, attend activities and functions and meet regularly with their child's classroom teacher(s). It seems fairly self-evident that parents, who continue the nurturing, and teaching roles they begin with their children at birth, will influence their children's school achievement and success. There is a fairly large body of research on effective schools that seems to confirm this notion of parental involvement having a significant influence on a child's success in school (Lofthouse, 1999). However, this leaves open the question of what is called research and who is measuring success, and that may depend very much on the view of education and schooling being taken by the researcher. If the researcher is attempting to measure the degree to which schools are preparing children for a in the production-consumption economy, then traditional means of testing and measuring may suffice and parental involvement may well be best directed at ensuring success on these measures. If, on the other hand, researchers are concerned about education as the preparation of children to become active participants in the political world in addition to their work and laboring roles, then they will need to measure very different factors and consider what role parents play in preparing their children for contemplation of what is a good and worthwhile life. The link between the private role of the parents and the home and the public role of the school and the teacher would seem to be fairly critical in

ensuring the child's educational success, especially if that success contemplates preparation for a life of labor, work and action, rather than only labor and work. I believe this confirms the notions I have outlined in the previous chapter, that the private roles of parents, and the public roles of the schools must be respected and nurtured in the best interests of the education of children.

Physical and Material Environment

There is no doubt that parents individually and as organized groups can have a tremendous political effect when they become involved in pressuring governments at various levels to provide appropriate, safe, clean and well equipped environments in schools. A study entitled "Building Conditions, Parental Involvement, and Student Achievement in the District of Columbia" published in Urban Education in April 1993 showed that:

the size of a public school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) budget is positively related to the school building's condition. The condition is, in turn, shown to be statistically related to the student's academic achievement. An improvement in the school's condition by one category, say from poor to fair, is associated with a 5.5 point improvement in academic achievement scores (Berner, 1993. p.6).

While the author acknowledges that factors such as mean income and racial composition of the area of the school were also found to be important, it was significant that they found a direct correlation between the size of the schools PTA budget and the

improvement of the physical facilities of the school. They also found that the building conditions affect the academic achievement of students (p. 24).

In my own experience, working in a growing school district, where portable classrooms almost outnumbered traditional classrooms due to rapid enrollment growth, one cannot underestimate the importance of parental pressure in bringing about building improvements. The media, politicians and government officials often seem to be much more responsive to parental pressures than they do to the standard data submissions made by school district staff, or, indeed by pressure brought at the political level by school trustees. In a particular case in point, a small rural elementary school was overlooked for provincial capital funding repeatedly, until the parent advisory council rallied parents to communicate with their political representative who brought the television cameras and reporters on site to witness the sewage contaminated surface ground water. Clearly, administrators and school boards are well advised to enlist the support of parents in lobbying government for resources to ensure that schools are maintained and improved. However, this reinforces the notion that education is about issues of labor and work and that the role of parents is to support the “social” needs of the school in maintaining physical infrastructure rather than discussing the purposes of education and schooling and its relationship to a good and worthwhile life – labor and work are privileged, action is omitted.

The private role of parents to ensure that their children are in a safe and healthy environment extends to their interest and involvement with their child’s school and its environmental conditions. When parents move beyond their private role as individuals and organize through such institutions as Parent Advisory Councils, they are taking on a

social role, becoming a part of the educational bureaucracy. While these pressure groups may serve the needs of the school bureaucracy as in the example given above, there are other times when they are in opposition to the local school or district and the relationship is less than harmonious. This, of course, raises questions about the appropriateness of parents moving into a more social role and whether small groups of parents can and do adequately reflect the wishes and will of all parents. Once again, parents are active in addressing the school's needs and agenda to support labor and work in the social sphere rather than their own issues and concerns for their child's education.

Communication

Communication is often characterized as perhaps the most significant role parents can play in their relationship with their child's teacher and school about the education of their child. However, the purpose of the communication is of considerable importance in determining its significance. As outlined previously in the section on "Teaching and Learning" (p. 80), when communication is unidirectional, from the school to the parent about the child's performance in limited aspects of education – work and labor, while the importance of preparation for a worthwhile life and the participation in the world as an actor is ignored, communication serves the narrow needs of preparation for the social rather than the public or the private sphere. School/home communication falls into a number of categories, including parent-teacher conferencing, informal meetings, volunteering in the classroom, receiving and responding to report cards, attendance and participation in parent-teacher meetings, and attending various activities and events.

Communication between parents, teachers and schools can vary tremendously.

Government, school district and school formal and informal policies can greatly influence the relationship between schools, teachers and parents and the level of communication.

The nature of the communication is, I believe, critical to this relationship and should address the nature and purposes of education and the parent and child's aspirations for a worthwhile life of action in the public/political sphere as well as preparation for labor and work in the social sphere and continuing to live in the private sphere.

Issues of communication about the child and the child's education raise concerns about the tension between the private role of the parent and the public role of the school and teacher. Fundamental to the relationship between the home and the school is a common understanding of the purposes of an education and the distinctions between the private role of the parents to guide their child's education and the public role of the school in preparing the child for their future as active participants in the world. In the first instance, communication should be about these roles and the assumptions and expectations, which both parties bring to the relationship. Parents and teachers need to communicate about all of the aspects of the education of children including the private and social conceptions of labor and work and the public aspects of participation in the world as an active citizen in a democratic society.

There are some practical concerns that arise in the communication between parents and schools. Parents from First Nations communities, who may have lingering apprehension from their own family experiences of residential schools, may be reluctant to get involved with their children's school. Recent immigrants, speaking a different language and/or from a different culture, may not be comfortable in dealing with the

school, particularly if the predominant culture and language is foreign to them. Many parents have had their own bad experiences with school. Since schools traditionally have been organized to reward student achievement in academics and have promoted entrance to college and university as the ultimate goal, the majority of today's parents will have failed to meet that expectation and will have reservations about going back in to the school environment or meeting with their child's teacher. The public role of the school has been shifted into the social sphere, where bureaucracy, controlled by professional educators and administrators, may not understand and accommodate the private issues that parents may bring to their relationship with the school. Also, like most aspiring professions, education has developed its own specialized language. Teachers tend to use educational jargon and this may intimidate parents, making them feel inadequate and unable to understand exactly what the teacher is saying about their child's progress. This exemplifies Arendt's concern about the social displacing the public sphere and nullifying the private role of parents to oversee their child's education. Communication between parents and schools about the purposes of education, preparation for a life of labor, work and action in both the private and the public sphere, may need to be facilitated to overcome some of the obstacles suggested here, and the role of parent advocacy, which will be discussed fully later, can, I believe, play a very significant role.

It seems that the level of involvement and communication with parents diminishes through the grades (Walker, 1998). Most parents seem to feel comfortable in dealing with school contact during the early grades, but by middle and high school, contact diminishes greatly. This can be part of the maturing child's natural growth and adolescent reluctance, or it might be that teachers at the higher grades are less able to

communicate with parents. It may also have to do with the nature of the communication – how much talk can there be about preparation for a life of labor and work? If more of the communication actively engaged parents and teachers in discussions about the purposes of an education and its contribution to a worthwhile life and respected the important but different roles of parents and teachers, perhaps communication would expand and continue. A recent study of parent's evenings in secondary schools in Norfolk, England illustrates the tension between the private role of parents, the public role of schools and the influence of the social on both by concluding:

These parents' evenings could be seen as occasions where identity was in jeopardy for all concerned. They stood at the interface between the school and the outside world – a location where the norms and practices of the school are potentially challengeable. So it is hardly surprising if schools wanted to police that boundary, while still needing to subscribe to the rhetoric of parental involvement. Teachers-as-experts were threatened by encounters with adults who could claim to know the students better than they, and who might hold their teaching to account. The parents likewise had their claims to know their children contested, with the status of expert being undermined by the client role constructed during the event. Young people were caught between perceptions of them as sons/daughters, students, and their self-perceptions as maturing adults. So everyone was uncertain of the role they were expected to play and how to read the other players. These parents' evenings were occasions fraught with personal and institutional danger (Walker, 1998, p.176).

It seems to me that, to a great extent, schools have set the boundaries around communication between home and school and limited the context and content to issues of labor and work, the social role of schools and the need of the school bureaucracy to enlist the support of parents in sustaining the status quo of the relationship without regard for the distinctions of private and public which Arendt saw as so critical to education and the world.

The exchange of information about the child, both from the perspective of the home and parents and from the school and teacher can lead to great success or may be fraught with miscommunication, doubt and suspicion. Many factors influence this communication: socio-economic status, power and control issues, ethnic/cultural disparities, etc. In addition, how the communication is constructed is important: the language used, representations made about schools or parents, and expectations – both high and low, of what home or school could or should accomplish (Nakagawa, 2000. p. 446). Schools carry the major responsibility for being aware of the communication needs of parents and the community. Most communication between schools and parents seems to be one directional and designed to communicate information from the school, about the child, to the parent. Little opportunity seems to be provided for a “space of appearance” where parents and teachers can meet with equality to discuss and act upon the parent’s issues and concerns for their child’s education. Again, the communication tends to be about issues of work and labor and the technical, bureaucratic needs of the school in the social sphere with little or no opportunity to discuss what is good and worthwhile and concerned with the public sphere. The District Partners’ Workshop was an attempt to expand the opportunity for partners to discuss and debate the public school

system and to provide a safe place for communication of ideas. However, each partner group selected participants according to their own norms and processes.

When teachers were invited to participate in the District Partners' Workshop, the representatives were selected and named by the local teachers' union. In British Columbia, and most other provinces, and to a lesser extent in the United States and other western nations unionization of teachers has become the norm; indeed in most jurisdictions, teaching is a closed union shop. This means that, not only do teachers generally want to be seen as highly qualified, credentialed professionals but they also want to model their control over their workplace on a labor union. The British Columbia Teacher's Federation, for example, describes itself as "a union of professionals" (BCTF website <http://www.bctf.bc.ca>).

Literature on the relationship of parents and teachers clearly demonstrates that since the inception of public schools there has been a tension and a shifting balance of power between these two groups. Cutler, in his recent book "Parents and schools: the 150-year struggle for control in American education" (2000) outlines the ebb and flow of political power between the two groups: "Starting with parental dominance in the mid-nineteenth century, Cutler chronicles how schools' growing bureaucratization and professionalization allowed educators to gain increasing control over the schooling and lives of the children they taught" (from the flyleaf of Cutler's book). In Britain, little was done to limit the role of parents in the education of their children until the 19th Century when parental rights were fundamentally constrained by the introduction of compulsory attendance (Ulrich, 1996).

Over the next hundred or so years, parental control diminished as the state took greater and greater control over student rights and educational policy, and educators increased their training and professionalization and ultimately unionized. Teachers were an elite, with a relatively high level of education and a social and economic background, placing them in a power position when dealing with most parents. Further, legislation governing education was prescriptive and placed in the hands of school authorities many of the rights and responsibilities formerly held only by parents. This brought about a dramatic shift of control and authority away from the privacy of the home, into the more public arena of the school. As families moved from the countryside to the urban centers, the structure and control of the family changed and the state took on more and more responsibility for the education and welfare of the children. Many parents were ambivalent about this loss of control, as they worked long and hard in the factories and strove to keep a roof over their heads and to put food on the table. Teachers came to stand in the place of parents with the children and exercised both legal and moral authority over their young charges (Wotherspoon, 1998, pp 54-56).

The emergence of the social and the loss of distinction between public and private roles has contributed to the creation of unions, with organized labor taking over the control and influence of individuals to bring about collective pressure on systems. The emergence of teacher unions changed the relationships within education and between individual teachers and parents. Charlene K. Haar has conducted a study of the relationship between teacher unions and parent involvement in the United States (1999). This study examines the role of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (ATF) in the application of policy and practice relative

to parent involvement in education. Haar has completed a careful analysis of the teacher rhetoric, which, appears to support parental involvement, and the collective bargaining and contract language, which avoids or works against issues of parent involvement.

“Rather surprisingly, very few national union [policy] articles refer explicitly to parents...clearly parents are a peripheral concern in NEA/AFT policy. “In fact...not one is based on the idea that parents have a unique interest in school affairs” (Haar, 1999, p. 5). Haar goes on to show that the unions have policies, which call for the restriction of volunteers in the schools to ensure that parents and others do not perform duties, which in any way reduce the number of union employees or union work. Since the signing, by President Clinton in 1994, of the Goals for Education an industry has been built around the eighth goal of increasing parent involvement. “By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation by promoting social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (From Goals 2000: Educate America Act). The NEA’s Center for the Revitalization of Urban Education (CRUE) developed family-school-community training modules in 1996 to carry out the strategic plan of the union. “The strategic plan emphasizes community partnerships and coalition building to counter attacks on public education. It does not include any suggestions on how parents can help their children learn more...” (p. 11). Haar states that:

... the NEA defines and encourages parent involvement in ways that reduce the teacher workload and take the legitimacy of union policies and teacher good conduct for granted.... Meanwhile, opposition to legislation that would empower parents to choose the school that would educate their children constitutes the

NEA's highest legislative priority. ... To summarize, all NEA/AFT materials on parent involvement define it in ways that strengthen or do not challenge teacher and union roles in education" (pp. 12-13).

One of the more controversial contract clauses, which appear in most teacher collective agreements, has to do with parental complaints against teachers. In British Columbia and, indeed, in my own district, this is a current issue of debate amongst parents, school boards and government. It was one of the main issues, which led to the development of the Parent Advocacy Project, which will be described fully later in this paper. Haar, referring to a model union contract used by some state education associations in contract negotiations, points out that the only reference to parents deals with contract language to limit the ability of parents to level criticism at teachers (pp. 13-17). Union contracts often have a double standard when it comes to complaints. Parents and the public must meet stringent legal due process requirements to process a complaint against a teacher (p. 17). On the other hand, teachers can make complaints against administrators, for example, without the grievance notice mentioning the name of the individually aggrieved teacher. Further, teachers are protected by labor standards in most jurisdictions from employer retaliation against employees filing a grievance. "It should be noted that parents and their children do not enjoy such statutory protection against teacher reprisals" (p. 16). In my experience, the most frequently expressed concern by parents wishing to file a complaint against a teacher was the fear of the effect this would have on their child's relationships with and treatment by the teacher.

The confusion over the meaning of "parent involvement" reflects the conflict of interest inherent in the governance structure of public education. On the one

hand, school boards and teacher unions are supposed to protect the public interest in public education. On the other hand, in representing the interest of teachers, teacher unions frequently place the interests of teachers above the public interest. ... Inevitably, the union stake in promoting the interests of teachers overshadows its role as protector of the public interest; facilitating the expression of parent concerns and criticisms becomes subordinate to the union interest in protecting teachers.... As a result, although union rhetoric pays great deference to the parental stake in education, the interests of teachers and teacher unions, or what is assumed to be their interests, is predominant in practice (p. 26).

The collectivity of unionization has perhaps, to some extent, undermined the responsibility of teachers in this public-private relationship – where teachers are to represent the public interest, and in so doing, to provide a link to the parents and the privacy of the home. Teachers then may have come to the decision to support the vision statement “parents are actively involved in the education of their children” for quite different reasons than some other partner groups, including parents. Teacher unions place teachers collectively in the “social” realm as workers and laborers, separating them to some extent from their public role and distancing them from parents. Clearly there were a variety of factors influencing the participation of teachers and other partners at the Partners’ Workshop.

I began this chapter with a reference to the District Partners’ Workshop held in my school district in 1993 and the top ranked vision statement, which emerged from that workshop “parents are actively involved in the education of their children”. I have attempted to illustrate how parent involvement in schools has emerged over time and how

the various partner groups – parents, teachers and trustees, may view parent involvement. Fundamental to the relationship between home and school is the public/private distinction and this theme, and the tension it creates, continues to run through the discourse on parent involvement. The consensus, which was reached at the workshop on this particular vision statement, did not, I believe, reflect total agreement on the meaning of “involvement”. The various partners brought their own interpretations and meanings to the workshop; however, the top ranking of this statement does indicate that parent involvement was a concern to all participants, for whatever reason. The tensions between parents and schools as I have outlined here, illustrate the concerns expressed by Arendt and discussed in the previous chapter. The loss of the public/private distinction and the emergence of the social in the context of schools have resulted in a blurring of traditional roles and responsibilities and the resultant demand for educational change. Schools are focused on labor and work and organized and administered as bureaucracies in what Arendt has termed the “social” sphere and sometimes fail to engage parents in discourse about education as preparation of the young for participation as active citizens in the public sphere. In the next chapter I examine the changing role of educational governance and the emergence of demands for parental involvement.

Chapter Four

The Restructuring of Educational Governance in Canada and Parent Involvement through School Councils

Education is integral to understanding the public-private distinction and the public-private distinction is integral to education. The tension between the private roles of parents and the public role of schools to provide an education is exacerbated by the structure of educational governance, which has emerged in Canada. The emergence of administration from the governance structures in education and schools has led to a bureaucracy to replace some of the public role with what Arendt would term “the social.” Governance and administration, through forms of representative democracy have generally omitted parents from direct participation in decision-making at the provincial, district and school levels. While recent efforts to introduce parent participation in decision-making at various levels have received widespread attention, a number of authors (Walsh, 1996; Fleming, 1997) cast some doubt on both the effectiveness of such participation and the intent of government and bureaucracy in introducing it.

Over the past decade in Canada, there has been significant change in the legislated involvement of parents in educational processes. The restructuring and realignment of school district governance has occurred in almost all provinces with the emergence of school councils as a significant common change occurring across the country. This change and the apparent efforts to include parents in the governance of the public education system has implications for the public-private distinction: parents having the

private responsibility to guide their child's education, and the state having the public responsibility to provide public education through the schools. What is the parental role in the governance of schools and education? What is the state's responsibility to listen to and respond to the concerns of parents? These responsibilities intersect at the school and legislation and regulations across the country have been changing to reflect the pressure to have parents included in decisions about their children's education. However, the changes also reflect government and administrative need to maintain overall control of education and to impose accountability on the school system. In this chapter I review the status of school boards and of school councils across Canada.

School Governance in Canada

The British North America Act of 1867 granted control of education to the provinces. Each province, through legislation, established school boards of elected or appointed trustees. These boards, subject to the regulation of the Minister of Education, had responsibility for the establishment and operation of schools within the geographic boundaries assigned to them. Fleming (1997) documents the shift of control of education from local to central government over time, a movement that began even before confederation. The widespread debate over school restructuring during the 1980s has, according to Fleming, led Canadian provinces to revisit questions of governance in the 1990s (p.7). Parallel forces of school district amalgamation and the legislated involvement of parents through school councils have become cornerstones of provincial

restructuring over the past decade. It is important to look at the changes in each province to understand the overall significance for decision making and parent participation.

British Columbia

In 1996, school district amalgamation in British Columbia reduced the number of school boards from 75 to 59 plus a Francophone Education Authority. Almost 100% of education funds come to school boards from the province. In British Columbia the right of parents to form a parent advisory council was written into the School Act in 1989. Section 8 of the Act states: “(1) Parents of students of school age attending a school or a provincial school may apply to the board or to the minister, as the case may be, to establish a parents’ advisory council for that school.” Further, the act states that the parent advisory council: “...through its elected officers, may advise the board and the principal and staff of the school, or the Provincial school respecting any matter relating to the school or provincial school”(B.C. School Act).

Alberta

In 1995 the number of school boards in Alberta was reduced from 146 to 66 (41 public, 22 separate, and 3 Francophone). The province provides 100 percent of funds for the operation of school districts. Since the revised School Act of 1988, Albertan parents could request the formation of a Parent Advisory Council. However, according to David Rideout (1995) a review of such councils in 1991 “...showed that in general they were

not functioning as anticipated.” Subsequent School Acts in 1990 and 1994 “...attempted to focus on ensuring more meaningful parent involvement through school-based management.” In 1995 government put in place the current school councils, which are consult and give advice to principals and school boards. The Alberta Ministry of Education has provided a School Council Manual and Handbook to assist in the implementation at each school.

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan has 107 school divisions. The province provides approximately 40 percent of operating revenues, the balance coming from local property tax levies. Saskatchewan Education is reviewing the results of a consultation process based on the discussion paper “Parents, Communities and Schools: Working Together for Saskatchewan Children.” This paper envisions school councils, which are described as “school based structures for parents and community involvement”. Further, the document states: “The primary purpose of School Community Councils would be to encourage and support parent and community involvement, partnerships and communications with schools. Their aim would be to lend support to programs and services and to enhance the quality of education provided to all students” (Saskatchewan Education, 1997). The final report of this review, entitled “School Plus: A Vision for Children and Youth” was delivered to the Minister of Education in February 2001.

Manitoba

The Manitoba Government commissioned a report on school division boundaries in 1993. It recommended reducing the province's 57 school divisions and one Francophone board to 21 (later amended to 22) but found that such restructuring would result in very few savings (Fleming 1997, p 15), particularly in rural and northern areas of the province. Government has encouraged divisions to consider amalgamation but no legislative action has been taken. With the election of a new government in 2000, the Minister of Education sent a letter to school boards stating the new government's preference for voluntary amalgamation of school divisions (Minister's letter to school board chairs, September 25, 2000). School division funding is from a combination of provincial general revenues, a provincial special levy and local levy determined by each school division board. In 1995, Advisory Councils for School Leadership were written into the School Act. The Ministry of Education published "Guidelines: Advisory Councils for School Leadership" which outlines specific actions: "Action 7 – Require schools to establish Advisory Councils for School Leadership, as required by parents, comprising parents and community members. Action 8 – Require schools to include Advisory Councils for School Leadership in developing school plans and divisional budgets" (Manitoba Education, 1995, p. 1). School Councils are being established in all schools in Manitoba.

Ontario

The Fewer School Boards Act was passed in Ontario in April 1997 reducing the number of school boards from 128 to 72. The Provincial government has also removed from boards the power to raise local funds through the property tax levy. The Education Improvement Commission (EIC) was established in 1997 to oversee the implementation of school board restructuring. School Councils in every school are required by the Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997. The EIC has undertaken consultations on the role of school councils and increased parental involvement as part of a broader government commitment to give parents more input on decisions affecting their children's education. In December 2000, the Education Minister announced new regulations to strengthen parent involvement in school councils by giving them the right to make recommendations on any matter and by requiring school boards and principals to seek the advice of school councils on the development and revision of policies that affect students (Ontario Ministry of Education News Release, December 13, 2000). The pace and extent of restructuring in Ontario resulted in labor unrest and court challenges of the government's directions.

Quebec

Legislation in Quebec restructured school governance effective in July 1998 with the abolition of the 156 mostly Catholic and Protestant boards in favor of 60 French language school boards, 9 English language school boards, and 3 special status boards

(the Cree and Kativik Boards in Northern Quebec, and the Commission Scolaire du Littoral for the Lower North Shore). Provisional councils were established to oversee the transition prior to the school elections held in June of 1998. Funding for education will continue to be through both provincial grants (84 percent of board revenues) and local tax levy. In addition to the newly structured school boards, each school will have a governing board, bringing together parents, staff (including the principal) and community representatives. A training plan for the boards is being put into place including local sessions through ministry regional offices and Internet and CD-ROM support. The governing board, chaired by a parent, has decision-making power including approving the school's budget prior to submission to the school board.

New Brunswick

In 1992 the number of school boards in New Brunswick was reduced from 42 to 18 (12 Anglophone, six Francophone) but in March 1996 the provincial government completely abolished elected school boards. A three-tiered structure of parent advisory committees evolved to fill the vacuum left by the demise of school boards (Chalker & Haynes, 1997). A parent committee at each school operated under guidelines published in a New Brunswick Department of Education Manual. It elected a representative to one of eight district parent advisory councils (five English and 3 French). The role of district councils was advisory. In November 2000, the newly elected government of New Brunswick announced a new governance structure, consisting of 14 autonomous district education councils (DECs) (9 Anglophone and 5 Francophone) to be set up through open

elections in May 2001. The experiment with parent involvement in governance through school councils and the abolition of school boards seems to have been short lived in New Brunswick.

Nova Scotia

In Nova Scotia an extensive public consultation process between 1991 and 1995 preceded the 1996 amalgamation of 22 school districts into seven districts (six English and one Francophone). Funding for education continues to be from a combination of general revenues and local property taxes. Legislation also allows for the creation of school councils at each school.

Prince Edward Island

In 1994, the provincial government of Prince Edward Island consolidated school districts from five boards to three (two English, one French). The districts receive all of their funding from the province. In 1995 legislation provided for the implementation of school councils as advisory bodies to school principals. The principal continues to be legally bound by contract and the School Act and cannot delegate decision-making to a school council. Membership in school councils includes a minimum of 3 parent representatives, one or more teachers (only one voting member), the principal ex-officio, and may include students. Teachers shall not outnumber parents on the council.

Newfoundland and Labrador

A 1992 Royal Commission set out the framework that led to the January 1997 reduction of school boards in Newfoundland and Labrador from 27 to 11 (10 interdenominational and one Francophone). The church resisted the dissolution of denominational boards and the government held a referendum on the issue, which resulted in 54 percent of voters endorsing the proposed restructuring. The boards are funded entirely from the general revenues of the province. The legislation resulting from the Royal Commission provided for the establishment of school councils on a voluntary basis in 1995-96 with full implementation by 1997-98. Two research papers on attitudes and perceptions about site based management and the establishment of school councils in Newfoundland and Labrador, found that a majority of parents desired more involvement in school decision-making (Hodder, 1995; Rideout, 1997).

North West Territories and The Yukon

In the Northwest Territories an elected District Education Authority (DEA) that functions much as a traditional school board, governs each school community. In Yellowknife there are two DEAs (one public and one denominational). Outside Yellowknife there are eight divisions, governed by an elected council. All funding is provided directly by the territorial government. In the Yukon each school has an advisory council to provide local direction. The territorial government sets and administers policy and funds education.

The Vanishing School Boards

Much has been written recently about the potential demise of elected school boards, the apparent rise of parent involvement through school councils and the increasing control of the educational agenda by provincial governments (Rideout, 1995; Fleming, 1997; Pierce, 1997; MacLeans, 1997; Chalker & Haynes, 1997; McKenna & Willms, 1998; Duma, 1998; Leithwood, 1998).

Fleming places the notion of restructuring Canadian school governance into historical perspective, suggesting that school board amalgamation is a continuation of the centralization of education preceding Confederation. The removal of local school control from parents and boards began with rapid population growth, the move from rural to urban communities, and the need for greater order and efficiency. In the depression years, major consolidations took place in an effort to overcome rural poverty and to equalize tax base support for education. The most recent round of amalgamations is based on a perception of cost savings and efficiencies to be derived from a larger organizational base and the provision of more equitable services in disparate communities.

Chalker and Haynes (1997), using the New Brunswick experience of school board elimination, review some of the possible causes of the vanishing school board. A major factor has been the ongoing search for equity in provision of educational programs. With school board's power to raise taxes locally, came tremendous inequity in their abilities to provide services and programs. Amalgamations, movement to provincial funding of education, and demands for greater efficiency and less bureaucracy have diminished the

value and influence of local school boards. Other factors cited by Chalker and Haynes (p.28) include the emphasis on trivia over substance at the board table while major decisions moved to central government; downsizing and reduced funding making school boards expendable; and a change in society's priorities as the population ages.

Leithwood, citing improvement of school services as one of the main reasons underlying school-based consolidation, asks a more fundamental question, "Does it make any difference to student learning?"(p.35). A review of 13 relevant studies carried out in Canada and the United States between 1974 and 1995 examined the relationship between board size and student achievement. Leithwood concludes, "Quite clearly, according to these studies, large school boards are bad for kids"(p.35). Complex bureaucratic structures, redirection of energy and effort away from the classroom, and diminished staff commitment are the three major reasons given for Leithwood's conclusion (p.35).

Clair Ross, general secretary of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Federation, quoted in MacLean's (February, 1997) on Ontario's restructuring of education says, "This is not about downsizing the number of school boards. This is about massive, unprecedented transfer of power out of local hands and into the hands of the provincial government" (p.58).

Underlying these changes, I believe, is the disappearance of the public-private distinction and the rise of the social. Not only are parents removed further and further from the locus of control of education, but the control has also moved from the democratic, representative control of local boards to the more anonymous provincial public/political arena and into the hands of the administrative bureaucracy. Despite the drawbacks of representative school boards, the small turn out at local elections and the

diminishing significance of school board influence and control, there was, I believe, a sense that a local person could be contacted and would have some understanding of the local situation. As the representation moves further away and boards represent more people and greater geographic areas, the possibility for direct involvement of parents becomes less and less. A parallel rise in the influence and control of the administration at both the provincial and local level further distances parents from the political decision-making arena. Deputy ministers, ministry staff, superintendents and principals have the ear of the elected decision-makers and become in turn the eyes and ears of the Minister and trustees. As outlined in Chapter Two, the ultimate rise of the bureaucracy and the emergence of the social leads to "...the rule by nobody" (Arendt, 1958, p.40). "Instead, society expects from each of its members, a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to 'normalize' its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action..." (p.40). Pitkin adds to this picture: "Those nominally in charge and setting policy [school trustees and Ministers] are the most isolated from reality and dependent on their organizational systems for information. Because of the huge size and complex interconnectedness of these institutions and their pervasiveness amongst us, they generate enormous inertia (Pitkin, 1998, p. 255). Parents, then become less and less able to influence the policy decisions and are subject to the administrative rules and procedures over which they have little or no control. This has led to the pressure by parents to have greater voice in the public education system

The Rise of Parent Advisory Councils

The rise of Parent Advisory Councils and School Councils receives mixed reviews from the public, political and educational perspectives. Fleming characterizes school councils as having become "...restructuring's Trojan horse in that they reduce resistance to the loss of local representation that occurs when school boards are amalgamated" (Fleming, 1997). While the councils vary in composition and formal roles across the country, most include parents, teachers, principals, community members and senior students (McKenna & Willms, 1998, p.79). In most cases the council's role is advisory; they do not participate in setting policy or making school-related decisions. The relationship between councils and school boards is weak, as the two structures seek to define their respective emerging roles with board's retaining the legislative power and parents assuming an advisory role. Teachers and principals are sometimes unwilling to share their authority over areas they view as their professional domain. Diane Duma, an elected member of the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils believes "The greatest failing of Advisory Council legislation is that there are no consequences for those individuals that still want to maintain the walls between parents and the school system" (Duma, 1998, p. 14).

Leithwood notes that between 1985 and 1995, over 80 empirical studies about aspects of site-based management and school councils were reported in the English language educational research literature (Leithwood, 1998, p. 36). The research perspective shows virtually no firm, research-based knowledge about the direct or indirect effects of school councils on students. He says "All claims that there is likely to be some sort of pay-off for students must be reconsidered given the lack of research-

based support. There is an awesome gap between the rhetoric and the reality of this initiative" (p.36). This is not a surprising finding, given that the research tends to measure achievement and success based upon training in skills for labor and work rather than preparing for action, and that parental involvement in governance is limited to an advisory role in a system which has become a bureaucracy, concerned with maintaining the status quo.

Byfield, writing in *Western Report* in 1994 was characteristically blunt in describing the Klein government's initiatives to increase parent involvement during the restructuring process "It means increasing their whining rights while ensuring they still can't actually decide anything, except how much they'll charge for a hotdog at the next community fund raiser." He goes on to say

The concept the government is groping for, surely, is parent "authority" – specifically, statutory power for parent councils to set their school's rules, to establish program priorities, to approve or reject the school's internal budget, to expel chronic misbehavers(sic), and to select the best available principal.

Anything less does not constitute "authority," and will leave parents whining, frustrated, uninvolved or running bingos (sic) (Byfield, 1994, p.2).

Byfield may not represent the mainstream of educational thought in Canada, but he certainly puts forward the concerns of parents wanting to gain a larger say in school decisions and is consistent with an Arendtian view that the school system is a giant bureaucracy anxious to protect the status quo by keeping others, including parents, out of real participation in decision-making.

In her 1996 dissertation, Walsh examines some of the underlying assumptions and implications inherent in parental involvement in educational decisions. She identifies five themes: power, professionalism, change, disinterest, and personal agendas. From these themes she draws three implications: different shareholders in education have varying ideas about how parents should be involved in education; societal pressures create barriers to parents becoming involved; and educational institution's hierarchical structure prevents the sharing of decision making. She concludes that, unless the structure of the educational system is radically changed, parental involvement in educational decision-making is unlikely to occur (Walsh, 1996). Although Walsh is not explicit in her dissertation, her conclusions are consistent with the Arendtian position I have outlined in Chapter Two of this paper that the public schools system is a giant bureaucracy located in the social sphere and that there is little or no opportunity for parents and others, outside the system, to participate with any equality in discussions about the purposes of an education which might result in action to change the system.

Action results from open dialogue amongst people in what Arendt calls the "space of appearances". The creation of this space is essential, so that individuals come together as equals and in their uniqueness to discuss and debate important issues about what is good and right about life in the world. The top down imposition of parent and school councils, while appearing to foster greater democratic participation, may be just a means to extend the bureaucratic control of the educational system to a legislated forum to continue to create public opinion using selected parents and other partners to extend the labor and work of government. Far from providing the space of appearance which Arendt deemed essential for action to occur, the models of governance and parent involvement

through school councils have tended to limit parents' participation to representatives giving advice on issues which lie within the social sphere: organization, management, and bureaucracy, and further to limit the representatives to a privileged group of parents (McKenna & Wilms, p 382). Democratic dialogue may have to arise outside the formal structures of legislation and governance, where individuals come together to share a common concern for improving the "life world" or public sphere; a dialogue free of coercion and manipulation. Coulter claims, "the preoccupation with educational governance misses the essence of democracy" (Coulter, in press). He concludes:

Democracy for Arendt ...is not centrally about governance and lawmaking, but about open, sustained and thoughtful public dialogue about what is important to people trying to live together. Canadians need policy initiatives to foster such dialogues and leaders to initiate such discussions. Instead of discussions about the size of school districts and the composition of school councils, we need to be discussing what kind of society we want to live in and what kind of society we are preparing our children to live in.

Encouraging and supporting such initiatives as the BCCPAC Parent Advocacy Project may go a lot further along the road to democratic dialogue and communicative action than the current governance restructuring would appear to have achieved.

However, a key issue, which I address in more detail in the next chapter, is that of distinguishing between the role of an individual parent advocating for his or her child and class advocacy where a group of parents advocate for systemic changes in the school system. This distinction is important when considering issues of governance and how, when, where and for what purpose parent "representatives" are included in decision-

making processes, thus privileging those parents and excluding the views of others. The notion of parent “representation” is problematic, as I have outlined in Chapter Two (p. 53). In addition, the assumption that parents are, indeed, privileged in relationship to the overall governance of public education is problematic, given that they are a minority of the citizens paying taxes to maintain the public schools and that same public has an interest in the outcomes of public school education. In the next chapter I examine parent advocacy and the role it might play in assisting parents in their role as guides to their children’s education as well as some of the possible problems when the parent advocacy role expands to broader systemic issues.

Chapter Five

Parent Involvement and Advocacy

Parents are the natural advocates for their children. Having brought them into this world, they hold the ultimate responsibility for the care, nurturing and protection of their children until such time as they are ready to emerge into the full light of the public sphere. In today's society part of that emergence from the privacy of the home into the publicity of the world, involves the school, a sort of "in between", where children are also cared for, nurtured and protected while preparing to participate as citizens. Schools, like most organizations of the state have become part of what Arendt termed "the social" sphere and tend to be bureaucratic, bound by laws, regulations, rules and traditions. At times, these bureaucratic needs can be in conflict with the rights of the child⁴. Since children do not have the necessary skills, experience or authority to defend their rights, it is sometimes necessary for them to rely upon an advocate to speak, write or act on their behalf. In this chapter I examine advocacy and its significance in today's world and in particular the emerging role of parents as advocates for children within the public school system. It is a complex interaction between the rights of the child, the rights and responsibilities of parents, and the rights and responsibilities of the state. It exemplifies the Arendtian view of the child's world, the confusion of the social and the inherent conflict that lies in the dichotomy of private and public.

4 Children's rights in British Columbia schools stem from the BC School Act, The Report of the Office of the Ombudsman, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Child Advocacy is About Protecting Children from the Social

There are many definitions of child advocacy (Tompkins, Brooks, & Tompkins, 1998, p. 33). These definitions vary according to such factors as: values and utility in the system in which they are used, assumptions made about child growth and development and related needs, and procedures developed in the name of child advocacy. Various authors have attempted to define child advocacy:

- A child advocate is any individual who is able to identify and articulate the interests and needs of children, especially in the presence of opposition. The ability to act effectively in the face of individual or institutional opposition distinguishes those who are advocates from those who are not (Margolis, Lewis & Salkind, 1996, p. 2).
- In essence, child advocacy is assuming, in varying degrees and ways responsibility for promoting and protecting the developmental needs of both an individual child and children in general (Westman, 1979, p. 44).
- A child advocate is an actor on behalf of children. In that role, he/she is a defender, protector, mediator, supporter, investigator, negotiator, monitor, promoter, enabler, and/or counselor of children (Fernandez, 1980, p.13).
- Child advocacy ... intervention on behalf of children in relation to those services and institutions that impinge upon their lives...a search for devices, targets, methods, rationales, and sanctions to make programs and services more responsive and more available to

children...to change or bend institutional networks so that they serve children better (Kahn, Kamerman, & McGowan, 1973, pp. 63-65).

The choice of definition is probably determined by who is perceived to be the advocate: the parent, a layperson, a professional within a system, or a professional from outside of a system. However, it is assumed in these definitions that the child is in need of someone to provide protection and support within a system or institution that may represent or promote interests other than those of the child. Children need to be sheltered from the full light of the adult world and do not have the resources, experience or maturity to advocate for themselves. My intention here is to address issues of child advocacy as they relate to parents of children within the public school system and to illustrate how the distinctions of private, public and social support the need for advocacy.

Child advocacy has a twofold basis: the private responsibility that parents have for their individual children and the responsibility that society has for the welfare of all of its citizens, in the public as well as the private sphere (Westman, 1979, p.44).

Historically, our society's responsibility for the dependent and less fortunate arises from the *parens patriae* doctrine, in which the English king was seen as the father of the country and as ultimately responsible for the welfare of his people... In this sense, the state has a supportive role in relationship to its citizenry.... the *in loco parentis* function of government...has assumed general responsibility for the protection and nurturance of children. The basis for child advocacy, then, is either from the delegated authority of parents or of the state when it supplements or replaces parental responsibility in a guardianship role (p.45).

In this thesis my concern is with the private role of parents as advocates for their children in the public school system.

Advocacy Can be *On Behalf* of Children, or *In Behalf* of Children

There are a number of important distinctions to be made when addressing issues of child advocacy. The first is of a legal nature, distinguishing between the terms “acting on behalf of” and “acting in behalf of”. When acting “on behalf” of someone, the advocate is working collaboratively with that person and is accountable to them. On the other hand, when an advocate works “in behalf” of another, they act independently, only needing to act in what they believe to be the best interests of the individual (McMahon, 1993, p. 4). When parents, or others, act as advocates for children, they must determine if they are acting “in” or “on” behalf of them. The developmental level of the child and the specific circumstance may determine the nature of the representative/advocacy relationship. As the child develops in knowledge and experience, the parent needs to allow for greater participation by the child in the decisions that affect him or her.

Advocacy Can be for Individual Case or for System or Class Advocacy

Case advocacy is concerned with the individual needs of a particular child. In this situation the advocate is attempting to secure a particular response from a service delivery system, (e.g. a school), or to seek to secure existing entitlements or to develop new entitlements for the child within the system, or to terminate a relationship with an

unresponsive institution (McMahon, 1993, p. 3). When individual case advocacy leads to the identification of issues, which affect other children in similar situations, it may lead to class advocacy which is focused on "...change for a group of children...usually...to alter administrative procedures, end aberrant professional practice, secure financial resources, influence legislative action, or resolve questions about the legal status of children..." (p. 3). It seems logical then, that advocacy may move from case advocacy to class advocacy, and then back to case advocacy to ensure that the results achieved for the group are applied to the individual in a timely and appropriate way. McMahon cautions that advocates should be aware that the more they move away from dealing with individual case advocacy into the realm of class advocacy, the more they become involved in issues of law and politics (p. 3). In the case of parents as advocates, this can be difficult when knowledge and experience in these areas are limited. As outlined in the previous chapter, system advocacy by parents, and particularly by "representative parent groups" such as PAC (Parent Advisory Councils) or school councils as envisaged in legislation across Canada can be problematic.

Advocacy Can Occur Within a System or from Outside a System

McMahon writes of a distinction between advocacy from within a system and from outside. (p. 4). He is concerned with the advocacy role of professionals, in this case psychologists, either in their role as employees of an organization working for change within that organization, or as outside individuals seeking to change another organization. My concern is with parent advocacy. Determining whether parents are actually working

from within or outside the school is problematic. Are parents in fact internal partners of the school or are they external to it? This may depend upon how parents are perceived by the school system itself and the individual school and principal. Clearly, parents are not employed by the school system nor are they under the supervision or direction of the school or its administration. When parents, collectively, act as class advocates for change to a school or school system and its policies, procedures or personnel, they are often regarded as an outside pressure group. This conflict of internal versus external needs clarification for parents intending to be advocates. While it may be desirable for parents to feel they are an integral part of the system, there is the danger that they can be co-opted into the very bureaucracy which they may be trying to change. Once parents gain status in such formal structures as school councils or committees, they may be governed by the rules and regulations of the system, and at the very least are under pressure to cooperate with the other players in the organization. In other words, while seeking to reinforce their private role as the guardian and guide of their child's education, they may unintentionally become absorbed into the social sphere against which they were originally advocating.

Changes in Families and in the Role of Public Institutions Lead to Child Advocacy

Child advocacy, as we know it today, is a fairly recent phenomenon, having become popularized since the 1960s (Tompkins, et al, 1998, p. 7). However, Westman charts the history of child rearing and its effects on the treatment of children beginning with the period from antiquity to the 4th century A.D. (Westman, 1979, p 30). This is what has been termed the "infanticidal" mode of child rearing in which "...the parents

resolved their concerns about problem children by killing them, a practice with profound effects on the surviving children!" (p. 30). The period between the fourth and thirteenth centuries is described as the "abandonment" model as parents began to believe that children had a soul. "A way of handling problem children then was by abandonment to a monastery or nunnery, servitude in the home of a nobleman, or simple emotional abandonment in their homes" (p. 30). From the thirteenth to the seventeenth century parents are described as "ambivalent" about child rearing, viewing their children as "...full of amorphous 'dangerous' impulses. The parental task, then, was to mold the formless child" (p. 31). By the eighteenth century the child was regarded as "...having a mind that needed to be conquered and an emotional life that needed to be controlled" and thus child rearing was in an "intrusive" mode (p.31). From the nineteenth to mid-twentieth century "socialization" was the common mode, characterized by "...training children through guidance and teaching rather than attempting to conquer their wills" (p. 31). Throughout early history, children were viewed as miniature adults (p. 31) and their small physical stature has made them "...exceedingly vulnerable to the prevailing attitudes and influence of adults" (p. 31). Of course, one should remember also, that children made the transition to adulthood very abruptly, often as early as seven or eight years of age as they became productive workers in society or were apprenticed to a master to learn skills of a trade (p. 31). Adolescence, as we know it today, did not exist. In the late nineteenth century, researchers began to examine the developmental stages of childhood. These new concepts, which revolutionized society's view of children, coupled with the rapid urbanization of family life and the consequent social and economic dislocation led to a widespread movement to involve the state in the affairs of

children and child rearing, previously the exclusive role of parents and families (Westman, 1979, p. 34). Out of this newfound interest and concern for children a number of “children’s causes” emerged spawning the original child advocacy roles in such categories as:

1. parental rights, based on the notion of children as exclusively in the family domain, as property, and stressing the child’s role as a member of the family economic unit; [an exclusively private role]
2. child savers, or individuals who place an emphasis on children’s incompetence, vulnerability, and the need for assistance from the community or state; [intrusion of the public into the private]
3. parents as savers, or individuals who emphasize the same vulnerability as the child savers but place the responsibility for children with their parents; [reinforcing the private role of parents] and
4. child liberators, or individuals who favor policies that ensure the independence and autonomy of children [allowing children to develop their own world separate from the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of the adult world] (Melton, 1987, pp.357-367).

These differing views of advocacy roles and parental rights and responsibilities have led to conflict over the past century. The establishment of the Children’s Bureau in the United States in 1912 as a result of the first White House Conference on Children in 1909 set the stage for greater state involvement in the affairs of children and the basis of disagreement between the parental rights movement and the child savers movement (Margolis et al, 1996, p. 108).

...the history of child advocacy reflects the evolution in the concept of children as autonomous individuals with the rights and responsibilities that accompany that status. As societies grow cognizant of the rights of children, the need for advocates to define and protect those rights emerges (p. 109).

These debates over the appropriate roles of private and public in the raising of children and the degrees of competing authority which can be exercised by parents and public agencies over children, caused concern for Arendt who saw the loss of authority of parents and teachers as contributing significantly to what she described as "The Crisis in Education".

Child Advocacy Helps to Protect Natality from the Public and the Social Role of Schools

There are basically two sets of reasons that children need advocates: generally they do not have the developmental maturity to advocate for themselves; and, partly because of this inadequacy, political and bureaucratic institutions that develop and implement policy exclude children from that process (Margolis et al, 1996, p. 110). These reasons reflect the distinction between the child's need for the protection of private space, and the schools role as a social space, a bureaucratically controlled public institution. Within these two complementary reasons for child advocacy can be found five explanations as to why children need advocates:

- Children have little political power;
- Children are not major purchasers of goods and services
- Children are more physically and psychologically vulnerable than adults;

- Children are cognitively unsuited to make major decisions that affect their own lives;
- Children do not influence or control the services designed to assist them because they are excluded from the planning, implementation and evaluation of such services (adapted from Margolis & Salkind, p 110).

These notions are consistent with the Arendtian view of natality – in which children are born into this world and in need of care, nurturing and protection in a private sphere and also in need of an education, “...an introduction to the world and one another” (Levinson, 1997, p. 436), in a place where they can grow, learn and risk without fear and the full glare of publicity. Schools serve as these “in between” places. Schools are public and social spaces, but also have a private role to care for, protect and nurture children. When the social role interferes with the needs of the child, the child may need the intervention of an advocate.

Parents’ Private Role Can Make Them the Best Advocates for Their Children

Since parents are the ones who bring children into the world, they are, or at least in my view, should be, the most natural advocates for their children. Apart from the basic, primordial fact of natality as the continuation of the species and the resultant natural biological, emotional and psychological importance of child rearing, society has placed expectations upon the family unit as summarized by Kadushin (1974):

- To provide for the basic needs of the child for food, clothing, shelter, education, health care and social and recreational activities;

- To provide love, security, affection, and the emotional support necessary for the healthy emotional development of the child;
- To provide the necessary stimulation for intellectual, social, and moral development;
- To help socialize the child through teaching behaviour that is customary and acceptable to the social group and through disciplining of the child;
- To protect the child from physical, emotional or social harm;
- To maintain family interaction on a stable, satisfying basis so that an effort is made to meet significant needs of all members of the family and to resolve discomforts, frictions and dissatisfactions, and to meet emotional needs through accepting, affectionate responses;
- To provide a fixed place of abode, so as to legitimize the child's membership in the larger social group and provide a clearly defined identity for the child in the community. (Westman, 1979, pp. 107-108)

The expectations of society and the natural role of parenting, place parents in a unique position to advocate for their children. Margolis & Salkind (1996 pp. 111-112) provide several explanations as to why parents can be the best advocates for their children and I will summarize them here. Parents have a special knowledge of the idiosyncratic needs of their children and often are the source of such unique qualities. In the case of special needs children, parents are usually the most informed and aware. Parents have a genuine concern for their children and in their thoughts if not in their actions, act as advocates for them. The essentially private role of parents has, over time, become subject to public scrutiny to ensure that children are in fact afforded the kind of

nurturing and protection that is expected of parents. Despite the horrific reports of child abuse and instances of the dark side of hidden, private space, the vast majority of parents provide proper care for their children and do what they think is right. Generally, parents are committed to the future success of their children because they want to see them happy, successful and productive. Parents are the most salient models for their children and influence their development more powerfully than any other individuals. Parents are the legal “gatekeepers” for their children and control many of the things, which benefit them, such as provision of immunization, and enrollment in school. Parents have the legal custody and responsibility for their children in our society, unless these have been removed by society and given over to guardians of the child. Parents can occupy several advocacy roles for their children across different agencies and institutions, unlike professional advocates who generally service only specific area of need for the child i.e. teacher, doctor, lawyer. Finally, the parent, even where there is a single parent, is the most available and practical advocate for his or her own children.

Parenting and advocating are different roles. Parenting involves the nurturing, teaching, discipline, protection and transmission of social and cultural values as described by Arendt as being within the private role of the home and family. These activities are directed towards the child. With the emergence of the social and its bureaucratic and institutional nature the role of parents is directed at the institutions and bureaucracies that directly affect the welfare of the child. Despite an increasing societal awareness of the needs of children and greater emphasis on the rights of the child, personal advocacy is still often needed to ensure that the child receives equal opportunity and access to services. Of course, one cannot assume that all parents are “good” advocates any more

than we can assume that all parents are “good” parents. A variety of barriers can interfere with the opportunity for parents to become the most effective advocates for their children (Margolis & Salkind, 1996, pp. 12-13).

The Social Creates Barriers to Effective Parent Advocacy

The first, and perhaps most critical barrier for parents is ignorance of the basic rights and duties of parents. The right to speak out against bureaucracies without fear of retribution against themselves or their children is inherent not only in democratic notions of society but also in law. However, in my experience dealing with parents, the reason given by parents for not taking on an advocacy role for their children is a fear that “it will be taken out on my child”; and a fear of the child being labeled as “the problem child” with “problem parents”. Parents have the right under both legislation dealing with access to information and the school acts of each province to access information and records pertaining to their children. Also, the School Act of British Columbia contains provision for parents to appeal decisions made about their children. It is probably the barrier of ignorance of rights and duties and fear of retribution, above all others, which spawned the notion of parents acting as advocates for other parents, as in the BCCPAC Parent Advocacy model that will be outlined in detail in a later chapter.

Social and economic stresses on and within the family represent a barrier to effective advocacy for children by parents. Today’s families face a multitude of complexities ranging from family breakdown, separation and divorce to loss of employment and income. Parent’s lives are often fraught with uncertainties and filled with activity. Children may take second place to the need to earn money to provide for

basic needs. Parents may lack time to assume the advocacy role for their child in settling conflict with institutions and bureaucracies, such as schools and school officials.

Lack of resources may also hamper the parent in being an effective advocate for his or her child. Parents may feel inadequate in their educational, social or economic status to take on professionals in the school system. Low-income families may be less likely to have access to information and professional resources to assist them in taking on advocacy for their child's needs in the school system. Single parents may lack not only the resources but also the time and moral support of a partner to sustain the effort that may be required to effectively advocate on behalf of a child.

Finally, parents may just not have the psychological makeup that is necessary to effectively confront the authority figures that control many of the activities in which their children are involved. The rise of the social sphere, and specifically in schools, as outlined in Chapter Two (pp. 22-28) of this paper silences many parents, discounting or disallowing their voice. Professionalism and paternalism are characteristics of the authoritarian structures of many institutions, including public schools. The use of jargon, officialdom, rules and regulations combine to intimidate some parents into passivity in the face of conflict. For some, perhaps most parents the memories of school and the authority of the teacher and principal tend to return when entering a school setting. Accessibility to the people within the system can also cause a barrier to those parents without the determination and strength to insist on access. Conflicting hours of work, location and lack of transportation, user-unfriendly technology (voice mail for example) can inhibit even the more aggressive parent advocate. Schools are social institutions. Parent advocacy is, in my view, one of those measures which "we need to seek out and

cultivate...that politicize people and encourage their participation in the active shaping of their shared public life..." (Pitkin, 1998, p. 260).

The Social in Schools

Schools are one of the three basic institutions vital to children (Bower, 1972, p. 556-565). The first is, of course, the family that brings the child into the world and protects it from the world, while preparing it to assume its place as an adult in the world. The second basic institution, according to Bower, is the peer group, through which the child learns to form social relationships, which will help it enter the pluralistic world of the public sphere. The third institution is the school, which Bower describes as a prescribed and unique society in itself. Schools have been charged with the responsibility of "...creating socially efficient citizens and...enhancing self-fulfillment" (Westman, 1979, p. 238). For children, school is a place between the privacy of the home and the public space of the world. However, as Westman points out, the educational system is also a huge industry "...dominated as much by the management of its physical plant and children, as by its educational mission" (p. 238). This description underlines the notion of school as part of the social. Child advocacy is needed to ensure that the unique individual differences amongst children are recognized and supported in a system that tends towards homogeneity. A number of specific issues that stem from the social and bureaucratic role of schools require the vigilance of child advocates. These include dealing with individual differences, classification procedures, record keeping, ability grouping, values, and behavioural control (p. 217) all of which tend to 'normalize'

children and make them conform with the norms of “mass society” (Arendt, 1958, pp. 40-41).

Preserving Natality and Protecting Plurality

The nature and organization of schools, where large numbers of children are grouped together for classroom instruction, tends to blur the unique and individual differences amongst children. Arendt’s notion of natality means the birth of each unique child into the world offers faith and hope for new relationships, new boundaries, and new horizons. Protecting the newness and allowing it to grow makes it possible for renewal of the world. Individual differences cover a multitude of areas including ones which have been known to educators for many decades such as knowledge prior to entering school, readiness for learning, level of physical and psychological development, gender, ethnicity, social and economic background (Westman, 1979, p. 218). More recently, research has established other differences that recognize each student’s individual learning style, thinking pattern, creative expression, and temperament. Such theories as Gardner’s “multiple intelligences” (Gardner, 1983, 1993, 1996) and increasing research knowledge associated with brain growth and development (Epstein, 1978; Caine & Caine, 1991) have reinforced the notion that each child has unique characteristics and learning styles and that their education needs to be arranged to recognize these. In school and at home children prepare to enter the world in the process of becoming and through a second natality enter the world to participate with others in speech and action. It is the

differences that each individual brings to plurality that allow for action in the public sphere to constantly renew the world.

Parents may need to advocate for their child with the school and or classroom teacher to ensure that their child's uniqueness is not overlooked in the classroom. This preservation of natality, the opportunity for the child to be born again into the world, is essential given the dominant social nature of the school. There has been a tendency in schools to measure differences and assign positive and negative value to them, using them for placement in school, classroom, and special groupings. Differences may also lead to difficulties in peer group relations, with those who are perceived as "different" suffering isolation or scapegoating by their peers (Westman, p. 223). Child advocates need to press for positive recognition of individual differences and ways to adapt the educational experience to enhance the value of schooling for all (p. 223). These differences are most noticeable when children are classified as being "special needs". These needs may represent deficiencies in physical and mental ability or may be in the form of "giftedness" in one or more specific areas. Parents of special needs children may need to overcome their own feelings of guilt or fear of perception of others, as they advocate for resources to meet their own child's special needs.

Children have been and are subject to classification by schools and their peer groups (Westman, p 223). Since schools deal with large numbers of children on a daily basis, they have tended over time to associate children with similar abilities and interests. "Even Plato in his *Republic* sorted out children to become philosophers, warriors, or artisans according to whether they possessed gold, silver, or lead talents of mind" (p.223). The most significant role for parents in child advocacy has been that of dealing

with children with special needs. Much of the advocacy literature focuses on issues of special needs children and their parents. Since schooling is dependent upon limited financial and human resources, the distribution of those resources is of great significance, especially for special needs, where costs and the need for individual attention is high.

Plurality, as conceptualized by Arendt has the two-fold character of quality and distinction. Both aspects need to be nurtured in home and school to ensure that children are prepared to enter the world and to participate in speech and action with others. Child advocates see equity as paramount in dealing with children in schools and the distribution of resources (Margolis & Salkind, 1996). "Equity refers to the principle of fairness or justice, ...there are two aspects of equity relevant to advocates' activities" (p. 107).

Horizontal equity refers to the equal treatment of equals – each child is entitled to the same access to education and educational resources. Vertical equity, on the other hand, refers to the unequal treatment of unequals – resources are differentially allocated to those with greater or lesser need. Vertical equity is the basis for the funding of special needs children in the school system and it has led across North America to a detailed and technical classification of special needs and significant labeling of children to ensure that they receive targeted funding according to their specific label. Parents advocate for their child to ensure that they maximize access to the resources available for their child. In addition, misclassification or misdiagnosis requires vigilance on the part of the parent advocate to be aware of the resources available and the intervention strategies to make certain that their child is treated equitably. Protecting natality and plurality is an important role for the parents and the school. Parent advocates may be in the best

position to ensure that their children are protected both in their uniqueness and their right to be human.

Issues of integration and segregation have been problematic for schools over the decades. Whether it was racial segregation (and desegregation) in the 1960s or special needs integration in the 1980s and 1990s, conflicting research and emotions have plagued the school system. In a similar vein, attempts to separate children into vocational, technical and academic groupings and sometimes into separate schools has raised conflicting educational and political debate (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Robertson, 1998). Parents may advocate for their child's placement in a certain setting, dependent upon their own experiences, social or economic standing, or political beliefs as well as their concern to provide the best available opportunities for their child so that they can participate in the plurality of the world. Arendt made clear in her writings on school integration in the Southern United States that she believed parents had the right to choose which school their child attended while the state determined the curriculum at the school (Chapter Three, p. 73).

Ability grouping has also been a matter of pedagogical debate over the decades. Testing and evaluation of children in order to group them according to their apparent intelligence or ability in some academic sphere has been prevalent in education and schools over the centuries. Again, parents have acted as advocates for their children in discussions about their child's perceived abilities and placement in classrooms and schools. While the current practices in Canadian schools lean towards heterogeneous grouping of students, with mixed abilities in classrooms, parents may have concerns about streaming within classrooms and, particularly in high schools, by course selection

and assignment. Such practices may serve to limit a child's ability to fully participate in society.

Schools need to keep records. Demographic data such as age, sex, home address, parent or guardian status and so on are essential for identification and certification purposes. Records of attendance and grade placement are needed to meet requirements under the School Act and regulations. Schools and teachers also keep records of achievement in tests, class work, behaviour and various other activities for purposes of reporting to parents on student progress. Record keeping can be problematic. Issues of privacy – ensuring that only required information is recorded and kept only for as long as it is needed, and confidentiality – ensuring that only those who have need and a right to know can have access to information, and due process – giving access to records to those who have a right to see them and are affected by them., need to be addressed. The advent of computerized record keeping, video surveillance and cellular phone and Internet communication have added to the problems of privacy, confidentiality and due process. Parents need to be informed and prepared to advocate on behalf of their child's rights to protection from invasions of their personal privacy. Children need to be protected from the public and the social so that they can grow undisturbed without the glare of publicity as they prepare to move into plurality.

While parents and families share the major responsibility for passing on values to their children, schools cannot avoid participation in that important role by the very nature of a child's association with role models and the basic purpose of the school to prepare the young for entry into the public world. Values education and the role of religion in schools has been a significant source of debate over the centuries. A major source of

conflict is inherent in the relationship between the privacy of the home and family and its values, ethics, and morals and the school and the role of teachers to guide the development of children so that they can find their place in society. Family life education and values education can be lightning rods for those parents who believe that it is their right and responsibility to inculcate their own beliefs and standards in their children. Schools, however, have a responsibility to the children and the larger society to ensure that children have the knowledge, skills, values, morals and ethical behaviours to succeed in a larger society, a more public world. These areas of conflict can be the source of many child advocacy situations for parents. The perceived values of society as a whole can easily be in conflict with the values of a community, ethnic or religious minority, or, indeed an individual family. Advocacy becomes extremely difficult when values conflict. However, it is important to protect the notions of plurality, so essential to participation on the public realm. When all are expected to be the same and hold the same view the result can be a totalitarian regime either through loss of individual identity or a lack of will to protect individual differences.

Learning to Participate in the Public World

Perhaps one of the lasting memories for all of us of our days in school is the issue of discipline, behaviour and control. The very nature of schools, where large numbers of students gather under the supervision and control of a relatively small number of adults, lends them to the development of rules and regulations governing behaviour within the group to ensure that life continues in an orderly, controlled and predictable fashion. Along with rules and regulations come methods of discipline and sanction for

transgressions. These are not only essential to keep the school operating in an orderly manner, but also to prepare the children for their entry into the world where they need to live together with others. As parents have become more aware of their rights and their children's rights, they have taken a more active role in intervention and advocacy for their children in situations of conflict and discipline. This area of conflict is one of the most significant in the rise of child advocacy and the protection of children. Arendt saw it as crucial for children to be fully prepared to enter the world and participate with others in plurality which needs common speech and language, understanding and acceptance of others including a sense of justice. To advocate for children in the school system engulfed by the social sphere, to ensure they develop as fully as possible and enter the world as prepared as possible, an advocate needs many skills.

Child Advocates Need Skills to Combat the Social in Schools

An effective child advocate dealing with the public school system must be able to define the issue, find the facts in a situation, plan strategies, develop relationships with others affected, negotiate with officials or others involved, and determine if the advocacy has achieved the desired outcome (Fernandez, 1980).

One of the most difficult tasks for parents before they advocate for their child within the school system is defining exactly what the problem or issue is, with whom, and what should be done about it. This may not be an easy task given the bureaucratic nature of school. Parents' approach will be influenced by previous experiences with schooling; relationships with their own parents and family attitudes towards schools and teachers; experiences with the current school and teacher, and many other factors specific

to their own situation. Arendt's conception of the social, according to Pitkin (Chapter Two, p. 25) is that of a mass or "blob" which will gobble up and destroy us. However, Pitkin sees hope in Arendt's view, and claims that we can overcome the social by finding new ways to participate. Parent advocacy, I believe, is one of those ways.

Arendt saw participation in the public as about using speech with others to bring about action for the common good. Getting and using information is the basis of action. Fact-finding is a must. Asking questions is the first step. To understand and work with the bureaucracy of the school parents need to find answers to the following questions:

Who controls decision-making?

What is the formal power structure?

What is the informal power structure?

Who controls the budget or who sets priorities for use of money?

How does the political system impact upon the system?

What rights do children have within the system?

What rights do parents have?

What rights do employees have?

What rights do employers and policymakers have?

What are the channels for complaints and grievances? (Adapted from Fernandez, p. 74).

In addition to the above, advocates should research varied relevant sources (school publications, local newspaper articles, public records etc.), talk to others who might have information relevant to the issue, and visit to gain first hand observations of

the situation – where appropriate. Developing a “web of relationships” is an important step in preparing to participate.

Arendt saw the loss of distinction between the private and the public and the emergence of the social as exceedingly problematic for schools and the education of children. Children get caught up in this social space where needs of others and the institution itself become more important than the needs of the child. If a problem arises at the school involving a child, the advocate’s next step is to identify an effective strategy aimed at resolving the issue. This often means dealing with the bureaucracy of the school and system where parents are often at a disadvantage because of lack of information and understanding. Schools often do not provide a safe space or opportunity for parents to be heard. They can also use their power and institutional mechanisms to prevent access or the articulation of an issue. Steps in developing a strategy might include identifying the problem(s), selecting one specific problem to address, and setting an action goal. Advocates should keep the following in mind so that they can approach the school on a somewhat equal basis:

1. Know your facts. Be accurate. Know Who? What? Where? When? And Why?
 2. Know the rights of the child, the parent, or other parties in the case. Seek advice from others, including a lawyer if necessary.
 3. Know the policy and or procedures that relate to the problem.
 4. Keep accurate notes and dates of everything.
 5. Do not go alone (except in unusual circumstances) to a meeting with officials.
- Take the child and a support person with you.

6. Keep to the point in meeting officials. Be firm but not antagonistic. Try to steer clear of personalities.
7. Follow channels. Don't go over a person's head until you have seen him/her about the problem.
8. If appropriate send a letter to indicate your understanding of what took place at a meeting with officials (Adapted from Fernandez, p. 83).

These steps are essential to bring balance and some degree of equality to any discussion from which the advocate hopes for action. They are part of combating the negative effects of the social and restoring the private role of parents to guide their children's education.

It is very difficult for a parent to act as an advocate for his or her own child alone. Developing a support system is an important ingredient to successful advocacy. Such relationships can be developed with other parents who find themselves in a similar situation. Parents need what Arendt described as a web of relationships in order that they may, through speech and action bring about change. One place to form such relationships is through the local school parent advisory council. In the next chapter I use a specific example of parent advocacy that has evolved through District Parent Advisory Council and the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils.

Schools are powerful bureaucracies that have developed a world of their own with policies, rules, hierarchies and the other trappings that Arendt describes as characteristic of the emergence of a social sphere. In order to interact with this social sphere an advocate needs to develop a variety of skills. An essential skill for an advocate is the ability to negotiate with people in positions of power within the system. Some of these

officials will be supportive and move immediately to assist in resolution to the problem(s) raised. However, there will also be those officials who see an advocate as a negative force, with potential to disrupt the status quo. Arendt characterized institutions in the social sphere as self-perpetuating, protecting the status quo and the various players within the established bureaucracy develop mechanisms to ensure that protection. Often, these officials will respond to the advocate with excuses for inaction to protect “the system”. Fernandez has listed some of the common responses given by school officials to parents when bringing forward a concern:

- We’re the experts. “We know best and must make these decisions. You do not understand all the complex issues involved.” (Privileging members of the bureaucracy over “outsiders”)
- Denial of the problem. “That’s not a real problem. Do you have any proof?” (Setting the agenda and denying others participation in discussion)
- The exception. “The examples you cite are exceptions. It may be happening to just a few children; it certainly isn’t widespread.” (Privileging the majority and denying the uniqueness of the individual)
- Blaming the victim. “With this type of child, we really can’t do that much.” (Excluding exceptions from the uniform mass)
- Blaming the parents. “We know it’s a problem, but those parents don’t seem to care about their own children.” (Placing responsibility in the private sphere)

- Delaying. “Yes, I know the problem exists, but we need time to figure out the best thing to do.” (Delaying a decision and denying participation in the solution)
- Passing the buck. “Yes, that is a problem, but I can’t do anything because my hands are tied (by policy, contracts, higher officials in the administration, the computer system) (Using the bureaucracy to deny access).
- An unimportant problem. “Yes, it may be a problem, but there are so many more pressing problems at this agency or institution.” (Privileging the needs of the organization over the needs of the individual)
- We’re not so bad. “Yes, it’s a problem in many places, but we’re not doing any worse than others.” (Normalizing situations to avoid resolving them)
- Further study. “This problem needs further study and research before we can act wisely.” (Justice delayed is justice denied)
- No money. “Yes, that’s needed but we are short of funds and are facing budget cuts already.” (Adapted from Fernandez, pp. 99-101).

These are somewhat familiar examples of arguments used by bureaucrats in the production/consumption economy and the social sphere to deny participation in discussion and resolution of a situation. In order to counter and deal with these bureaucratic responses, advocates need to be prepared. to avoid being sidetracked and put off from their planned course of action.

I have attempted to outline in some detail the role of parents as advocates for their children in schools. I have viewed the problems associated with advocating for children, and, indeed the need for advocacy, using the Arendtian conception of the distinction between the public and private role and the rise of the social. In learning to deal with this social sphere, the bureaucracy of the public school system, there are some pitfalls that parents should be aware of – whether acting alone, as part of a parent group, or in concert with professionals within or outside the school system. “There is a fine line between trust and cooperation on the one hand and co-optation on the other” (Friesen & Huff, 1990, p. 34). Professionals, particularly, may attempt to co-opt the parent or the parent agenda, either to weaken or neutralize the advocacy efforts of parents or because of a lack of understanding of issues from the perspective of parents and families. Co-optation can occur when parents are reluctant to disagree with professionals, either because parents perceive officials as having more expertise or power, especially when those officials have been friendly and cooperative. Professionals can co-opt the parents’ agenda by keeping records at meetings and preparing reports with little or no input from the parents. Finally, professionals can take over the parents’ agenda and then reorganize the priorities within it. The problem of co-optation can be more serious when parents and parent organizations are dependent upon the system for funding and other resources (space, printing, communication tools) (p. 35). This notion of co-optation is consistent with Arendt’s view of the social and its all-encompassing and pervasive consumption of both the private and public spheres. Pitkin’s description of Arendt’s notion as “the attack of the blob” captures, I believe, the essence of the danger for parents/advocates of being absorbed into the bureaucracy as part of the social.

The social/bureaucratic nature of public schools can be seen as an insurmountable problem that may overwhelm parents. Parents may find it difficult to access information, either because they do not know about its existence or because it is in a form which they may find hard to retrieve (computer based data, minutes of in-camera meetings etc.) The information may be contained in complex documents such as legislation, detailed budget sheets or financial statements. It may be presented in language only accessible to professionals because of the use of jargon or technical language. Finally, there may be so much material that it is virtually impossible for the layperson to read and analyze it to the point of comprehension without assistance from a summary document (Friesen & Huff, p. 35). However, I believe that a skilled advocate can circumvent these barriers to communication by bringing the discussion back to the individual and private issues which parents need to articulate to the school by understanding the conception of school as a social institution without becoming completely absorbed into the social sphere.

Those who are employed within the system may have unreasonable expectations of what a parent can accomplish in the advocacy role. Often, those in the system overlook the fact that parents are in a volunteer capacity, having their own lives and jobs to attend to in addition to advocating for children. Issues include the scheduling of meetings at times when parents cannot attend, expecting parents to take time off work without reimbursement, and presuming that parents can bear the costs of transportation and childcare (Friesen & Huff, p.35). These factors may make it difficult for parents to sustain their advocacy role. Again, these are the rules established by the system in its social role to protect the institution and its members. However, parents, in their private role as guardians and guides of their children have a responsibility and, a right to be

heard. The public school system is indeed intended to be a construction of the public sphere to provide a space for the preparation for the young to enter the public sphere and participate in discussion and action. Parent advocacy may be one way of restoring the private role of parents while reinforcing the notion that schools are a “public good” and not the exclusive domain of the bureaucracy or workers in the social sphere.

Lack of time to spend in the advocacy role is one of the more obvious pitfalls facing parents, either as advocates for their own children or working in an advocacy role for other parents. Imposed timelines, suitable to the school, may be used as a way of blocking parents from continuing to advocate for their child. Conflicting or competing needs may cause undue strain on the advocate, forcing them to make choices between issues or cases (p. 35).

Child advocacy is an emerging issue. While there are numerous examples across North America devoted to advocacy on behalf of children – they tend to be of organizations, political committees, caucuses, commissions, study groups or appointed professionals (Margolis & Salkind, 1996, p. 218). The role of parents as individual advocates for their children has remained largely unexplored (p. 218). Placing the role of parent advocates into the debate about the restoration of notions of public and private to counter the pervasive role of the social in our public schools is, I believe, unique to our understanding of the tensions between parents and schools. In the next chapter I explore the emerging role of parents as advocates for parents in the BCCPAC Parent Advocacy Project as one model of how parent advocacy might be taking on a previously unintended role of clarifying private and public roles of various players in the public school system.

Chapter Six

The British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils Parent Advocacy Project

This chapter is a case study of child advocacy in schools and illustrates the tension between the private role of parents to guide their children's education, the public role of schools to prepare children to enter the world, and the confusion brought about by the blurring of these distinctions by the rise of the social and its influence upon the school system. The British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) Parent Advocacy Project began in 1994 as a result of Ministry of Education funding which included a pilot project in School District No. 69 (Qualicum). A small group of parents in this District had discussed their concerns about dealing with the schools and school system over a period of time. These conversations were often held in school parking lots or over coffee. Parents expressed feelings of helplessness as they struggled to deal with issues affecting their children's education. Some of these issues dealt with specific classrooms and teachers. Parents felt the teacher or principal at the school was not hearing their concerns.

A District policy on "Public Complaints" directed parents to take their problems to the classroom teacher. Failing satisfactory resolution, they could go on to meet with the principal, then the superintendent and finally, the Board of Trustees. While this process would sometimes lead to resolution, there were occasions where a teacher and parent disagreed on process or procedure and conflict arose. Parents emotionally

involved with their child's issue, found it difficult to challenge the teachers, equipped with professional jargon and supported by the weight of the school system and their union. Gradually, parent discontent surrounding a teacher would become the subject of the parking lot or coffee group conversations. During this time, a group of parents, involved in the local parent organization, discussed the possibility of working together in support of each other to deal with some of these unresolved issues

One such conversation led to my first formal involvement as superintendent with what was to become the advocacy project. Sally was in Mrs. Smith's third grade class (not their real names). Frequently, Sally would come home upset and crying. She complained that the work was too hard, she didn't understand and that Mrs. Smith ignored her requests for help. Often Sally complained she was punished for talking when it was really other classmates who spoke out of turn. Sometimes Sally's Mom let her stay at home when she woke up complaining of stomach pains. For her part, Mrs. Smith wrote on Sally's report card that she was indolent, that she did not pay attention and that she distracted others from their work. Sally's mother visited Mrs. Smith in her classroom. While Mrs. Smith sat at her desk, Sally's mother sat on a primary classroom chair, feeling ridiculous and intimidated. Mrs. Smith quickly reviewed Sally's record of missing marks, failed tests, and poor attendance. However, she told Sally's mother that the girl could do better and only needed to "apply herself to her work." Sally's mother could not hold back her tears.

Sally's mother was not satisfied that Mrs. Smith was doing her best for Sally. She felt uncomfortable talking to Mrs. Smith. She didn't know how to express her concern for her unhappy child or to hold back the tears, which welled up. She had to leave the

meeting without a resolution to her concerns. It seemed that Sally was wrong and Mrs. Smith was right. Later, while waiting in the parking lot to pick Sally up from school, Sally's mother fell into conversation with a neighbour, also waiting for the school day to end. She told of her meeting with Mrs. Smith, her concern for Sally's education, health and well being. Her neighbour empathized and shared her view that Mrs. Smith was unsuited to working with children in grade three, disorganized and, perhaps, incompetent as a teacher. Sally's mother made up her mind to see the principal.

Sally's mother called the school to speak with the principal. She explained her concerns about Mrs. Smith and asked to visit with the principal. A date and time were agreed. Before hanging up the principal said, "Of course, Mrs. Smith and her union representative will attend our meeting since you are making a serious complaint against Mrs. Smith." Sally's mother froze. How could she attend such a meeting and maintain her composure? Surely she would break down again, embarrassed and unsure of how to proceed. Who could she turn to? She attended a Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meeting for the first time and met Sylvia, the PAC chair for Sally's school. During the coffee break she asked Sylvia what she should do about the impending meeting with the principal, Mrs. Smith and the union representative. Sylvia asked about her concerns, whether she had been to meet alone with the teacher and if she had written down the various incidents about which Sally had complained. Finally, Sylvia offered to attend the meeting with her as her "advocate".

When the day of the meeting arrived, Sally's mother, accompanied by Sylvia entered the principal's office to find Mrs. Smith and the Teachers' Union president already in the office with the principal. Sally's mother introduced Sylvia. The meeting

was tense. The union president took notes and asked questions while Sylvia did the same on behalf of Sally's mother. The principal mediated the discussion. Finally, a plan was drafted, a time line established and a date for the next meeting set.

As Superintendent I received a lengthy letter from the union president a few days later. The union had grave concerns that a precedent was being established. There was no provision in the School Act for a parent to join another parent at a meeting. What about confidentiality and the Union Code of Ethics? Two parents attending the meeting together had intimidated Mrs. Smith. It had to stop! After seeking legal counsel, I responded to the union's concerns. I could not find anything in the School Act, which prohibited a parent inviting anyone else to a meeting. What if they chose to bring legal counsel? What if language was a barrier would the union object to a translator attending such a meeting? How did the union think Sally's mother felt being faced by the principal, union president and Mrs. Smith in the principal's office? I indicated that the district would support a parent's right to have an advocate attend a meeting with them. Thus, the concept of parents as advocates for other parents was born.

Although the characters in this incident are fictional, the basic ingredients are real. Two parents from the District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) began meeting with me and the various other interested groups to discuss the role of parents as advocates within the school system. These parents had been discussing for some time prior to our meetings the very issues of how parents could deal with situations such as the one presented by Sally's concern about Mrs. Smith and the problems associated in dealing with the school and the school system. Guidance was sought from the Ombudsman's office and the provincial child advocate. Soon the two parents were drafting guidelines and procedures

and the advocacy project began to take shape. Discussions were held with the BCCPAC and a grant application was made to the Ministry of Education. Armed with substantial provincial funding, BCCPAC and our district DPAC undertook the task of formalizing the advocacy role of parents.

Today there are parent advocacy projects in various stages of development in 38 of the 50 school districts throughout BC and information sessions and workshops have been held in other provinces. Manitoba and Quebec have started their own projects. Presentations have been made via video conferencing across Canada and at a Canadian Home and School meeting in Ottawa. There is a toll free number for parents to call and in 2000 there were 2385 contacts to the project. Policies and procedures are in place as well as ethical guidelines for parent volunteer advocates. The BCCPAC Advocacy Project has extended its vision from case advocacy to include student self advocacy, as well as encouraging PACs and DPACs to become involved in class advocacy to bring about changes in school district policies, processes, and program delivery. The parents who developed and implemented the Advocacy Project have met considerable opposition along the way. They claim to have made everyone uncomfortable, including parents themselves – change is a difficult process, but some pain along the way is often needed to bring about change in a static system. They have persevered and become recognized as credible "experts" in a previously uncharted field of parent volunteerism. After seven years of growth and development, the BCCPAC Advocacy Project is firmly established in B.C. and is being considered by parent in some other provinces.

Creating Private Space

Most parents have little knowledge of or experience with the world of school other than their own memories of school days past. The opportunities to become familiar with the system are few, given that many parents are working. Other parents do not feel adequately prepared to take on the school system, or just do not know where to begin. The public school system, although a product of the public sphere, has become a social space, a bureaucracy where it has become increasingly difficult to establish a private space to have discussions about what is right and good about education and how the needs of children can be met in this space between the private space of the home and the public world. Parent advocates, as described in the previous chapter can develop the knowledge and skills to help address the relationships between these private and public goods. The BCCPAC Advocacy Project has made use of the literature and experiences of advocacy as I have outlined in the preceding chapter.

The trained, volunteer advocate will have detailed knowledge and experience with the school system, understanding its private, public and social nature, and will be in a position to help the parent find his or her way through the policies, procedures, regulations, structures and jargon of a formal conference. The Advocacy Project has designed a self-help guide for parents "Speaking Up! A parent guide to advocating in public schools" (BCCPAC 1999). (The very title of this guide suggests the need to create space for the parent's voice to be heard.) This guide provides parents with

- An outline of parents' rights and responsibilities
- A guide to working through a problem

- An approach to dealing with parents' fears
- Information on the BC school system
- Places to go for more help

Central to the work of the Advocacy Project and providing a base for understanding the rights of children in schools is the "Fair Schools Report" issued by the Office of the BC Ombudsman in May 1995. (The title of this document suggests issues of justice and other characteristics of the public sphere and the balance essential to maintaining the private and public functions of schools). It outlines the following rights of children in BC schools:

- All children and youth have the right to be valued and to be treated with respect and dignity.
- All children and youth have the right to a fair and equitable education.
- All children and youth have the right to receive appropriate advocacy supports.
- All children and youth have the right to participate in decisions that affect them; to express their views and to have them carefully considered.
- All children and youth have the right to the benefit of the fundamental human rights provided in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- All children and youth have the right to a safe physical and emotional environment.
- All children and youth have the right to receive appropriate programs from appropriately trained and properly motivated staff.
- All children and youth should have the opportunity to access publicly funded services in their home communities or as close to their homes as possible.

A self-help guide to solving problems and dealing with the bureaucracy of the school system suggests parents note such details as:

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- What difficulties have this situation caused me/my child?
- What policies, laws, etc. apply to my situation?
- What are my rights and responsibilities?
- What are the system's rights and responsibilities?
- Make sure your concerns are based on what you know to be true from your experience or your child's experience.

The guide recommends that detailed notes be kept which include:

- Who you talked to.
- When you talked with them.
- How? Letter, telephone, fax, etc.
- What they said they would do for your child.
- Who will do it?
- When and how they will let you know what action has been taken
- What you said you will do.
- Do you need to call them back?

Finally, the guide considers resolutions and asks the parent to list some of their ideas for solving the problem so that they are adequately prepared to participate in the discourse essential to understanding and resolving their issue focusing on the essential questions:

- What will best meet my child's needs?

- Will I know agreements are upheld?
- Who will be responsible?
- When will the action plan be started?
- Who should I talk to if I have further concerns?

Using the ideas formalized in this guide, parents can gain some degree of balance in their relationship and conversation with the teacher and the school. By understanding the system and the people in it, by gathering data about their concern, and by defining their issue and its resolution, parents are better equipped. In dealing with parents' problems, in the privacy of a conversation with the teacher, confidentiality is protected. Others do not need to be drawn into the situation if resolution can be achieved at this stage. The process and procedure developed by the Advocacy Project helps protect the private sphere of the family and the relationships between Sally and her mother, Sally and Mrs. Smith, and between Sally's mother and Mrs. Smith. Maintaining this privacy is important to protect Sally from the glare of public interest, which could damage her growth and development as an individual. If or when the matter becomes part of the public sphere, Sally's mother is better prepared to deal with the formality and bureaucracy of the school and school system and to continue to protect Sally from further harm.

Moving from Private to Public/Social Space: Problems of Confidentiality.

In the scenario of Sally's mother and teacher we can see at play the tension between the private role of the family to guide the education of the child and the role of the teacher to introduce the child to the world. The initial contacts between Sally's mother and Mrs. Smith are somewhat private; however, there is clearly a power

imbalance in their meeting and conversation. The physical setting of the classroom, the tiny chair, the professional jargon and the intimation that somehow Sally and her mother needed to change to improve the situation did not leave Sally's mother feeling like an equal in the conversation about Sally and her education. Sally's mother was feeling the effects of the social sphere, a loss of equality, despite being in what seemed like a private conversation between adults.

This power imbalance becomes exaggerated when the conversation moves to the principal's office and is joined by the president of Mrs. Smith's union. In this setting we are no longer concerned solely with the interaction between Sally and Mrs. Smith in the somewhat private space of the classroom. Now the more formal constraints of the law, regulations, policies, procedures, contracts, and professional autonomy enter into the discussion. Not only is the concern for Sally's education under discussion, but also Mrs. Smith's rights as a teacher and union member. The principal's role becomes one of management representative, responsible for both the interests of Sally and her mother but also for Mrs. Smith and the district's responsibilities under the School Act, and to its collective agreement with its teachers' union.

At this stage there is some loss of privacy. Others become involved in the private role of the parent and family. Some degree of confidentiality is lost, as the principal and the union president become active participants in the discussion. Sylvia, a volunteer parent, acting in an advocacy role, has also become familiar with the details of Sally's situation. Unlike the teacher, principal and union president, the confidentiality provisions of the School Act, College of Teachers or the Union Code of Ethics do not govern Sylvia. The BCCPAC Parent Advocacy Project has developed guidelines for ethical behaviour of

advocates (Code of Ethics for Advocates appointed under the BCCPAC Advocacy Project, 1997), but there is no statutory or other enforcement provision. Only the bonds of trust and empathy between parents protect the privacy of the child and the parent once an advocate becomes intimately involved in assisting the parent with resolution to his or her concern. The scenario painted here is reflective of the social nature of schools, steeped in bureaucracy, no longer a place between the private and the public, but having a life of its own.

With compulsory school attendance has come the imposition of the conformity necessary to administer these institutions. Somewhat reminiscent of the factory model, schools have been structured around rules, timetables, courses and grades. Measurement is about standards and norms, where each child is expected to attain a predetermined level in various subjects over a defined period of time. Behaviour is controlled through discipline based upon authority. Students are expected to conform and produce according to defined outcomes and prescribed codes of conduct. The organization of schools is not so much a product of the public sphere – the result of a dialogue amongst equals about the nature of education, as it is a way to organize a bureaucracy, the social sphere which caused Arendt so much anguish.

Parents, then, are caught in this middle ground, between their private lives of home and family and the public necessity of raising their children to live as active participants in the public or political sphere. They, of course, see their child, as an individual with unique and special needs to be nurtured and developed. So, in most cases, does the teacher. However, the school system, once representative of the public sphere, but now mostly absorbed into the social, must adopt and inculcate the norms of

the larger society. Policies, procedures, rules and regulations guide the teacher in dealing with the children. When these two come into conflict, where the family beliefs and values and those of the society, represented in the school, clash, parents are often unable to deal with both the personal emotion and the public bureaucracy. Parents, children and teachers have lost much of the private space in which they could prepare for the eventual emergence of the young into the public sphere. This makes it very difficult for parents to deal with the school system regarding concerns about their child's education. The schools have also changed; become part of the social, concerned with protecting the status quo and homogenizing the children in their care to fit into a conforming, production/consumption economy. I believe parents can help parents cope with the system while defending the rights of the child.

Class Advocacy Moves the Role of Parents from the Private to the Public-Social Sphere

Over the past seven years, dealing with thousands of contacts each year from parents all over the province, the two provincial advocates (the two original advocates from my own school district) have been able to identify a wide range of issues which affect many children and their parents. Amongst these are: administrative fairness (due process, student rights and issues dealing with public complaints policies); discipline up to and including student suspension; curriculum issues; services to special needs students; student educational plans (a provincial requirement in B.C.); classroom placement, student peer harassment; violence; charges of harassment against parents (B.C. teachers

have the protection of a provincial collective agreement on harassment); inappropriate treatment of students by staff; and many more.

The advocates have many individual stories or cases which, when brought together, form the basis for class advocacy. Here, PAC or DPAC or BCCPAC tackle the issue from a systemic perspective, attempting to bring about change in policy or procedure at either the political or administrative level. One such area, which is both a local school district issue and a provincial issue, is that of public complaints and how various policies and contracts have been created to deal with them. This has been a long-standing area of tension between parents and teachers. In my own district, both the advocates and DPAC have been involved in questioning the policy on parental complaints (School District No. 69 (Qualicum) Policy No. 6240 Public complaints concerning professional staff.) The preamble to the complaints policy reads as follows:

Constructive criticism of schools and teachers is welcome when it is motivated by a sincere desire to improve the quality of educational program.

The Board places trust in its teachers and desires to support their actions in such a manner that teachers are free from unnecessary, spiteful, derogatory, or unwarranted criticism and complaints.

The past president of DPAC, said that parents were particularly put off by the second statement:

“When people came to me with a complaint, and I gave them a copy of the complaints policy, the reaction was always the same. The policy is so negative, and so defensive it was clear that they weren’t going to get anywhere with their concern, so why bother? ...It was pretty clear to parents whose side the Board

would be on in a complaint issue” (R. Roy, Past President, DPAC, personal communication, April, 2001).

The policy goes on to define a complaint as meaning “...oral or written criticism of a teacher by a student, parent, or citizen which implies a need for resolution”. Regulations call for a 3-step process starting with reference of the complaint to the teacher involved, then to the principal and then to the superintendent. Each step has limited timelines and follows a process similar to that of union grievance procedures and includes provision for the participation of the teacher’s union representative at all meetings after the initial meeting with the teacher.

The Public Complaints Policy is referenced in Article E 8 of the Transitional Collective Agreement between School District 69 (Qualicum) and the Mount Arrowsmith Teachers’ Association (1996-1998):

8.1 The Board recognizes the benefit of a policy on public complaints and the interest of members of the Association in the outcome of such complaints. The Board agrees to consult with the Association prior to amending the existing policy on Public Complaints and will not amend such policy without agreement during the term of this Agreement.

8.2 No decision of the Board with respect to the application of this policy shall abrogate any right, benefit or process contained in the Agreement, or deprive the employee of any right, benefit or process otherwise provided by law.

Parents saw this as a “private” deal between the teachers and the Board that excluded students and parents from participation.

In January 2000 the teachers' association brought forward a proposed amendment to the Public Complaints Policy, requesting a statement that electronic mail would not be considered valid written notice of a complaint. Parents saw this as their opportunity to become involved in changes to the policy and through their representative on the District's Educational Advisory Council (EAC) requested that the Board establish a partners' committee to study and make recommendations for revisions to the policy. The Board directed EAC to establish such a committee with members from the Principals and Vice-Principals Association (QDPVPA), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), DPAC, and the Mount Arrowsmith Teachers' Association (MATA). The Interim Superintendent (I was on medical leave from the District at the time), the Secretary-Treasurer and a trustee were also appointed to the committee. DPAC chose to ask one of the BCCPAC Advocacy project workers to assist them with the work on this committee.

After many meetings and drafts of potential policies, a level of consensus was reached amongst the partners on the committee after about 14 months. In essence, a new policy and new approach has been designed to deal with concerns. The proposed revised policy is now entitled "Process for Resolution of Public Concerns." The preamble reads: "The Board believes that any individual's concern must be given respectful attention, and that all reasonable efforts must be made to assist those involved in achieving resolution" (Draft Policy No. 6420 – presented to EAC on April 10, 2000 but – at the time of writing - not yet approved by the Board of Trustees). The proposed policy has a four-step process ranging from the initial contact of the concerned individual to a final-stage appeal to the Board under the District's appeal policy. While the policy continues to require the

involvement of a union representative, it now also ensures that complainants are advised that an advocate may accompany them. A "Public Complaint Form" and a "Complaint Resolution Form" are attached to and form part of the policy.

The Past President of DPAC reports that the parents like the following about the proposed revised policy:

- The new opening statement, indicating a desire to resolve concerns,
- That it talks about concerns, rather than complaints, opening the door to talk about general concerns, not just specific complaints against individuals,
- The idea that they would be informed of what was happening with their concerns,
- That there was now a less formal first step, then an easy to follow paper trail from step 2 onwards, meaning their complaint was now officially on record,
- That there was a complaints resolution form, which would outline everyone's expectations,
- That parents were told what to do if their concerns continued,
- That steps were very clearly outlined as to what would happen at each step, and what to do if they were not satisfied,
- That the school district actively sought their opinions on the complaints process and how it served (or didn't serve) them. (R.Roy, personal communication)

It should be noted that while the DPAC approved of the draft policy, the BCCPAC provincial parent advocate felt it still did not go far enough to meet the concerns about process and outcomes which advocates had found not only in this District but throughout the other districts in which they have worked in recent years. However, the DPAC representative determined that enough had been gained in this draft to warrant asking the

Board to approve it saying “The big shift had occurred, and if we were going to look at it [the policy] again in one year, the little nudges [changes the advocate still wanted to see] might be better received then” (R. Roy, personal communication). She concluded her comments by saying, “DPAC feels that their efforts at systems advocacy will bring about a change in how the school district looks at parental concerns”.

The tension apparent between parents who may question or express concerns about the school system or their child’s teacher and the teacher’s unions was clearly apparent in a recent newspaper article entitled “Incensed parents pose threat to teachers”.

Parents upset with their children’s teachers are increasingly turning abusive when they complain, resorting to everything from slashing tires to screaming in front of classrooms full of students, union and school board officials say (Blackwell, 2001 p. A1).

The author goes on to relate specific cases of abuse and violence against teachers in the North West Territories, and to state that teacher unions in the North West Territories as well as Newfoundland and Toronto had struck deals with their Boards to cope with the problem. The article concludes:

There’s another side to the problem. Parents groups don’t condone parents who lose their cool, but say the phenomenon is borne out of an aggravation many feel in trying to have their grievances dealt with by education bureaucracies they say are slow-moving and biased toward protecting teachers (p. A2).

It does seem that organized teacher unions have taken steps in their collective agreements to afford maximum protection for teachers against complaints from parents. The revised

draft policy in my school district seems to address some of the parents' issues and to bring a more balanced approach to addressing concerns.

On the other end of this issue are the rights of children to protection from adults in the system. One province has had legislation in place since September 1996 to address such an issue. New Brunswick has the "Pupil Protection Policy" subtitled "Policy for the protection of pupils in the public schools system from misconduct by adults." Its stated purpose is:

- To protect pupils in the public school system from abusive behaviour by adults to which they may be exposed by virtue of being pupils including physical, sexual and emotional abuse and discrimination.
- To eliminate abusive behaviours through prevention and effective treatment.
- To define acceptable standards of behaviour for adults who have responsibility for pupils in the public school system (New Brunswick Education).

The policy is based on the principle that "The Department of Education is committed to providing learning environments which are safe, orderly, inviting and conducive to the pursuit of excellence. All individuals are intrinsically valuable and must be treated as such". The policy classifies the behaviours from which pupils are protected into abusive behaviour, misconduct, and inappropriate behaviour management. The policy goes on to define a step-by-step complaints process and disciplinary action. It is significant that the major areas covered in this policy, as areas in which pupils need protection are many of the same areas, which the BCCPAC Advocates have identified as those most frequently brought to their attention when parents are seeking assistance.

Parents have a very legitimate role as advocates for their children with teachers and in schools. The Advocacy Project has provided to parents some of the tools they need to work effectively within the system to address their concerns. As a Superintendent I have personally found that an active Parent Advocacy Project in our District has been a great asset. Originally seen as a threat by many, including the teacher's union and school administrators, it has become an important part of the culture of the District. Often, it is staff who refer parents to the Advocacy Project's toll free phone line. A level of trust has been established between all of the players in the system and the parent advocates. Many parental issues are resolved in private, between the parent and the teacher without any further involvement by others. In situations which need further discussion to achieve resolution, parent advocates participate in meetings, providing support and encouragement to parents to continue their advocacy for their child until they reach resolution.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

The public-private distinction has provided a useful tool to examine the complex relationship of parents to public schools. Issues of parent involvement have been high on the public agenda for the last decade as reflected in the almost universal inclusion of references to school councils and parent involvement in legislation across Canada. Provincial governments, in their push towards greater accountability and measured achievement in schools have made major restructuring efforts in governance to bring control closer to the centre through amalgamation of school districts, while stressing local involvement in decision-making processes through school councils and parent organizations. However, these efforts pale when viewed in the greater context of the erosion of the distinction between public and private spheres as articulated by Arendt and others. This erosion has led to the emergence of the social, preoccupied with the necessities of life, which Arendt agrees has blurred the boundaries and left confusion and frustration in its wake. I began this thesis with the intent of understanding the appropriate role for parents in the public school system. I end it with much broader issues and questions in my mind having to do with power, control, bureaucracy, democracy, rights, responsibilities and the future of public education. It remains for me to reflect upon what I understand differently for my practice as a school superintendent, working within the public school system but very much aware of the frustrations and unmet expectations of parents for what their children can achieve for their futures.

Community Theatre as a Metaphor for Schools

Arendt's conception of the public sphere as a space of appearance where unique individuals come together in their plurality and through speech and action change the world, brings to mind the conception of the world as a stage. Shakespeare's famous lines from "As You Like it" (2.7. 139-167) capture this notion rather well:

All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

These thoughts brought me to a metaphor of the world as a public stage where people in a free and democratic state come together to talk and bring about action to improve the world for the common good. Schools are places in the community, established by the public to prepare the children for their eventual entry onto this world stage. Although this preparation begins from the moment of natality in the privacy of the home, to ensure that the preparation meets the needs of the public as well as the private, schools are placed between the home and the public as an in between stage where children can, with some degree of protection and security try out their future roles and prepare for their eventual "birth" onto the "real" world stage. Schools then, are theatre schools to prepare the actors for their future roles in life. This metaphor provides a means to identify the various components of this private/public distinction and the idealized role of the school and its current characteristics as a bureaucratic part of the social or mass society.

Children are required by the public to attend these schools to learn how to become actors on the world stage. Teachers who, as actors themselves, have an in-depth

knowledge of the real theatre, prepare the children for their eventual entry onto the public stage. This preparation, in Arendtian terms, does not become the world, nor do the children create their own world within this school. Teachers' authority comes from their knowledge and skill as actors themselves and they convey to the children what the world stage is like, while allowing them to develop their own unique skills and abilities at acting so that they can bring their own artistic interpretation to the world stage. They learn how to speak their lines, project so that they can be heard while listening for cues from the other actors on the stage and being aware that they are a part of a play that is itself much greater than the sum of the parts. Children try out their skills on the somewhat private stage in the school where the public and parents can come to see them perform in a sheltered environment, away from the major risks of theatre critics and the glare of publicity. Parents share their concerns and ambitions for their children with the teachers and together they help the children become the best actors they possibly can. Not all children are able or aspire to the leading roles on the stage, taking various parts and trying them out. Others find they have special skills in working behind the scenes, on set construction or preparing the stage for the performance, adjusting the lighting and sound and props necessary to the performance. The stage needs to be set right for the action to take place without interruption. Children learn from scripts, the curriculum written for the public and common to theatres in most other public school/theatres. However, the script is general and allows for improvisation and is only a model that can be changed and may not entirely simulate the scripts used on the real stage. The many scripts reflect the various disciplines required of the actor to take on various roles: comedy, tragedy, etc. An artistic director who ensures that the various scripts come

together to produce a play that is seamless in its presentation coordinates the overall production – the idealized role of the educational leader or principal in a school perhaps. Many other functions are needed to support the operation of the theatre: front of house (office), maintenance of the building and its infrastructure, assistants to provide additional help to children having difficulties with the script or skills required because of physical, mental, emotional or other problems.

Our current conception of this place called school has changed somewhat from the idealistic view outlined above. Rather than the public stage being the place where we come together as actors using speech to determine what is right and good, we have become rather preoccupied with concerns about the labor and work which are necessary to sustain life and the economy of production and consumption. The demand placed on our schools has become more and more tied to sustaining this production/consumption economy. So what does this look like for the theatre-school metaphor? The emphasis in this school is no longer on preparation for participation in speech and action but for labor and work to produce the goods. We are in competition with other theatres to produce and consume the goods to increase economic growth. Much greater emphasis has been placed on the backstage roles in the theatre – preparation of the sets, feeding and clothing the actors, maintaining the physical infrastructure, advertising the production to compete with other theatres.

Demand has grown to have specialist theatres, which prepare the actors for very specific roles in specialized productions or indeed, prepare them only for the non-acting roles in the world. Parents are demanding free choice of which type of theatre school their children attend and more say in how the theatre is managed and what should or

should not be performed on the stage. Principals have become preoccupied with these external forces, worrying about the front of house, dealing with the demands of workers and parents while neglecting the artistic direction/leadership role of their position. Maintaining and running the theatre has become the overwhelming priority, so rules and regulations are needed to keep it operating in the same ways without external factors interrupting. There is little or no time to discuss the script (curriculum), which is now written to meet the needs of production and consumption rather than preparation for acting on the public stage. In fact, there is less and less tolerance for uniqueness in the acting roles, all players are conditioned to respond without having to think through the meaning of their lines. Teachers and children are measured against how well they can recite their prepared lines or construct the sets in relation to others from other theatre schools in the same and other countries. Schools have become absorbed into this culture that Arendt described as the social sphere.

I find this metaphor useful in understanding the roles of parents and schools in relation to the conceptions of public and private and how they have merged to become the social sphere. Some parents, caught up in the production/consumption economic contest see schools as a means to their child's competitive advantage and have increased their demand for involvement and control, privileging themselves over other members of the public who have an interest in the long term implications of education as preparation for life in the world. Governments, also subscribing to the global economic growth theory use the rhetoric of the production/consumption economy to shape schools and education in preparation of children for labor and work, rather than for participation in the discussion about a worthwhile life and what is right and good. The language has

changed, with parents having become clients, children consumers, teachers producers, concerned about products and meeting targets. This metaphor has helped me to simplify and gain a better understanding of the concepts Arendt presents in the public private dichotomy and the emergence of the social. However, the metaphor also has some limitations, as does Arendt's view of the school. Perhaps the school should be viewed as one of many stages that make up the world stage, rather than isolating the young in a place which, for Arendt, was not part of the world or even a simulation of the world, merely a place of preparation. Indeed, Shakespeare's notion of "all the world's a stage" would include school as part of the "real world". Despite these limits I return to the reality of our current dilemma and conclude this thesis with a better understanding of what my role as a school superintendent can and, perhaps, should be in helping parents and schools decrease tension and understand how they can help to restore the distinctions between private and public and reduce the constraints of the social.

Creating Space for Public Dialogue about Education

Perhaps the most significant role a superintendent of schools can play is to create a dialogue in the community, which addresses the issues and concerns raised by this loss of private space and the transformation of both the private and the public space into a social realm. Arendt would claim that it is not the specific rights about which we should be concerned, but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever (Arendt, 1973, p.297). To ensure that the rights of all, including parents and children are guaranteed, we need a public realm where natality and plurality are

recognized as the cornerstones of a democratic society and in which education is the key to preparation to participate in that democratic society. Natality recognizes that new people are always arriving on the scene in the form of children, and plurality means that each one is uniquely different, with different needs and interests (Wiens, 2000, p. 400). Thus, education is not about uniformity and conformity, it is about sustaining a dialogue where each individual, without fear and being free and equal, can bring forward his or her uniqueness and join with others to act. Leadership in education, understood in Arendtian terms, is about action and the ability to initiate action.

Arendt's view of leadership is that activity where the capacity of initiation and being free coincide. This conception of action is what provides the potential power and authority for all people to be leaders, both because they continue to initiate conversations about humanity and also because they renew the structures and institutions within which those conversations can take place (Wiens, p. 402).

This is no easy task for a school superintendent to undertake, in a society and a system that tends to be about power generated by strength and control exercised by rule rather than power generated by collective effort as the result of speech and action.

Educational leaders have critical roles, not to define visions, or to create artificial consensus or manipulate public opinion, but to bring communities together to discuss what is good and worthwhile [humanly meaningful]. We need people to begin such debate by suggesting possibilities, listening carefully to each other and moving the conversation along (Coulter & Wiens, 1999, p. 7).

To initiate such conversation we need to be clear on what is private and what is public and what is speech and action and what is bureaucratic and social.

“Communicative action is concerned with reaching understandings with others about, for example, what constitutes a good society and how to educate the young for that society” (Coulter, in press). Coulter points out that the power of civil society is funneled into the administrative systems of modern democracies through political parties and elections. Communicative action is therefore not directly concerned with governance, but rather with the generation of public opinion that influences decisions and does not make them directly. Democratic public dialogue is concerned with creating norms and values that form the context for decisions, not making the decisions.

The public spheres, where these dialogues take place, are not singular. Influenced by the criticisms of writers such as Benhabib (1992) who took issue with a singular public which subordinated particular groups – women, workers, peoples of colour, gays and lesbians, and led to multiple alternative autonomous publics, Habermas (1992/1996) defined the public sphere as (p. 37):

A network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way as to coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions. Like the life world as a whole, so, too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action (Habermas 1992/1996, p. 360).

As superintendent then, I must take leadership in initiating and supporting those multiple public spheres where conversations take place which ultimately influence public opinion and the decisions of the democratic systems. Such events as the Partners Workshops (Chapter 3), the parking lot conversations and DPAC and PAC meetings (Chapter 6),

networks of community associations, service groups, community newspapers and television, and all manner of other public forums form the basis of public opinion which, when filtered through to the decisions makers, whether provincial or local, influence decisions. However, the danger inherent in this approach is that we sustain talk rather than thoughtful dialogue:

The public sphere is filled with the voices of resentment, prejudice and unanalyzed opinions that are exposed to others, more often than not, in acts of exhibitionist defiance. The more impersonal the public conversation has become, the more the temptation is increasingly to 'let it all hang out'; the line between intimacy and publicity has been corroded (Benhabib, 1996, p. 205).

So, a different kind of dialogue needs to be initiated and sustained, one that is informed and focused.

As superintendent of schools my role is one of initiating and informing public dialogue. This I can achieve by being visible in the community and raising the issues that are most important to the future of education and the world. This includes bringing my knowledge and understanding to these discussions and listening carefully to the voices of others. I can also support those individuals and groups who also initiate and sustain dialogue in the community whether that is our administrators, teachers, students, unions, or parents and attempt to bring them together in a public forum where they can debate the issues that concern them and the education of children.

Schools: Private, Public and/or Social Spaces?

Overlapping rights and interests in the education of children blurs the distinctions between the private, public and social roles of schools. How do parents fit into this picture? Clearly, we have seen that parents are responsible for the birth, nurturing and early education of their children in the private sphere of the home and family. Also, we have seen how the public/political sphere to prepare the young for their entry into this public/political world establishes the public schools. So, if schools are not part of the private sphere of the home and family and not truly public, where do they fit into the Arendtian analysis? It seems they are a place “in between” the private and the public, a “social” space where children learn about the world and the potential for the entry into that world, without actually being there. This use, by Arendt, of the term “social” to describe the school is confusing, especially when we consider her description of the rise of “the social” as an aberration of private and public life.

Arendt's use of the term ‘society’ and her accompanying distinction between ‘the social’ and ‘the political’ are notoriously hard to grasp. ‘Society’ is a kind of pseudo-public realm, a distortion of authentic public life characterised by a combination of conformity and egocentricity. In society, human beings are bound together, but the concerns that bind them are essentially private, to do with production and consumption in a common economy and a common mass culture. According to Canovan (1992), herd-like uniformity is therefore the essence of ‘society’ as Arendt understands it (p. 116-117). Is this an apt description of public schools or, indeed, of society? Certainly, despite all the rhetoric about individualized instruction, schools are indeed large institutions that

deal with the mass of students and aims towards uniformity by imposing standards and achievement targets. What is the relationship of parents to these schools?

Schools, by the nature of their structural organization, are bureaucratic organizations, but they are also communities. Large numbers of students gather in schools supervised and taught by a relatively small number of staff in an institutional setting which generally results in a hierarchical bureaucracy, governed by rules and regulations. However, schools also provide a space for socialization of the young where they live and work together with their peers and learn from the adults within the community of the school. What relationship can and do parents have with their children's schools? As I outlined in Chapter 3, issues of choice, decision-making, material environment, teaching and learning and communication are often at the heart of issues of parental involvement. These are issues of what Arendt would call labor and work, and seem to have little to do with Arendtian notions of action and preparation for participation in debate and discussion about a good life and the world.

Public Schools and Parental Choice

Writing about issues of desegregation in the southern states, Arendt reaffirms her belief that:

The right of parents to bring up their children as they see fit is a right of privacy, belonging to home and family. Ever since the introduction of compulsory education, this right has been challenged and restricted, but not abolished, by the

right of the body politic to prepare children to fulfill their future duties as citizens (Arendt, 1959, p. 236).

In the case of desegregation, Arendt caused a storm of protest by suggesting that desegregation removed the right of parents to have their children educated at schools of their choice, thus protecting the right of free association and group formation. Her point was not that discrimination is right, but that it should be confined to the social sphere, where she felt it is legitimate, and prevented from trespassing on the personal and political sphere, where it is destructive (p. 238). However, she was attempting to ensure that the schools, the place between the privacy of the home and the public/political world, are indeed kept separate from that political world and not used as an instrument of the state to enact their political will through the children.

For the child himself, school is the first place away from home where he establishes contact with the public world that surrounds him and his family. This public world [the school] is not political but social, and the school is to the child what work is to an adult. The only difference is that the element of free choice which, in a free society, exists at least in principle in the choosing of jobs and the associations connected with them, is not yet at the disposal of the child but rests with his parents (p. 242).

Arendt claims that parents have the right to determine both where their children go to school and with whom they associate. In this sense, Arendt would have claimed that parental choice of schools is a right that stems from the right of the parent to raise the child in private, which for Arendt included the elements of school, that she described as

social and outside the public/political world. She saw great danger in using children for political purposes.

While Arendt is adamant that parents retain choice over the education of their children, the current school system is not conducive to such choice. In fact, there are some who would argue that the education agenda has been taken over by the global market economy, driven by the self interest of the “have’s” in society at the expense of the “have nots”. Barlow and Robertson suggest that the use of the term choice is misleading in the current context of schooling.

The educational philosopher John Dewey saw the role of choice in education as the exercise of our collective responsibility to choose from among competing possibilities what is best for all children. No doubt Dewey would be appalled to see choice appropriated by the conservative alliance to uncouple the fortunes of some children from the fortunes of others, claiming that everyone would be better off (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 188).

Fege (1992) asks the fundamental question in this regard:

How did we come to define the national purpose of education not on what is best for the collective will or community, but on what is best for ‘me’ or ‘my child’
Even if that action may be exclusionary, discriminatory or even uninformed?
(Fege, 200, p 40).

As a school superintendent, charged with the protection of the public school system, I do not support the notion of choice as it is currently characterized. Providing schools that offer educational opportunity to some at the expense of others is not an appropriate way to prepare children for participation in the political world, which requires not only

plurality but also equality and distinction. Providing a preferential education for the children of some while depriving others will not enhance the public sphere. However, parents should still be afforded some choice within the school system, provided that the choice is open to all and that all have an equal access, regardless of economic and social status. Choice of school in a particular district may be possible, as is the choice of programs offered in particular schools. In other words choice in education by parents for their children, a private decision, is superceded by the needs of the public sphere to provide all children with the opportunity to an education which will give them the chance to be recognized as unique individuals who will participate in the public as equal citizens. The current issues around schools of choice, voucher and charter schools, do not, in my mind, meet the criteria of equal access and opportunity, unless all parents can choose these schools for their children, regardless of their private situation. All schools must prepare children to be democratic citizens.

Parents and Decision-Making in Schools and School Systems

A great deal of effort has been invested in issues of parental involvement through school councils and parent organizations, formally structured by governments in almost all provinces through legislation. However, it is unclear whether these efforts have really resulted in greater involvement of parents or whether they have been used to hide the intent of government at the provincial level to centralize major educational decisions, particularly in financial, curriculum and accountability matters. In all cases the level of involvement has been advisory, even in New Brunswick, where the short-lived parent

councils that replaced school boards, were to advise the Minister at the provincial level, and to advise the school principals at the local level. The long standing provision in the BC School Act allowing Parent Advisory Councils, makes clear that the role is “advisory” and subject to the cooperation of the school board and school principal. However, from a public- private view, perhaps this limited involvement has a purpose.

Parents are foremost representative of the private sphere, the home and family and responsible for the guidance of their children and their care and nurturing. However, parents also have a responsibility to prepare their children for the public, especially for entry into the school and to appear in public outside the home, where rules of civil conduct are expected to be followed, even by children. Schools, however, as I have described them earlier in this paper, are established by the public for the benefit of the public, to prepare the young for their role in the world. As such, schools are the responsibility of all citizens, not just the parents. One can make the case that parents should have no more influence over decisions in the organization and operation of school districts and schools than any other tax-paying citizen. Indeed, it may be that some would see parent involvement as one of self-interest, in seeing that their child benefited at the expense of other children. Perhaps then, the governance of schools is best left to the democratic process whereby all citizens are represented at the governance level – provincial government or school board. However, this position too, in my opinion, is flawed. Representative governance, as Arendt has pointed out, is often reflective of abdication of responsibility by the public, and in the case of education near abandonment, since very few people tend to bother to vote for school trustees in local elections. Thus, the chosen representatives may only represent a very narrow view or even be a “one

issue” candidate, having an axe to grind against some individual or part of the system, rather than a commitment to providing education for all children on an equitable basis.

So where should a superintendent stand on issues of parental involvement in governance and decision-making? I believe that parents have a role and a right to be involved with the school in shaping their child’s education. This includes participation in an advisory role through the various vehicles that have become available through legislation and policies. In my own case I have promoted strong and open parent involvement in PAC at the school level, DPAC at the district level and in BCCPAC at the provincial level. Given that other players in the educational process, the unionized employees and the administrators, often tend towards preservation of the status quo, protection of bureaucratic systems and dedication to “the social” role of schooling, a voice from outside the parameters of the system can provide the counterbalancing advice which helps the elected representatives temper their view of what is happening in schools. However, this voice can also be one of disruption and destruction, when parents apply pressure on the system to meet very specific needs without regard to the best interests of all children within a school or school system.

In the case of schools, my district has established School Advisory Councils (SACs) at each school. These councils, providing advice to the school administration, are made up of representatives of teachers, support staff, students, parents, administration and in some cases, students. They provide a source of feedback on such matters as school policy, internal budgeting, codes of conduct, and any other matters of interest or concern. While they are advisory, because the principal in the School Act and Board Policy is held responsible and accountable for the overall operation of the school, they do

provide a public role through a network of opinion gathering that would otherwise not be available to the principal. Also, despite the limitations of representation – in the case of parents, limited to those parents who have the time and other resources to be available to serve on the PAC and SACs, there is a mechanism for consultation with other parents through the PAC and their newsletters and other communication vehicles. It has been my experience that the greater the involvement at this level, where parents can clearly see their influence at work, the stronger the PAC become as a voice for parents and wider representation. In our current world, dominated by the social, where almost everyone is preoccupied with production and consumption, it seems to me, the more opportunities for people, and especially parents, to become actively involved in discussions about the education system and schools (speech and action) the greater the chance that we can recreate schools as the “in-between” places which help take children from the private realm of their homes and prepare them for participation in the world.

At the district level, we have about 8 years experience with an Education Advisory Council (EAC) that grew out of the Partner’s Workshop discussed in Chapter 3. Again, this council is made up of representatives of the unionized employees (teachers and support staff), school based administrators, students, and all five of the elected school trustees. Its mandate is to advise the board of trustees on matters of policy and budget, and any other matters of interest or concern. It meets monthly throughout the school year, and its meetings replace one of the formal board meetings. The representatives tend to be the senior elected person in each organization – the presidents of the unions and DPAC. This provides the basis for an extensive communication process with those involved and affected by decisions of the school board. Although sometimes criticized

for slowing the decision-making process, EAC has proven its value to all concerned in that there has been a much higher level of consensus decision-making in the school district, especially around such divisive issues as budget development in times of restraint. Although, again, the representative process, especially in the loose network of PAC and DPAC, is flawed, it is, in my opinion, a limited public role that is better than no representation and no voice of influence for the trustees to take into consideration as they deliberate on important issues.

Parental involvement in PAC and DPAC has grown over the years in my school district. I believe this is a result of at least the perceived increase in influence of parents at the school and district level. However, these groups continue to suffer from the weaknesses outlined in Chapter 3. The parents who become involved in PAC and DPAC tend to be from homes where the time and resources are available for such participation. The overwhelming numbers of PAC attendees are mothers, and often those who do not work outside the home. Despite these weaknesses in the process, I believe in and support the PAC and DPAC in my district, because they provide a network of communication amongst parents about matters of concern and interest to parents and they have proven their ability to bring about some positive changes in the system over the long term. One clear instance has been the development of the advocacy project that grew out of discussion amongst parents active in DPAC who were searching for a way of addressing parental concerns within the system without putting themselves or their children in jeopardy within the schools. BCCPAC also provided a useful vehicle for the necessary funding and organizational structure to legitimize the Advocacy Project at the provincial

level without it becoming a part of government or internal bureaucracy of school districts. I will come back to the advocacy issue later in this chapter.

Parents and the Material School Environment

In Chapter 3 I outlined the influence that parents can have over the physical and material environment of a school. It is sufficient to repeat here that parents have the responsibility for the care and nurturing of their children, including their safety and comfort and that, I believe this responsibility continues into the school environment. While it is clearly the school, district and province that are responsible for the provision of safe, healthy schools and classrooms, it continues to be the responsibility of parents, in their private role, to monitor these things and to initiate some form of complaint process when they feel their child is at risk or the school environment is not conducive to their learning. Working together, parents and the school district have been effective in lobbying government to support the replacement and upgrading of school facilities throughout our district. In some situations it was the work of the parents bringing attention to the deficiencies in the physical plants to the attention of the media and the politicians that resulted in the appropriate funding being approved. This may be indicative of the recognition that parents do represent the welfare needs of their children better than anyone else does, or, cynically, it may be that parents vote and have influence in the constituency of elected officials.

Parents' Role in Teaching and Learning

There seems to be little doubt that the research, mentioned in Chapter Three, supports the notion that the more parents are interested in and involved with their child's school and work, the greater the achievement of the child. However, as I also note in Chapter Three, concepts of achievement and measurement of success are problematic when they are directly tied to issues of work and labor and the preparation of children to perform in the global market economy to the exclusion of their role as citizens in the discussion about what is a good and worthwhile life. One of the areas, it seems to me, needing much greater follow-up by superintendents, principals and teachers, is how to ensure that all parents are aware of the importance of their interest in their child's education and how we can make it possible for parents to demonstrate that interest both at home and at school. The emphasis in this discussion needs to move to a concern for questions about the purposes of a public education and what is good and worthwhile in life, away from an exclusive interest in preparation for work and labor. The research also shows that parental involvement with their child's schoolwork and with the school has socio-economic and ethnic biases. Schools need to understand these biases, in non-judgmental ways, in order to help overcome the inequality, which results for the children. Schools need alternative models of discourse with parents and to provide assistance to parents to help them and their children more fully participate in all aspects of public education.

One such example from my own school district is the establishment of a School Board goal to improve literacy. The Literacy Project had the vision of ensuring that all children would be reading at grade level by the time they were in grade three, and that additional resources would be applied to assist those students who might not attain the stated vision. It quickly became clear that the major influences in the development of reading occur for children up to and before the age of three. The gap in relative reading readiness of children entering school for the first time is enormous. Those involved in the project concluded that intervention is needed long before children enter school, even at birth. However, they faced the much discussed issue of the public-private distinction and questions arose as to the efficacy of schools intervening in the home and making judgments about the degree to which parents were or were not preparing their children to learn to read. Those involved in the project did, however, feel welcome in working with preschools and in providing reading preparation kits and guides to supply, on request to parents. This project illustrated for me the dilemma faced by schools in their public role to prepare children to enter the world, where they will need the ability to read and write to enjoy a worthwhile life, and the recognition that the home is indeed a private place, where parents are responsible for the care, nurturing and guidance of their children. Perhaps the best thing schools can do is to improve the level of communication within the whole community about the importance of early intervention and role modeling in a child's early development.

Communication and Action in Schools and School Systems

Many of the issues raised in this paper have to do with communication. It seems that communication is at the heart of the public private discussion. The plurality and diversity essential to speech and action in Arendt's public sphere, is the cornerstone to understanding this dichotomy. The tension between the home and the school, which I have outlined earlier, can only be addressed through issues of communication. Whether that communication is on the micro level, between individual parents and the child's teacher, or on the macro level of school system or government to all parents, if it does not occur, or is not clear, the tensions remain or increase.

The barriers to establishing dialogue or communication come from the issues, which distinguish the public from the private. In order to participate in the public through speech and action, certain conditions must exist. First, the necessities to sustaining life must be in place – food, shelter, intimacy, comfort and security – before one can be free to participate in the public sphere, beyond the protection of the household. One must be able to participate with some degree of equality while maintaining one's uniqueness. Finally, one must know how to participate in speech and action with others through some basic agreed structures (rules, laws), which provide the forum for communication and action to occur. These fundamental issues are of utmost importance to understanding how to improve communication between home and school, parent and teacher in order to relieve some of the tension, which continues to exist. Being aware of the individual circumstance of parents – to what degree have their basic needs been taken care of – is perhaps the first important concern for the educator. If the

parent is unable, for whatever reason, to provide the necessities of life, the chances of them participating in a dialogue with the school about their children's education are remote indeed. Educators must recognize the uniqueness of each individual parent and avoid the temptation, so common today, to regard parents as a homogeneous mass with common needs and understandings. In addition, the educator must understand the systemic factors which make parents feel unequal in dealing with the school system and with teachers: professionalization, social position, economic status, etc. Finally, educators need to consider the forums they use to communicate; what are the appropriate mechanisms, language, and rules, which should guide communication so that parents can participate with a degree of confidence that they are equals in a dialogue which will result in action in the best interests, not only of their own child but of all children.

Many of the forums currently in use by schools and teachers limit the access of some parents to information about their child's education. Whether it is educational jargon, or the physical arrangements for a conference, or the timing and location of a meeting, consideration must be given to these factors to ensure that meaningful communication can occur with freedom and equality. Unfortunately, the growing "social" character of schools and school systems have tended to work against improved communication as rules and policies and collective agreements have worked to protect the organization from change and penetration by "the public" – including parents. Whether it is closed, contractual policies on "Public Complaints", or harassment provisions to protect teachers from aggressive parents, it seems that much more effort and attention has gone into excluding parents from meaningful participation in dialogue about education than it has to including them.

What role can and should a school superintendent play in addressing the communication issue involving parents and schools and teachers? Communication and action are the most important roles for a superintendent to play. Initiating forums for discussion about important issues, where all partners feel safe and protected and which can result in action to change the status quo, should be a high priority for a superintendent. This does not imply single, one event discussions, rather a cultural change, where systemically the norm becomes open, free dialogue and debate about what is right and good in education; where all partners in the educational process can participate with the ultimate goal of improving the education of our children, so that they can take up their place in the world and have their opportunity to participate and change the world into which we have brought them.

Parent Advocacy Helps to Ease Tensions and Improve Communication

Parent advocacy as I have outlined in Chapters Five and particularly the Parent Advocacy Project as described in Chapter Six is, I believe a way to help ease the tensions between parents, schools and teachers. It is also about addressing the distinctions between the Arendtian notions of public and private and recognizing the social role of schools in our current world. In my view, the clash that occurs in education is between the private role of parents and the public role of the schools, exacerbated by the absorption of the schools into the “social”. Parents faced by the uncertain future of their children as they move away from the security of the home, through school and into the world. They are also faced by the school as a bureaucratic institution which, in many

ways, is no longer concerned about preparing the young to enter the world as unique citizens in a world of plurality where speech and action bring about change, but with preparing them to function as productive workers in a global production consumption economy dominated by a mass culture which requires uniformity and compliance. Parent advocacy is about helping parents to deal with this “social” bureaucratic institution we call school so that they can fulfill their role in guiding their children’s education and preparation for entry into the common world.

I believe that the Parent Advocacy Project has demonstrated unusual success in its development. It began in a small school district as the result of a small group of parents expressing concern to each other about how to deal with problems faced by their children in school, without creating additional problems for themselves or their children within the schools. It grew, first to an organized volunteer effort of the local DPAC into a major provincial organization managed by BCCPAC and supported through financial assistance to BCCPAC from the provincial government. It has subsequently spread to many school districts in BC and across western Canada.

Despite its successful growth, I believe Parent Advocacy faces some huge problems that have yet to be addressed. These include its voluntary nature, its uncertain funding, the danger of its co-optation into the “system” and eventual rejection as a “foreign body” by the institutional organism called public schooling, and the overriding self-interest of some parents

Parents are working as volunteers when they get involved with their children’s education and schooling. Although they are fulfilling an important role as parents in the guidance of their children, most parents are overburdened by their role in providing the

necessities of life and most are very busy working to sustaining the life style which they have come to desire in this mass culture we call society. This leaves very little time, energy or financial resource to spend on advocating for their own children, let alone becoming involved in advocacy for other parents. Thus, the parents who are available to become parent advocates are those with the time and opportunity – most often those women from a socio-economic background, ethnic grouping and educational level which makes them different from the vast majority of parents of school age children. While these factors do not necessarily detract from the ability of an individual to be an excellent parent advocate, it certainly limits the number of people available to fulfill this volunteer role. In addition, as the initial parent advocates have found, it is not a role in which the time involved can easily be limited. What may initially appear to be a straightforward advocacy case can grow into a complex, time and energy consuming ordeal stretching over weeks, months or even years.

Provincial funding has been provided to BCCPAC to initiate and coordinate the Parent Advocacy Project. This source of funding is not secure, and exists at the will of the government of the day. In addition, when government funds are allocated to a group such as BCCPAC, it comes with accountability strings attached. Although I am not in a position to comment on what strings may currently be controlling access by BCCPAC to the funding, it is clear that government is unlikely to fund blindly a project which may, if not now, in the future venture into system advocacy which may attempt to change the education system in ways which may not be supported by the Minister, bureaucracy or government of the day. To sustain the project in a school district will eventually, in my opinion, require funding from some source. Logically this would be from the system

itself, since PAC and DPAC have no equitable source of funding other than fund raising, which would hardly be adequate to fund staff positions even on a limited basis. Once the system begins to fund parent advocacy, how long will such a system resist the temptation to take over the project and have it conform to the policy and bureaucracy of the system. Who will ultimately influence the project and gain the power and control? What role will school administrators or unions play in influencing advocacy, given their track record in controlling other aspects of parent involvement in the schools? The issue of volunteerism and funding is fundamental to the survival and development of parent advocacy in the schools and it remains, to my knowledge, unexplored.

A further issue for the advocacy project is the quality and training of advocates, whether volunteer or paid. In Chapter Five I have outlined the kind of skills and abilities required to be an effective parent advocate. Some of these can be taught and some depend on the individual's personal aptitudes, values and perceptions. Only certain individuals will be effective as advocates, while others may effectively destroy the credibility of parent advocacy both with other parents and with the school system. In order to overcome this factor, a selection and training process is needed to ensure the "the right" people become advocates. Making this more complex is the question of who determines "the right person"! While many school and district administrators have expressed support for the current advocacy project and the individuals involved, there have also been concerns about some individuals and their suitability for the role. This can be particularly the case when the issue involved is one requiring the system to change or accommodate the parent or the parent's child in a new or unusual way. If the advocacy project becomes absorbed into the system, it may not be long before the system

– meaning the administrators of the system, are the ones determining who is “the right” person to take on the advocacy role.

Some parents may eventually torpedo the Parent Advocacy Project. Those with a competitive self-interest in gaining advantage for their own child may not accept the necessity of public schooling addressing the needs of all children in equitable and caring ways. They may not wish to understand the system, or the needs of those in the system or, indeed of other parents. Intent on obtaining satisfaction, they may discount the advocate and circumvent the system by using other means to accomplish their objectives. This could be use of legal, political, media, or other pressures to overwhelm advocates and those in the system or, indeed, threat of violence and intimidation. The result of this kind of pressure could well be demands for greater control over parents and their access to schools and to the individual teachers and administrators within the schools. Legal restrictions on parents or contract language to protect teachers and others from aggressive parents could undo the work of parent advocacy to open channels of communication between home and school.

I am concerned that, without strong support for the advocacy project from leaders in education, such as school superintendents, the project will eventually be rejected by the school system as it works to protect itself from what may well be perceived as an intrusion into the field of professional educators. Once a systematic selection and training process is in place, the history of educational organizations tells us, it will not be long before credentialism and professionalization and unionization follows. I predict not only will, the educational establishment take over or eliminate parent advocacy, but other establishments – such as law - will feel their domains have been encroached upon, and

will begin to isolate and reject the volunteer and lay nature of the current role. It would only take one lawsuit by a parent, child, teacher, administrator or lawyer in the current environment to destroy the fragile advocacy project.

I have no solutions to the concerns outlined above. However, I do believe that the advocacy project has much to offer to the relief of current tensions between parents and schools and teachers. As such, I believe it is incumbent upon educational leaders, including school superintendents, to join in a dialogue with parents through BCCPAC and local DPAC to address these issues before it is too late. Additional research is needed to examine the effectiveness of parent advocacy on a much broader basis than is possible in this conceptual analysis. Also, researchers may be able to propose solutions or alternatives to overcome the possible problems I have outlined as facing the current advocacy project.

Conclusion

The work of Arendt, in describing the public-private distinction and the emergence of the social has given me a clearer understanding of the relationship between parents and schools and why there is often tension in this relationship. As a school superintendent I have often found myself in something of a no-man's-land between the various power structures built into the public school system. My role is multidimensional: responsibility to guide, support and take direction from an elected board of trustees; to ensure that the School Act and regulations from the Minister of Education are applied and followed; to oversee the organization and administration of the

school district and schools including the financial, educational, facilities and transportation mandates; and to be an educational leader, placing the education of the children in our care at the top of a never ending list of priorities. Part of this role is to play referee, linesman, and umpire in the constant push and pull between organized labor, administration, community and parents.

There is no doubt in my mind that the introduction of the Parent Advocacy Project has been a great asset to the public education system. It has provided parents with a resource base to assist them in dealing with the bureaucratic school system and with professional staff. Problems that are only resolved through conflict, or left unresolved to ferment, bring the schools and public education into disrepute and alienate parents even further from the schools. Today, very few of the concerns that arise in schools arrive at my office door. In all but a few difficult cases, with the assistance of a parent advocate, parents are able to resolve their issues very close to their source, without bringing the weight of the whole system to bear. This model is being replicated across the province with varying degrees of success. It has been largely due to the tireless work of the two original parent advocates who have worked for over 8 years to bring the Advocacy Project to its current stage of development. However, as I have explained earlier in this chapter, much is left to be resolved if advocacy is to continue and grow in the coming years. Additional research is needed to examine the means by which advocacy can continue without becoming absorbed into the super structure of the schooling system or sidelined as a lay approach to problems deemed to require professional attention.

This study has taken me beyond the notion of parent advocacy for children in schools to a growing concern for the future of our world and the educational system's

role in that world. Arendt's description of the loss of distinction between the public and the private spheres and the emergence of the social raise issues of such magnitude that it is difficult to envision an optimistic outcome for the future of our children and our children's children. In some ways I find it difficult to accept Arendt's sharp distinction between public and private. The reality is I think much less easy to define, with elements of the private in the public sphere and similarly public issues in the private domain. In addition, I find Arendt's rather negative characterization of the social and bureaucracy too extreme. In our complex world, bureaucracy is essential to avoid total inertia or even anarchy. We must all abide by rules and directions and some form of hierarchical organization is inevitable in institutions, particularly schools. However, Pitkin, Greene, Habermas and others give me reason to hope that there is, within our human plurality the ability, through communication and action, to overcome the blob mentality, to be wide awake to what is happening around us, and to recreate public spheres where change can occur. The social is not all-bad, after all we are in essence the social. The belief in natality, and the opportunity for renewal, must sustain us. We must continue to regard education as our best hope for the future and for our children's future:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance to undertake something new, something

unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (Arendt, 1968, p. 196).

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