Theorising parent participation in school decision-making processes: A Foucaultian inspired exploration of school councils

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Dedication

For the children we teach
Acknowledgements

A thesis represents the collaborative efforts of the candidate and many others who offered their time, support and expertise in ensuring the completion of the project. The list of those to whom I owe thanks is consequently long; however, as these people are integral to this thesis, it is important to acknowledge them publicly.

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This thesis is the result of the generous support of all of these people and many more not specifically named here. The completion of this research is the result of your companionship on this journey. Thank you.
Authentication

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

................................

Graham Ramsay Daniel

15th December, 2008
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Abbreviations

ACER  Australian Council for Educational Research
ACSSO Australian Council of State School Associations
APC    Australian Parents Council
BOS    NSW Board of Studies New South Wales
CCG    Concerned Citizens Group
DET    Department of Education and Training (Australian State Government Departments)
DEET   Department of Education Employment and Training (Australian State Government Departments)
DEEWR  Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST   Department of Education, Science and Training
DAP    Developmentally appropriate practice
ERIC   Education Resources Information Centre
LSC    Local School Council
MCEETYA Ministerial Committee on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MINBUD Australian Federal Government Ministerial media release
NELS88 National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988
NSW DET New South Wales Department of Education and Training
NSW P&C New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations
OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
P & C   Parents and Citizens Associations (Australian organisations similar to PTO’s)
PTO    Parent Teacher Organisation (Similar to P&C
SBM    School Based Management
SEDL   Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
UNDP   The United Nations Development Program
UWS HEC University of Western Sydney Human Ethics Committee
VICCSO Victorian Council of School Organisations
VIC DEST Victorian Department of Education, Science and Training
Abstract

The inclusion of school councils in family-school partnerships frameworks and the widespread application of these councils as part of site-based management in schools has resulted in the formation of school councils in most schooling systems in Western democratic nations (ACER, 2008; World Bank, 2008). As a form of parent involvement, school councils are positioned as a way in which parents are able to participate in the decision-making processes of their children’s schools. There is, however, little research to support this positioning of school councils or the inclusion of this construct within family-school partnerships frameworks and policies. Therefore, this research investigates the naturalisation of school councils within Western schooling systems, providing a Foucaultian inspired genealogical exploration of the discursive construction of parent participation in school councils.

Informed by Dewian understandings of the purposes of schooling in modern society and drawing on research and policy literature and the experiences of parent school council participants, this research applies the methodologies of Foucaultian discourse analysis in identifying the discursive construction of parent participation in school councils. The results of this analysis reveal social democratic, representative democratic and advanced liberal constructions of parental participation in school councils as dominant in modern Western society. In doing so, some of the discursive marginalisations that produce significant equity and social justice issues in relation to these existing constructions of school councils are exposed and reintroduced into the discursive context. The theoretical foundations of the field of family-school partnerships are contested within this Foucaultian inspired (post)critical exploration of school councils as a form of parental involvement and participation.

Based on the findings of this research, this thesis argues for a reconceptualisation of the field of family-school partnerships in order to develop the robust theoretical foundations required to inform the formation of policy and practice that is inclusive of the differing families of the children we teach in our schools, in order to support these children’s schooling experience and education. The thesis concludes by
offering a way forward in this process, providing suggestions for the (re)theorisation of the field of parent involvement and participation in their children’s education. The thesis therefore presents an applied theorisation of school councils as a construction of parental participation in school decision-making processes.
Parental involvement seems like the least controversial concept in education reform – just try and find someone who admits to being against it

(Public Agenda, 1999)
I

Introduction

Chapter 1   Orientation to the thesis

Chapter 2   Foundations of parent participation: Situating school
             in the educational landscape
Chapter 1
Orientation to the thesis

Introduction
In recent times, schooling systems in Western democratic nations have placed renewed interest on increasing parental involvement in their children’s education as a way of improving schooling outcomes. These initiatives have been in response to the vast body of research literature documenting the benefits of parent involvement for students, teachers, parents, schools and society. Increased opportunities for parental involvement in schools have been supported by school policies and by legislation requiring schools to develop opportunities for parental involvement in activities both at home and in school, and participation in school decision making.

The construct of school councils has emerged as the dominant formation for parental participation in decision making and appears as a naturalised or commonsense construct within research and policy literature. Parent involvement and participation strategies including school councils are not, however, supported by a soundly developed theoretical understanding of these practices and that there is a need for further research to inform the theorisation of these family-school partnerships policies in schools. The research reported in this thesis investigates this taken-for-granted inclusion of school councils within family-school partnerships policies and thus contributing towards the further theorisation of these practices in schools. Founded on a Dewian understandings of the purposes of schools in society, and applying a Foucaultian-inspired methodology, this thesis draws on research literature, policy statements, and the illustrative experiences of a number of parent school council members to provide a theoretical exploration of school councils as a form of parent participation in their children’s education. This research therefore questions the taken-for-granted inclusion of school councils in the management structures of schools, asking:

Why does the construct of school councils exist as a taken-for-granted truth in the field of parent involvement in schools?
**Significance of the study**

Reviewing the current knowledge base across the field of parent involvement, Jordan Orozco and Averett (2002) concluded that policy development and practice in this field of practice was running ahead of the development of the theoretical foundations required to support these strategies. In times of increased devolution of school management to the school site in many Western schooling systems (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998) there is a particular need for research to investigate the efficacy and effects of the different elements of devolved school management on students, schools and their families in order, to support the development of these theoretical foundations. In particular, issues of equity and social justice need consideration in relation to the effects of these policy changes (Apple, 2006; Apple & Beane, 1999; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Blackmore, 1999a, 2000; Borg & Mayo, 2001; Crozier, 1997; Dodd, 1998; Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Lingard, Hayes & Mills, 1999; Mills & Gale, 2004; Verhoeven & Van Heddegem, 1999; Whitty et al., 1998). This thesis draws on existing research literature, policy documentation and the experiences of several parent school council members to investigate the formation of the construct of school councils in modern westernised schooling. In doing so, this thesis contributes a critical exploration of the construct of school councils towards the theorisation process.

For French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984), questions of equity and social justice represent the marginalisations and exclusions of individuals as the result of the arrangements of power represented by a given construct, as a truth. In order to address these issues of marginalisation and exclusion, Foucault proposed a methodology that disrupts these arrangements of power that hold the particular construct in place. It is this methodology that informs the research in this thesis, which aims to disrupt the taken-for-granted acceptance of school councils as a form of parental participation in their children’s schooling, by offering the beginning of a focus on “a set of questions … regarding the effects of patterns of school governance on the social distribution of educational outcomes … in addition to [its] effects on [overall] levels of outcomes” (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000, p. 148).
This thesis forms part of a reintroduction of “questions of equity and participatory
democracy … [which]… need to be returned to an agenda which has disfigured
schooling policy by regarding it merely as an economic tool” (Lingard, 1993, p. 33).
This call for a return to issues of equity and social justice in the educational research
agenda have been recently reasserted in a collected volume edited by Gloria Ladson-
Billings and William F. Tate (2006) entitled Education research in the public
interest: Social justice, action, and policy, which highlights what Lingard et. al.
(1999) have described as “an evacuation from robust equity and social justice
policies” (p. 101) in national policy making, and the need for research that “matter[s]
in the lives of real people, around real issues” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 10).
In that volume, the contributing authors argue that calls for this research in education
are now even more critical, due to the increasing dominance of neoliberal discourse
and its rearticulation of the role of schools in modern society and formative effects
on policies and practices in schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

The apparent naturalisation of school councils as the construct in schools that
enables parental participation in decisions involving their children’s education, and
the inclusion of school councils in family-school partnership policies and
frameworks (see for example 1988 Chicago School Reform (P.L. 85-1418));
Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), 2004a; Epstein, 1987a,
1987b, 1991, 1994, 1995; Sanders & Epstein 1998), make the understanding of the
equity and social justice implications of these practices critical in developing the
theory base to guide policy development in schools. Drawing on Foucault’s critical
stance of refusal, curiosity and innovation (Foucault, 1988a, p. 1), this thesis
provides a critical investigation of the construction of parent participation in the form
of school councils. In doing so, the thesis provides a discursive history (genealogy)
of school councils, (re)exposing these formative discourses to recontestation and thus
reopening possibilities for the reconceptualisation and reconstruction of parent
participation and parent involvement in their children’s schooling.

Research regarding school councils is limited, with few studies focussed directly on
the outcomes of school councils in terms of student achievement, and very few
directly challenging the notion of school councils itself. While a small number of studies identify some concerns around social justice issues in relation to school councils (see for example Blackmore, 2000; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Clabaugh, 1998; Lingard et al., 1999; Lingard, 2000a, 2000b; Lingard, Hayes & Mills, 2002; Mills & Gale, 2004), to date there has been no systematic theorisation of the construct of school councils addressing these issues.

**Research aims**

With policy running ahead of the development of the theoretical foundations required to support practice in schools (Jordan et al., 2002), and with issues of equity and social justice being important considerations in the context of schooling (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000; Blackmore, 1999a, 2000; Lingard et al, 1999; Lingard, 2000a; Whitty et al., 1998), this thesis aims to contribute a critical understanding of the construct of school councils to the theoretical foundations of parent involvement and participation in children’s education. In addressing the research question of why the construct of school councils exists as a taken-for-granted truth in the field of parent involvement in schools, the aims of this research are:

1. To investigate the concepts underpinning policies and practices of parent participation in schools;
2. To identify the discursive arrangements that produce the construct of school councils within family-school partnerships policies and practice in schools;
3. To provide a critical consideration of school councils in relation to the aims of education, as constructed in the Dewian tradition.

**Parent involvement in children’s education**

Parents support their children’s educational development in a range of ways. Henderson, Jacob, Kernan-Schloss and Raimondo (2004, p. 7), for example, identified four main roles of parents in their interactions in their children’s education: parents as teachers; parents as supporters of education; parents as advocates for their own and for all children; and parents as decision makers. School councils offer parents the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes in their
children’s schools. As a form of participation, this role in school governance is often referred to in typologies and frameworks of parent involvement, or as part of family-school partnerships. The differences between the terms parent involvement and parent participation, and the ways in which school councils are constructed as part of these relationships, form the central core of this thesis.

**Parent involvement**

The body of research literature supporting parent involvement in their children’s schooling is considerable. Several reviews and meta-analyses of this literature have been published during the past 30 years, some of the most recent being by Baker and Soden (2005), Brough and Irvin (2001), Carter (2002), Fan and Chen (2001), Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez and Kayzar (2002), McKeand (2003), and those conducted for the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) (Boethel, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jordan et al., 2002). These analyses identify general agreement that parents’ involvement in their children’s education results in improved outcomes for all those involved, and strong evidence to support particular forms of practice.

Parent involvement in support of their children’s education includes activities in the home, school and wider community. These activities may be initiated by the parent (such as visits to a museum), the school (such as homework activities) or by the needs or interests of the children themselves. Parent involvement activities therefore may be directed by the parent or occur under the guidance of the school. Where parents are involved in school-based activities, parent involvement is traditionally under the supervision of the school, which acts in the legal position of in loco parentis.

**Parent participation**

At the level of participation of parents in the decision-making processes of schools, parents are empowered to varying degrees in matters that have direct and indirect influence on the schooling experiences of their children. Activities might include membership of decision-making committees and working parties, input into policy or
curriculum change, shared decision making in relation to decisions relating to one’s own children, and membership of management, administrative or governance bodies in the school, including a school council. In positions of decision making, parent participation moves from activities that are directed by parents outside of the school or under the direction or guidance of the school to activities where parents are empowered within the school’s decision-making processes. These forms of participation, therefore, differ from other forms of parent involvement in their children’s education. Conceptualised around the degree of autonomy or empowerment, parent involvement forms four general types as illustrated in Table 1-1, with the fourth (in bold) being referred to in this table as parent participation. This thesis addresses activities that are located in this fourth form.

Parent participation, then, refers to empowered parental involvement in activities in the school or community, and can be seen as differing from those activities that might otherwise be considered parent involvement. The focus of this thesis is on this particular form of parent participation in school decision making. These concepts of parent involvement, parent participation, and school councils are critiqued further in Chapter 2, and throughout the thesis.

Table 1-1
Differentiation of Parent Involvement and Parent Participation in Children’s Education around Degrees of Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>At home or in the community</th>
<th>At school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-directed activities</td>
<td>Parent involvement</td>
<td>Parent involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-directed activities</td>
<td>Parent involvement</td>
<td>Parent participation</td>
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**School councils**

Parent participation in school decision making is usually facilitated in the form of school councils (McConchie, 2004; Parker & Leithwood, 2000). School councils offer the opportunity for members of the school, and in some cases the broader community, to participate in the school’s educational and administrative decision-making processes. In reviewing existing research, Olivos (2004, p. 25) claimed “Substantial literature suggests that parent participation is beneficial to student success”. Participation of parents in school decision making such as through school councils, is claimed as creating a sense of shared responsibility in the school community (Goos et al., 2002, p. 46), which is empowering for families (Epstein, 1995), in ways that support positive educational outcomes for individual students and schools (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Golby, 2005).

The introduction of school councils has formed a prominent part of school restructuring initiatives in Canada, the United States, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Australia (Malen & Ogawa, 1992; Mohrman, Wohlstetter & Associates, 1994; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Whitty et al., 1998; World Bank, 2008). Britain’s Blair White Paper, Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils (Blair, 2005), and America’s No Child Left Behind legislation (United States of America Congress, 2001) included provisions for increased participation by parents and the local community in decision-making processes in schools. Several other countries in regions including North America, Scandinavia and a number of European countries, have similar parent participation policies (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003).

School councils are composed of representatives drawn from some or all of the differing stakeholder groups, being parents, school staff, administrators, officials, students and members of the community, and may be given decision-making powers in various areas of responsibility. The differing ways in which parents might participate in school decision making also involve differing levels of responsibility and autonomy. As discussed in Chapter 2, these differing degrees of autonomy make
further distinctions within this broad category of parent participation necessary, and it is these distinctions that frame the discussions in this thesis.

School councils in Australia

In 2008 in Australia the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) reported that “in most states and territories, School Councils or representative Boards have been developed to provide a community input at the local government school level” (ACER, 2008, p. 31). The establishment of school councils as a way of enabling parents to participate in decision-making processes in Australian schooling has been publicly advocated over a number of years. In an early article supporting increased parental participation in school councils, Warren Johnston, then president of the Federation of Parent and Citizens Associations of NSW wrote in a 1993 newsletter that “participation means empowerment” (Johnson, 1993, p. 28), linking participation to an active role in school decision-making processes. Johnson supported this claim by stating, “compelling reasons for parent participation are to be found in the considerable body of research which conclusively shows that parent participation in education processes results in improvements in children’s learning” (1993, p. 28). Ten years later, the New South Wales Director General for Education and Training, Jan McClelland, informed the NSW Parents and Citizens Association’s annual conference “Children do better at school and stay in education longer if parents are actively involved in school decision making” (McClelland, 2003). Different ministers of education, both state and federal, and from both major political parties in Australia, have also expressed support for this participation of parents in schools (Free, 1995; Kirner, 1982; Nelson, 2004a, 2004b).

The most recent support for parent participation in Australia has come from the Howard (Liberal) Australian Federal Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) in its development of the draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a). The recently elected Australian Rudd (Labour) government has also indicated support for “building better partnerships between schools, parents and the community”, announcing the establishment of a Family-
School and Community Partnership Bureau (Gillard, 2008). The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework states:

An inclusive approach to school decision-making and parental involvement creates a sense of shared responsibility among parents, community members, teachers and administrators. In turn, shared responsibility:

- ensures that parents’ values and interests are heard and respected; and
- makes the school more accountable to its community.

(DEST, 2004a, p. 8)

The research focus

Original research

This research began its life with the intention to investigate the role and experiences of parents as members of school councils in schools in New South Wales. With a large body of research literature indicating the many benefits of the involvement of parents in their children’s schooling and its inclusion in policies and practices in many countries, the positive nature of the contributions of this and other forms of parent involvement was taken for granted. Like much of the literature, this research accepted the concept of parent participation in school decision making, though unlike this literature, questioned the efficacy and suitability of school councils as a way of enabling this parental participation in decisions in their children’s schooling. The investigation of the role and experiences of parents as members was designed to explore the motivations, interests, achievements, benefits and challenges of school council membership for these parents.

The challenge

Despite claims and advocacy in support of parental participation in the decision-making processes of their children’s schools, a number of issues arose during the early stages of the research that further challenged the acceptance of school councils as a natural or commonsense construct. These issues were initially based on concerns raised in some of the research literature, in particular in research by Jordan et al.
(2002) and Birenbaum-Carmeli (1999) around the depth of the knowledge base and the equity and social justice considerations in relation to the differing formations of school councils. The same concerns became evident in the early interviews with parent participants. These concerns resulted in the constitution of a more urgent question, focusing on the very construct of school councils and its apparent under-theorised acceptance as a natural formation of parent involvement and participation in their children’s schools.

Educational efficacy
In 1991 Epstein and Dauber (p. 292) cautioned that in relation to parent involvement in their children’s education, “most practices have not yet been formally evaluated”. Epstein reiterated this warning in 2000, stating that different practices of parent involvement were likely to produce different results, and that the results and efficacy of each element or type of involvement would need to be investigated (Epstein & Sanders, 2000, pp. 285-306). As the author of one of the seminal and most “widely used” (Mattingly et al., 2002, p. 550) typologies of parental involvement, applied in developing the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a), Epstein’s indication of the need for further research is significant, and indicates the status of this typology as observational and descriptive of activity rather than evidence-based.

In exploring the wider parent involvement literature and critiques of the research it is evident that there is little evidence to support claims of educational benefits for students arising from the specific form of parental participation in school councils. The research base linking parent participation in school decision making processes has been described in reviews and meta-analyses of the research as “thin” (Boethel, 2003, p. vi), “minimal” (Caldwell, 1998), “far from compelling” (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a, p. 235), “not very encouraging” (Lingard et al., 2002, p. 26) and “sparse” (McKenna & Willms, 1998, p. 30). In their review of the influence of school councils on school and classroom practice, Parker and Leithwood (2000) concluded:
School councils are a prominent feature of most school restructuring initiatives, despite surprisingly little evidence about their contribution to school improvement (p. 101).

There has also been criticism of the rigor of research across the field of parent involvement, and the quality of its representation in the literature (Baker & Soden, 2005; Boethel, 2003; Carter, 2002; Finn, 1998; Hess Jr., 1996; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a, 1998b; Malen, 1999; Malen, Ogawa & Kranz, 1990; Mattingly et al., 2002). These criticisms are further elaborated in Chapter 5, which investigates the role of pedagogical discourse in the construction of parent participation in the form of school councils.

Equity and social justice issues
Although issues of pedagogical efficacy might be considered primary in determining the adoption of pedagogical practices, issues of equity and social justice are also highly important in the provision of educational services in the community (Apple, 2006; Apple & Beane, 1999; Borg & Mayo, 2001; Connell, 1998; Crozier, 1997; Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1962; Dodd, 1998; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Kemmis, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Lingard, 2000b; New London Group, 1996; Verhoeven & Van Heddegem, 1999). A number of researchers have identified concerns around these issues in applying parental participatory models of school management and governance in schools (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Blackmore, 1999a, 2000; Mills & Gale, 2004; Whitty et al., 1998). Issues of equity and social justice are raised throughout this thesis in relation to the differing constructions of school councils.

Participants’ concerns
Concerns about advantage and disadvantage in school councils were also raised by the experiences of some of the early research participants. These participants noted an inequitable representation of the different interests of the school community within councils. One participant spoke of clear divisions within the council based on the financial support offered by a particular family. Another two participants
reported experiences where particular individuals had a strong influence on the decisions of the councils. From the participants’ view, these influential members of the council appeared to have what Bourdieu (1972, 1984, 1997) identified as social and cultural capital, being able to work politically to achieve their desired outcomes. Concerns were also raised about the demands of council membership removing parents from participation that had relevance for their children’s schooling.

A new research focus
These issues involving educational efficacy and the principles of equity and social justice are considered by some educationalists and researchers as being at the heart of the purposes of schools in modern societies (Apple, 2001; Apple & Beane, 1999; Blackmore, 1994, 1999a, 2000; Connell, 1993, 1998; Cope & Kalantzis, 1996; Dewey, 1916; Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1962; Kemmis, 2006; New London Group, 2000), and are central to this thesis and its investigation of the construct of school councils. Together the concerns raised, in terms of the educational efficacy and in relation to equity and social justice of school councils, prompted a turn in the research gaze from its original focus on parents’ experiences of participation in school councils to the construct of school councils itself. This new question focused on asking how parent participation in school decision making came to be constructed in this particular form, and how, despite emerging critiques and evidence, the construct has become naturalised in the context of schools in research and policy.

The research approach: A Foucaultian stance
Michel Foucault was concerned with the themes of, and relationships between, knowledge, power and the human subject. Foucault’s research methods sought to investigate and demonstrate the social origins of our knowledge and subjectivity and the consequence of these processes in our world. By analysing the regimes of thought, or discourses in a particular setting, Foucaultian research aims to identify those knowledges and ways of being that dominate, and those that have been marginalised, in the current configurations of truths about the world and about ourselves. In analysing the construction of existing (and past) truths, Foucault’s intention was the reintroduction of currently marginalised discourses into the
formative space, in order that their truths speak again and thus offering an opportunity to reconsider the marginalising effects of their exclusion:

We must define what conditions and in view of which analyses certain of them are legitimated and we must indicate which of them can never be accepted in any circumstances.

(Foucault, 1972a, p. 25-26)

Foucaultian research is therefore critical research “since it is geared towards a counter-reading of historical and social conditions and offers possibilities for social critique and renewal” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 27). Rather than focusing on issues such as sexism, racism or class distinctions, as might be the case in classical humanistic or Marxist inspired critical research, this Foucaultian, post-critical (postcritical) approach looks to the ways in which these particular knowledges and ways of being are produced in a particular situation, as truths or not.

This research takes this Foucaultian poststructural, postcritical approach, seeing the notion of school councils as discursively produced rather than representing any fundamental reality or truth about our world. The research seeks to destabilise school council’s naturalisation in the field of parent involvement in order that inequities and injustices held in place by its current formations be identified, and the possibilities opened for a reconceptualisation in this area of pedagogical policy and practice. A Foucaultian approach is therefore suited to this investigation of the construct of school councils, in that it provides methods, or principles, to identify the discourses that constitute this particular construct in pedagogical settings. These principles and methods are explored in Chapter 3, which details the Foucaultian theoretical framework that informs this study and the discussion of the application of this methodology as method in Chapter 4.

**The Foucaultian research paradigm**

For Foucault, then, all non-material “realities” in this world are socially constructed; that is, they are “of this world” (Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 131). Foucault rejected the possibilities of a hidden order of things, with pre-existing “truths”, and thus rejected
the existence of any predetermined moral order to guide our relations in the world. Since the (socially constructed) constructs of this world privilege particular knowledges and ways of being, while marginalising others, and since this marginalisation produces inequity and injustices in society for those who speak from these other spaces, and since there is no pre-existing moral order to guide us, Foucault concluded that the only moral way of being in our world is that of an ongoing questioning of “all accepted unities” (1972a, p. 29). This ongoing stance of questioning enables us to identify these injustices and open the possibilities for a more inclusive, less inequitable construct to emerge. Foucault conceptualised this moral way of being in the world as constituting, being constituted by, three stances – refusal, curiosity and innovation (1988b, p. 1).

Refusal

Foucault’s notion of refusal as a moral stance in the world is founded in an understanding of our epistemological and ontological realities as being socially constructed, and thus there being no worldly or metaphysical realities underpinning these formations. Because we tend to accept these things in this way, in our day-to-day living, these things can appear as though they are natural, essential or fundamental, and so we must consciously work to refuse this appearance in order to be able to become aware of and address the injustices these existing constructs hold in place. Foucaultian research begins with this stance of refusal, questioning “all accepted unities” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 29). This refusal is, however, not a permanent state, which would provide no space for action, as Foucault (1972a, p. 25-26) states: “They must not be rejected definitively of course, but the privilege with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction of rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized”.

The stance of refusal asks us not to accept the current state of things – current knowledges and constructs – but to always question their seeming completeness and obviousness as definitive, natural, foundational or essential truths. Foucaultian research therefore refuses, at least temporarily, the obviousness of these things in our
world, in order for us to take the next stance of curiosity. This thesis begins with a refusal of the naturalness of the construct of school councils as a form of parent participation in schools.

Curiosity
By refusing to accept anything as an essential and stable “truth” we are then able to question how the construct under our gaze came to be as it is, and why it is accepted as it is in the context of its situation (Foucault, 1988b). Curiosity asks us to interrogate these constructs, asking why they are what they are in terms of the arrangement of discourses that form and hold them as true. The purpose of this stance, or process, is to identify the dominant and, more importantly for Foucault, marginalised discourses in the formation of the construct. This process brings these injustices, and their discursive production, into the open, and aims to allow those discourses excluded by the existing formation to speak again into the situation. Foucault’s purpose here is to expose these dominant and marginalised discourses in order that their assumptions and inequities be re-exposed to the processes of contestation, in order that the possibility of a more equitable and just construct emerge. Thus this research investigates the discursive formation of school councils in recent times, asking the question of: Why this construct; in this context; at this time?

Innovation
Innovation is the result of the stances of refusal and curiosity. It is the creation of the possibility of possibilities for renewal (Foucault, 1988b). The ways in which these discourses come together or reconstruct, in the new context created by the disturbance of current arrangements in the current context of their disturbance, is dependent on the discursive dominances, or arrangements of power, in the context of re-formation. Importantly, these new arrangements of power cannot be predicted, in that the ways in which these new arrangements form is the result of their recontestation in the future, rather than in a static (and thus known) present. The outcome of this process cannot, therefore, be predicted prior to its new formation. (This relationship between knowledge, power and discourse is explored in depth in Chapter 3.)
Although unpredictable, Foucault’s intention was always to reactivate those marginalised discourses in existing orders, and thus to open opportunities for addressing disadvantage, marginalisation and exclusions that arise for individuals as the result of currently accepted constructs of our worlds. Thus the critical (or postcritical) nature of Foucaultian research. This thesis attempts to initiate this innovation by including a consideration of some of the effects of these current marginalisations and exclusions. In keeping with Foucault’s theoretical framework, however, the thesis stops short of offering specific suggestions for future reconstructions in this field, but instead provides some guiding principles based on the considerations identified by this thesis.

**An ongoing process**

Any new formation that emerges contains the same potential for injustice as existing constructs, due to its own inclusions and exclusions. Since all accepted constructs remain in a state of ongoing reformation as they are challenged by, and resist challenges by, the discourses in their context, Foucault proposed the need for an ongoing stance of refusal and curiosity towards the present. Thus, a Foucaultian investigation is necessarily seen not as a finished product but as an opening of possibilities, a “game opening” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 85), and part of an ongoing process of consideration and reconsideration.

Foucault’s purpose in such investigations was always to expose the discursive formations of injustice, thus offering an opportunity for these injustices to be addressed through a reconceptualisation of the constructs that hold them in place. That is, the aim is to problematise existing knowledges in order to address inequities and injustice. With its central concerns based around the potential inequitable and marginalising effects of the constructs of our society, Foucaultian theory is therefore suited to questions that form the focus of this research. This thesis, therefore, represents a Foucaultian (poststructural) discourse analysis of a single construct - that of school councils. As has already been indicated, however, this term is itself problematic, with the differing formations of parent participation in their children’s schooling forming part of this investigation.
The Thesis

Guided by the research question which asks why the construct of school councils exists as a taken-for-granted truth in the field of parent involvement in schools, this thesis presents the findings of a Foucaultian-inspired investigation of the construct of school councils as a form of parent participation in their children’s education. The thesis details a genealogical exploration of the dominant ways identified by this research in which this participation in school councils is constructed, and develops a critical consideration of this construct in the context of modern schooling. The thesis therefore presents a theorisation of parent participation in their children’s education in the form of school councils. This research is based around an analysis of documentary evidence, and draws on the experiences of a small number of parent school council members to illustrate the constructions of these subjectivities in the context of school councils.

Research questions

Inspired by a Foucaultian approach, the aim of the research is to question the formation of the construct of school councils in order to identify the dominant discourses of its production, and issues of inequity or injustice that the construct may produce. By emphasising these issues from a Foucaultian poststructural stance, the thesis aims not to expose and explore specific issues of equity or social justice, such as those based around race, culture or gender, but to expose the ways in which any marginalising effects, often experienced around these issues of identity, are formed or held in place within, and by, this particular construction of parent involvement and participation. In addressing the research question, this research therefore investigates the following contributing questions:

1. What are the discursive arrangements that have produced school councils as a form of parent participation in their children’s education?
2. In particular, what are the equity and social justice considerations of these constructions of school councils?
3. What are the implications of these constructions of school councils for the project of schooling in modern Western societies?
4. What considerations can be identified for the process of reconceptualisation in the field of family-school partnerships?

**Thesis structure**

The presentation of the research in this thesis reflects the research approach, which is structured around Foucault’s three moral stances of refusal, curiosity and innovation. The particular approach of this research results in a format that, while including all the aspects of a traditional thesis, presents these elements as part of its own discursive construction as poststructural research. The thesis is therefore presented in four parts, based on these moral stances as applied in this investigation of the construction of school councils (Table 1-2).

**Section I - Introduction**

The first section of this thesis, which includes this chapter (Chapter 1) and the following (Chapter 2), provides an orientation to the field of inquiry and the approach of this research. Chapter 1 has introduced the field of parent involvement and the role of school councils as a form of parent participation in their children’s schooling. Chapter 2 introduces the Dewian understanding of the role of education in society within which this thesis is situated, and situates the role of family-school partnerships in supporting the educational enterprise. In doing so, this chapter also introduces and defines key concepts and terms in this field.

**Section II - Refusal**

The second section, containing Chapters 3 and 4, introduces the theoretical framework that forms the Foucaultian stance of refusal and the way this stance is applied in this thesis. Chapter 3 details the poststructural theoretical framework that informs the postcritical approach of this research, drawing specifically on the works of Michel Foucault. Chapter 4 then details the application of this framework in the genealogical methodology that guides this research, introducing the methods of data gathering and analysis and the ways the results of this analysis are used in informing the findings and recommendations of this thesis.
### Table 1-2 Thesis structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Foucaultian Stance</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I       | Introduction       | Chapter 1: Orientation to the thesis  
Chapter 2: Foundations of parent participation: Situating school councils in the educational landscape |
| II      | Refusal            | Chapter 3: Theoretical framework: Philosophical foundations of Foucault-inspired research  
Chapter 4: Genealogy as method |
| III     | Curiosity          | Pedagogical constructions  
Chapter 5: Pedagogic constructions of parent participation in school councils  
Political constructions  
Chapter 6: A genealogy of modern democratic discourse  
Chapter 7: Democratic constructions of parent participation in school councils  
Chapter 8: Advanced liberal constructions of parent participation in school councils |
| IV      | Innovation         | Chapter 9: Discussion and conclusion: A way Forward |
Section III - Curiosity

Chapters 5 to 8 address the discourses identified in this research as being dominant in the construction of parent participation in school councils, representing the results of this investigation, or curiosity as to how the construct of school councils came to be as it is in the field of family-school partnerships. This section is divided into two parts, with the first addressing the pedagogical (outcomes-oriented) constructions, and the second the political (or social) constructions of parent participation.

In addressing the pedagogical constructions of school councils, Chapter 5 focuses on the ways in which school councils are positioned as supporting the achievement of improved school and student outcomes. Chapter 6 introduces the dominant political formations of school councils, providing a genealogy of modern democratic and liberal discourse. The following two chapters then investigate the ways in which the participation of parents in the decision-making processes in schools as citizens is constructed in the social democratic and representative (Chapter 7) and neoliberal (Chapter 8) constructions of school councils. As such these four chapters represent the stance of curiosity, asking how this construct (of school councils) came to be accepted in the formations in which it appears in modern schooling. Thus, these four chapters represent the findings and discussion of this research.

The reliance of these four chapters on the research literature for their data and discussion means that the traditional literature review is integrated into these chapters. Chapter 5, which addresses the pedagogical construction of school councils, introduces much of this literature as part of its critical considerations of this particular formation of school councils, though literature relating to the differing constructions of school councils (discourses) is presented within each specific chapter. The discussions in these four chapters also present the data gathered from policy documentation and the participant interviews as part of this research in each chapter’s considerations of the implications of each discursive construction of school councils. These chapters thus represent an integrated presentation of the data and its analysis, with the literature both reviewed, as part of the data presented in each
chapter, and drawn on in discussing the findings of this research in terms of each
discursive construction of school councils.

Section IV - Innovation
The final section of the thesis (Chapter 9) represents the beginning of the processes
of innovation, considering the implications of the findings of this research and
offering the conclusions in relation to the possibilities and processes of
reconceptualisation in the field of family-school partnerships. In his own research,
Foucault would not take part in predictions about the future, believing that the
discursive production of reality was situated in the moment of its production, and
thus the exact formulation that emerges from the contestations of discourse could not
be predicted in advance. Instead, Foucaultian research is intended to present things as
they are, in a genealogical description of their existence (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Foucault's intentions were always to promote an opening of possibilities, so that
injustices embedded within, and held in place by, existing constructs might be re-
exposed and potentially addressed. Although this thesis is in agreement with the
principle of this position, it does also explicitly aim to re-establish discourses of
equity and social justice in this field, though decisions about what specifically
constitutes equity and social justice remain matters to be resolved in the specific
(discursive) situation. The discussions and recommendations in this chapter represent
an opening move in the processes of reconceptualisation in this field, rather than
final solutions to the issues identified in the research. The Foucaultian stances of
refusal, curiosity and innovation form an ongoing process and project, aiming not for
a specific perfection but for an ongoing awareness of how we, and the constructs we
accept as taken for granted, affect others. It is a process that asks us to readdress
these effects as we become aware of them in our worlds. In that way Foucaultian
inspired research becomes an active, constructive and practical undertaking in the
world.

While maintaining its Foucaultian foundations in not attempting to identify
fundamental structures or essential formations to which we should orient our efforts
this final chapter does provide specific considerations, based on the findings of this research, in terms of the ways in which this reconceptualisation process might be facilitated in the project of developing ways in which families and schools might be supported in achieving their aims of the betterment of the individual and the betterment of society. In this way, this thesis is itself discursive, exerting “power” (as power/knowledge) into the construction of reality. These aims are discussed further in Chapter 2.

Conclusion

This research therefore provides an analysis of the discursive constructions of school councils based on an analysis of policy documents, the research literature that supports the development of these policies, and the political advocacy for parent participation in school decision-making processes, and illustrated in the experiences of the research participants as members of school councils (the empirical work of this research). The thesis provides a critique of the research evidence supporting each discourse within the construction of school councils, and a critical analysis, reintroducing the discourses of equity and social justice into these considerations (the critical work of this thesis). In doing so, the thesis aims to open the possibilities for a reconceptualisation of parent involvement and participation in children’s education (the theoretical work of this thesis). The thesis concludes by providing a suggested way forward in reconceptualisation within the field of family-school partnerships that is embedded in Dewian notions of education for the betterment of the individual and the betterment of their society, notions that inform and frame this research (the practical work of this thesis). As such, the thesis is therefore discursive in itself, in that it reintroduces these notions (of effective, equitable and socially just purposes) into considerations of the provision of education in modern society (the discursive work of this thesis). The following chapter begins this process by establishing the context of school councils and this research within the modern schooling environment.
Chapter 2

Foundations of parent participation:
Situating school councils in the educational landscape

If it were possible to define generally the mission of education, it could be said that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life.

(New London Group, 2000, p. 9)

Introduction: The purposes of education
Philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) envisioned the purposes of education in modern democratic societies as being for the good of the individual and for the good of society (Dewey, 1916; Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1962). Education thus becomes both a private and public good, within the framework of the greater good of all. Dewey’s philosophy proposes issues of equity and social justice as integral in the educational project of improving individuals’ lives and the overall improvement of society (Kemmis, 2006). In Dewian thought, these issues are given similar priority to issues of pedagogical efficacy in informing the formation and functioning of the educational environment of schools. Issues of equity and social justice thus become integral to the purposes of public institutions in society, such as schools.

The New London Group (2000, p. 9) provided a similar view of the mission of education as being “to ensure all students benefit” (my emphasis), and on “learning ways that allow them to participate fully in [the] public, community and economic life of their society”. To this could also be added personal lives, in acknowledgement that the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values has a personal dimension in contributing to the quality of an individual’s life.

Like Dewey, the New London Group express a notion of schooling in society that sees the improvement of the lives of individuals and society as interdependent. It is
this emphasis on the maintenance of equity and social justice that ensures the rights and freedoms of all individuals, and thus our own freedoms are also ensured and maintained. (These notions are explored further in Chapter 6.) Consequently, issues of equity and social justice become integral to the purposes of public institutions in society, such as schools.

**Education, equity and social justice**

The concepts of equity and social justice, significant in the Dewian conceptualisation of improving the lives of all students, are reflected in policies such as the Australian Ministerial Committee on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century (Adelaide Declaration) (MCEETYA, 1999) and the National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008); the New South Wales Board of Studies (NSW BOS) Statement of equity principles (NSW BOS, 2007); and embedded in New South Wales Department of Education and Training policies (NSW DET, 2007a).

The Australian Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA, 1999) lists three goals for Australian education, the first that schools should aim to “develop fully the talents and capacities of all students”; the second identifying content areas for effective schooling, and the third emphasising that “schooling should be socially just” (MCEETYA, 1999, n.p.). The first of these goals aims for the provision of quality education that enhances the lives of all students. The emphasis here is on the educational development of the individual, all individuals in the school’s care. The second goal provides the principles for the selection and development of educational content. The focus on a universality of education in the first of these goals and on social justice in the third goal emphasises the centrality of the role of schools in addressing issues of equity and social justice.

The Adelaide Declaration establishes the goals for education as being for educational outcomes for individuals that are “free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability;
and of differences arising from the students social-economic background or
geographic location” (MCEETYA, 1999). The draft of the National Declaration on
Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) proposes similar aims
for the follow-up document to the Adelaide Declaration, with the goals of education
being to support “all young Australians to become successful learners, confident
individuals and active and informed citizens” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5) supported by
the goal of “promoting equity [as] a foundation for achieving [these] goals”
(MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5). These goals embody the principles of the Dewian view of
the purposes of education (Dewey, 1916; Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1962), and those
thesis is founded. These views emphasise the need for educational provisions to be
pedagogically effective and socially just, and are similar to those of Foucault’s
emphasis on exposing the marginalising and exclusionary effects of existing
constructions in society, and form the foundations of the research in this thesis.

**Foucault, equity and social justice**

For Foucault, issues of equity and social justice were foremost, with disadvantage
and exclusion seen as resulting from the marginalisation of certain knowledges and
ways of being by the dominant constructs in our society (see Chapters 3 and 4 for
further elaboration of Foucaultian philosophy). Foucault viewed these constructs as
representing a particular arrangement of the discourses in society in the formation of
what becomes taken-for-granted, commonsense, and as truth and reality.

Rather than looking to classes or categories of discrimination, which Foucault saw as
not offering a full understanding of the complex production of these issues,
Foucaultian poststructural theory sees issues of marginalisation, disadvantage and
injustice as being produced by the ways our world is formed through discursive
action. These discursive formations, or constructs, at all times include certain
knowledges and ways of being as true, while simultaneously positioning other
knowledges and ways of being as unrecognisable as truth. As all of our everyday
social and human-made world is understood as being the product of these processes,
in any context there are, therefore, included and excluded knowledges and ways of
being. From this postcritical view, it is the marginalisation of these other knowledges and ways of being that produces inequity, disadvantage and social injustice.

As discursively produced constructs, equity and social justice also represent the arrangements of power at their moment of emergence as concepts. In Foucault’s conceptualisation, therefore, notions of equity and social justice become contextual and temporal. Thus, equity and social justice can only be achieved through the investigation of these constructs of the world in the present moment, in order to identify what knowledges and ways of being are included (and excluded), and thus exposing these discursively produced knowledges to recontestation by other discourses in the context of consideration and production. That is, equity and social justice become the task of an ongoing process, rather than representing pre-existing concepts (essentialism) or a teleological process of working towards an ideal state. Foucaultian inspired poststructural research therefore looks to the discursive production of truths in order to understand the production of injustice.

Foucaultian research aims to disrupt the balances of power that create and hold these constructs and thus injustices in place, in order that new constructs that are more inclusive of other truths and ways of being might emerge (O’Farrell, 2005). Each new reconstruction, however, is itself formed by a particular arrangement of the discourses in its environment, and as such is produced by and produces its own inclusions and exclusions. Equity and social justice are therefore seen as implying an ongoing moral project with the aim of continually identifying those marginalised or excluded by existing constructs, processes and arrangements.

For Marxism, equity was to be ensured by the eradication of class difference through the communal ownership of the means of production, and the equal distribution of the results of individual labour and entrepreneurial action. In this way, all citizens are seen as being equal. Equity was embodied in the notion of equal ownership and provision of resources. Critics noted that this failed to address issues of equity where there was greater need (for example see Robert Tucker’s characterisation of Marxist theory as having an “aversion to justice” (Tucker, 1969, p. 36)), and did not
sufficiently reward greater effort. Thus Marxism gave insufficient attention to individual differences, reducing incentives for the individual initiative and the entrepreneurship considered by liberal capitalistic philosophies as necessary to ensure the provision of improved standards of living for all citizens.

Rather than focusing attention on the equal distribution of resources, neoliberal theories articulate equity to mean the equal availability of resources, where all citizens can, in theory, benefit more or less depending on their individual efforts – the concepts of self-maximisation and the level playing field (see Chapter 8). Here, equity is seen as the availability of an equal right and opportunity for individuals to engage in the processes of self-maximisation, with an emphasis on the competitive acquisition of resources and market forces as our raison d’être. In the neoliberal view, socially democratic notions of welfare are seen as distorting the level playing field, limiting access to the full benefit of individual efforts, and thus acting unjustly – a rearticulation of the concept of injustice. Instead, in neoliberal discourse, individual needs form an area of demand that the market will then address in its effort to maintain stability, either economic or social – the concept of a hidden hand in the market – and thus social justice is rearticulated to a market-based provision in meeting the demands of those in society.

In education, the notions of equity and social justice suggest ways of thinking about schools and pedagogy that aim to improve the lives of individuals and their society through an emphasis on meeting the educational needs of all students in our schools. In this view, equity is conceptualised as implying principles of fairness (or justice) in terms of access to the benefits of society. This is expressed in the understanding of the purposes of education of the New London Group already cited, that “all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (New London Group, 2000, p. 9). In this understanding, equity, as conceptualised as process, is the result of the actions of all citizens, and prioritises active intervention in order to promote these aims.
This conceptualisation of the role of education in society, informed by more recent poststructural, postcritical understandings of the complex nature of disadvantage and marginalisation, are reflected in the works of international educational researchers cited in this thesis, such as Michael Apple, and of Australian researchers such as Stephen Kemmis, Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope, Bob Connell, Bob Lingard, and Jill Blackmore. These writers emphasise the social purposes of education in building a more equitable society, with an emphasis on the individual within, and as part of, their context. These principles form the particular way of understanding the project of schooling in society in which the work of this thesis is embedded.

The approach of this thesis is therefore located in the field of socio-cultural theory, informed by Dewian notions of the purposes of education in modern democratic society, and applying a Foucaultian inspired poststructural, postcritical, stance that, while acknowledging issues of culture including class, race, and gender as significant, looks to their sources of production as marginalised ways of being in identifying issues of disadvantage and injustice. In the pedagogical environment, with the aims of providing improved possibilities for individuals to participate in the opportunities and benefits of society, Foucault’s notions of ongoing evaluation in terms of the constructs around us provides a way of identifying and addressing the injustices of marginalisation and exclusion that result in the inequitable provision of educational opportunity and benefit. In investigating the construct of school councils as a form of family-schools partnership, this research therefore emphasises a pedagogical and sociological focus rather than a managerial focus. The research asks questions about the formation of this construct in the pedagogical environment of schools in terms of a socially democratic perspective of the purposes of schooling in our society, with an emphasis on issues of equity and social justice.

**Families and parents**

In the field of family-school partnerships, in which the construct of school councils is situated, the meanings applied to the terms family and parent become significant. The widely used terms parent involvement and parent participation (introduced in Chapter 1 and specifically defined later in this chapter) name the parent as the
subject, whereas the term family-schools partnership (also defined later) broadens this to a potentially wider group of people in the child’s life. The meanings of these terms in relation to these involvement, participation and partnership practices are discussed first.

The concepts of parent and family are under review at this moment in time, with their culturally based meanings requiring redefinition in new times (Hall, 1996) of an increasingly diverse society and a globalised world (Robinson & Diaz, 2006). The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a, p. 14) identifies this need, quoting at length Wise (2003) to state:

There is abundant evidence that Australian families are undergoing rapid change. The diversity of families is evident in the growth of non-traditional family structures. Family structure can be defined in terms of parents’ relationships to children in the household (for example, biological or non-biological), parents’ marital status and relationships history (for example, divorced, separated, remarried), the number of parents in the family, and parents’ sexual orientation.


In terms of the involvement of families in schools, these broader definitions of parent and family allow for a more inclusive practice that better reflects the family and cultural lives of the child. In terms of involvement in activities in schools, care is required in applying any definition, with legal guidelines establishing who is and who is not permitted to have access to the child. In some circumstances, such as in court-ordered access restrictions, this may include those who identify as a parent of a child or as members of their family. Permission for involvement by non-immediate family members in school activities may also be required from children’s legal guardians. In terms of home-based or outside-school activities, however, the definition provided in the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a, p. 14) does embrace those in parental or family relationship with the child.
Where the involvement of families is related to decision making in their child’s education (DEST, 2004a, pp. 7, 8, 11) there is some confusion in the research and policy literature. The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a), for example, states: “Parents are entitled to be consulted and allowed to participate in decisions concerning their own children” (DEST, 2004a, p. 8). Parents are defined in the draft framework as including “… all types of parental figures” (DEST, 2004a, p. 14). However, where decisions relate to a particular child, family or parent can refer only to a specific, limited, group of people who hold positions of legal guardianship or professional (legal) jurisdiction in making such decisions. Definitions of family as including a broader range of people in relationship with the child are therefore limited with regard to participation in decision making.

In discussing decision-making roles, such as those in school councils, the use in this thesis of the term family or parent is therefore problematic. When decisions are being made for an individual child, the term includes only those in legal positions to participate in such decisions. However, in the context of a school council, which in some definitions includes members from the wider community, these terms may be used more broadly. In this thesis, when discussing school councils, the definition of family is in keeping with the more inclusive definition of Wise (2003) provided in the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (Wise, 2003, cited in DEST, 2004a) introduced earlier. That is, within the more broadly defined notions of families as they exist in modern society.

**Parent involvement in schools**

Involving parents in schools in recent times has been advocated by school reformers and scholars who have identified the educational benefits of linking the home and school environments. These benefits have been widely researched, and have been reviewed in the “often cited” (Mattingly et al., 2002, p. 549) series of publications by Anne Henderson and co-authors including The evidence grows (Henderson & Berla, 1981), The evidence continues to grow: Parent involvement improves student achievement (Henderson, 1987), A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994), A new wave of evidence: The
impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), and The case for parent leadership (Henderson, et al., 2004). Considered “the most comprehensive survey of the research” (McConchie, 2004, p. 14), Henderson’s reports identify practices of parent involvement as improving children’s academic performance, social skills, and emotional development as well as producing benefits for parents, class teachers, other students and the broader school community. In summarising the literature, Henderson and Mapp (2002, p. 73) conclude:

When families of all backgrounds are engaged in their children’s learning, their children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and pursue higher education.

(Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 73)

The large number of studies reporting benefits from parent involvement programs and practices in schools has led to an emerging body of reviews and meta-analyses, all concluding that some parent involvement practices offer educationally significant advantages, particularly for the children of involved parents (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000; Baker & Soden, 1997, 2005; Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Fan & Chen, 2001; Finn, 1998; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a, 1998b; Mattingly et al., 2002; McKeand, 2003). The benefits of parent involvement are reported as continuing through and beyond the completion of high school (Carter, 2002; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993a, 1993b; Trusty, 1999). Some of these reviews, however, also note emerging concerns about the quality of research in this field of inquiry, and the need for the development of a more sound theoretical foundation, based on a rigorously established knowledge base, to inform future policy and practice in schools (Jordan et al., 2002).

Some aspects of parent involvement programs might be criticised as paternalistic, with schools offering parenting lessons to families for example (Epstein, 1995). However, the parent involvement vision of the Chicago school reforms was based on research that attributed the failure of some schools to cultural incongruities between
the largely middle-class formation of the schooling system and the differing cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of the children (Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1998).

This sociological view proposes bringing these two sites (schools and home) of cultural reproduction together, in order that families and schools work together as partners in meeting the needs and interests of children from all backgrounds, rather than acting as separate forces in the children’s world. The intention here was not so much paternalistic as oriented to informing schools about the different needs, interests, and ways of being of these students and their families, so that programs might be structured to better fit with these children. As well as Henderson’s regular reviews of the parent involvement and participation literature (see previous chapter), the publications of Joyce Epstein and colleagues have provided a significant volume of research and provided theorisation in this field (see for example Epstein, 1987a, 1987b, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1995, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, Croates, Salinas & Simon, 1997; Epstein, Herrick & Coates, 1996; Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Epstein et al., 2002; Epstein, Williams & Jansorn, 2004).

**Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres**

The notion of the need for greater integration of the differing fields of influence on the child was elaborated in the mid-1980s and 1990s by educational researcher Joyce Epstein. Epstein initially proposed a theory of overlapping spheres (Epstein, 1987a), with the contexts of family, school and community intersecting around the child (see Figure 2-1). These spheres provide the child with different knowledges and understandings, values and attitudes that inform their choices, expectations and their ways of being-in-the-world. That is, together these spheres provide the epistemological and ontological messages that inform children’s understandings of themselves and their worlds. Similar to the more complex conceptualisation of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1994) ecological theory, which places the family at the centre of a series of concentric circles of community, national and global influences, Epstein’s model situated the role of the family as highly significant in the child’s development.
In Epstein’s model the three spheres of home, school and community intersect around the child, forming the main sources of influence for the child’s development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes and sense of self. Epstein theorised that when the child’s environments are close to each other, the congruence between these worlds affords the child the ability to work in greater harmony within the different environments, and thus be able to more readily access the resources provided. Epstein’s theory, therefore, has similarities with Bourdieu’s notions of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977). Where the child is socially and culturally comfortable, that is where they know “the rules of the game”, they are able to more effectively engage in the processes, or transact (Bourdieu, 1997).

Figure 2-1. Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres

As the main influence prior to and following a child’s entering school, the family, is regarded by Epstein (1987a) as central in the child’s education, and a partnership between these two elements or sites and schools is therefore essential for schooling success. Yet as a construct of the dominant society, schools may represent a sphere that has little overlap with the child or their family. Increasing parent involvement in children’s schooling brings these two spheres of influence together, facilitating a
more consistent approach in which both spheres can better meet the child’s needs. Greater consistency between the two spheres also increases the child’s ability to access (transact) the resources of the school environment.

Conversely, where these spheres have little overlap the possibility of confusing or contradictory messages and expectations is increased, and the child’s pathway potentially more difficult to traverse. For example, when schools attempt to impose an “alien culture” (Gilbert & Dewar, 1995, p. 13) on children from different backgrounds these children and their families can experience a greater sense of alienation (Corrie & Maloney, 1998). The effect of attempts by the school to alter the child’s ways of being can be “assaultive” on the child’s sense of self, their families and their cultures (Clark, DeWolf & Clark, 1992, p. 4). Instead, “when parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work” (Epstein, 1995, p. 701).

Such partnership initiatives are considered particularly important for children from non-dominant cultural backgrounds as a way of bringing the spheres together around the child. Epstein (1987a) proposed that by increasing parent involvement in educational practice, the overlap between the spheres of home and school becomes greater, promoting more equitable and socially just educational outcomes. School practices of involving parents from differing cultures have been identified as increasing schools’ and families’ understandings of each other, promoting the development of more inclusive teaching practices and leading to improving results for the students involved (Davis, 1995; Desimone, 1999; Griffith, 1996a, 1996b; Hickcox, 1998). Research in Australia has similarly shown that when schools included the families and cultural knowledges of students from indigenous and other cultural backgrounds, student engagement in schools increased and their outcomes improved (Coleman, Collinge & Tabin, 1996; Goos et al., 2002; Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington & Richer, 1999; Kalantzis, Gurney & Cope, 1992).

Although the effects of parent involvement for students have been identified by some researchers as being greater for those from lower socio-economic, disadvantaged and
marginalised backgrounds (Bernhard, Friere, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Villa, 1998; Desimone, 1999; Douville, 2000), improvements in student outcomes are evident irrespective of the family’s socio-economic status, race, employment, or marital status (Henderson, 1995; Singh et al., 1995; Snodgrass, 1991; Thorkildsen & Scott Stein, 1998). Research also indicates the gender of either student or parent appears not to be relevant to the benefits for students or their families (Carter 2002; Keith et al., 1998; Shaver & Walls, 1998). Overall, existing research documents potential benefits for all children in the introduction of a range of parent involvement practices.

As a pedagogical process, therefore, parent involvement supports the academic efficacy of the educational process, and also contributes to addressing issues of equity and social justice in society. These dual benefits lend support to assertions that “family involvement in schools is therefore central to high quality education; it is part of the core business of schools” (DEST, 2004a, p. 3). A number of central concepts inform this understanding of parent involvement and participation in their children’s education.

**Key concepts in the field of parent involvement and participation**

A number of terms that are central to discussions in the field of family-school partnerships require discussion and definition in this thesis. Many of these terms are used inconsistently within the literature. This inconsistent application of widely used terms presents a major difficulty in the building of a rigorously established theory base on which to develop policies and practices in this area in schools (Baker & Soden, 2005; de Carvalho, 2001; Jordan et al., 2002). Applying the definitions of parent involvement and parent participation from Chapter 1, parent involvement is taken as referring to activities in which parents support their children’s education at home and in schools. Parent participation is used to refer specifically to active decision-making roles for parents in schools. However, these terms require further elaboration in developing an understanding of the positioning of school councils in the parent involvement landscape.
The following discussion identifies differing conceptualisations of the main terms referring to parent activity in supporting children’s education used in this research. Within these discussions, theoretical frameworks that provide useful ways of clarifying or problematising the usage of these terms are introduced. In doing so, the distinctions and definitions applied in this thesis are developed.

**Parent involvement**

The term parent involvement is strongly associated with the work of Henderson cited earlier (Henderson, 1987; Henderson, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1981, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson et al., 2004), and with Epstein’s typologies of parental involvement activities (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) (Figure 2-2). In Australia, these practices have traditionally involved parents in assisting at home, in the classroom or in the wider school environment (Beare, 1984).

In elaborating on the nature of the home-school overlap (see Figure 2-1), Epstein sought to identify the different forms or types of parent involvement in children’s education. Based on the various ways that parents were active at home and in schools in supporting their children’s learning, Epstein proposed a typology or framework (Epstein, 1995) which described these different types of involvement (see Figure 2-2 & Table 2-1). Epstein described the purposes of the typology as being to:

help[s] educators develop more comprehensive programs of school and family partnerships and also help[s] researchers locate their questions and results in ways that inform and improve practice.

(Epstein, 1995, p. 704)

Although other authors have offered alternative categorisations of parent involvement (see for example Cervone & O’Leary, 1982; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Hannon & Welch, 1993; Hester, 1989; Jowett & Baginsky, 1988; Russell, 1991; Williams & Chavkin 1989), it is Epstein’s work that is most widely recognised in the literature (Baker & Soden, 2005).
**Epstein’s typology of parent involvement**

From an initial four categories of involvement, basic obligations, school-to-home communications, parent involvement at school, and parent involvement in learning activities at home (Epstein, 1987a), Epstein expanded the typology to include a fifth form, parent involvement in governance and advocacy (Epstein, 1988), and then a sixth, collaborating with the community (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Some of the terms that formed this typology were reviewed again in 1995, and it is this final list of six that forms Epstein’s framework of six types of involvement (Epstein, 1995, p. 713). This final, and widely used, framework and Epstein’s definitions for each type of involvement is summarised in Figure 2-2.

In Epstein’s categorisation, then, the term parent involvement is used to refer to all forms of activity, at home and in schools as well as in the wider community, where parents act in ways that support their child’s educational development and their social, emotional, and physical well-being. Epstein’s typology is structured along a continuum from at-home involvement with one’s own children through increasing interactions between school and home, to interactions with the wider community in supporting children’s educational development. Epstein made no implicit ranking of the importance or effectiveness of these types of involvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

The full meaning of the term parent involvement is, however, uncertain, with “differing perceptions of activities, relationships, and roles” (Scribner, Young & Pedroza, 1999, p. 41) being classified as being, or not being, parent involvement across the literature. Parents and teachers tend to describe different sets of activities that, to them, represent parent involvement. Teachers are identified in research as mostly considering parent involvement to refer to activities in the school, “school events, meetings, workshops, and governance activities, and working as teacher aides, tutors, and school advocates within the larger school community” (Boethel, 2003, p. 39). Parents, on the other hand, identify informal activities at home “as the most important parent contributions to children’s success in school” (Boethel, 2003, p. 39) and include monitoring homework, reading and listening, arranging for tutorial
help, as well as “providing nurturance, instilling cultural values” (Boethel, 2003, p. 39) in their descriptions of parent involvement activities.

Figure 2-2. Synopsis of Epstein’s (1995) Framework of Six Types of Parent Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Type of Involvement</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>refers to the roles of families in “establish[ing] home environments to support children as students” (Epstein, 1995, p. 713), and includes meeting the child’s physical, social and emotional needs, as well as child raising and access to parent training and support services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>includes the development of effective two-way communication processes between home and school “about school programs and children’s progress” (Epstein, 1995, p. 713).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>where schools “recruit and organise parent help and support” (Epstein, 1995, p. 713). In this type of involvement, parents are assistants and act under the direction and supervision of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Learning at home</td>
<td>This form also involves parents acting under the guidance of the school in activities “to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning” (Epstein, 1995, p. 713).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>is described by Epstein as to “include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives” (Epstein, 1995, p. 714) and as “a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals” (Epstein, 1995, p. 715). Epstein includes Parent-Teacher Organisations (PTOs); advisory councils; membership of curriculum, safety and personnel committees; parent leadership and participation; district level councils and election as school representatives (Epstein, 1995, p. 714).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Collaborating with the community</td>
<td>where the aim is to “identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning and development” (Epstein, 1995, p. 714).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent participation

An earlier Australian definition describes parental participation in schools as referring to activities where parents make “constructive suggestions on school policy; through P & C Associations; through consultative committees; and through proactive school initiatives” (Department of Secondary Education, Queensland, 1987, p. 13). (P & C Associations are the Parents and Citizens organisations in Australian schools for parent involvement. Their activities relate more to school support and a small amount of non-core decision making, such as the selection of a school uniform, and advocacy input into school policies). In this definition, participation appears to refer to support and advocacy roles, where power remains with school staff and state education bureaucracies.

The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) lists participation in decision making as a separate form of parental involvement (see Table 2-1), describing participation in the following way:

Families’ time, energy and expertise can support learning and school programs in many ways. This may involve family members:

- working with students on learning activities in classrooms,
- participating in other school activities outside the classroom, or
- participating in activities outside the school itself.

(DEST, 2004a, p. 8)

These activities listed as participation in the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) are similar to those described as volunteering by Epstein (1995). Again, power remains with school staff and state education bureaucracies. Participation is defined differently by others in the field of parent involvement to mean “decision making”.

In the 1990s, the then president of the Federation of Parent and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, Warren Johnson, made a passionate plea for a new understanding of the terms parent involvement and parent participation. Johnson
(1993) asserted, “participation’ means ‘partnership’ … and is “characterised by a real and effective sharing in decision making” (Johnson, 1993, p. 28). In Johnson’s definition, “participation, in contrast with involvement, formulates or alters policies, guidelines and practices which directly influence the experiences children have at school” (Johnson, 1993, p. 28).

A participative role for parents in decision making in schools has been included in many other typologies. These typologies list different activities of parent input into school decision-making processes, from advisory in a consultative or advocacy capacity, as a full partner in particular areas of decision making as a collaborative process, through to governance roles, including:

- a form of “at school” participation (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1990)
- an “active” parental role (Hester, 1989)
- as “empowering of parents” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, reported in Jones, Burke & Picus, 2001)
- as “decision making” as a category of its own (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson et al., 2004).

Both Epstein (1995) and the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) include decision making as a distinct type of parent involvement activity. In Epstein’s parent involvement framework and the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework, this more empowered participation is referred to in the category of decision making and as separate to those described as participation (DEST, 2004a) or volunteering (Epstein, 1995). This comparison is illustrated in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1 provides a comparison of the terms used in Epstein’s and the Australian draft Family School Partnerships frameworks. The order of the different forms of partnership from the DEST framework has been altered to illustrate the similarities between these two models. The original numerical or alphabetical numbering is maintained to indicate the place of each category in the relevant typologies. This realignment in Table 2-1 demonstrates the strong similarities between the two
frameworks. These similarities are in part because the development of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework was guided by a focus question asking: “How can the Epstein classification be adapted and improved for use in Australian schools?” (McConchie, 2004, p. 11).

Table 2-1. *Comparison of Epstein’s Typology of Parent Involvement (Epstein, 1995) and the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a)*

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Parenting</td>
<td>A. Understanding of roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Communicating</td>
<td>C. Communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Volunteering</td>
<td>D. Participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learning at home</td>
<td>B. Connecting home and school learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Decision making</td>
<td>E. Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Collaborating with the community</td>
<td>F. Collaborating beyond the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. Building community and identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The term participation is applied with multiple meanings in these two frameworks. The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework is based on an understanding that “parents are entitled to be consulted and allowed to participate in decisions concerning their own children” (DEST, 2004a, p. 8). The linking of the term participation with decision-making in this statement reflects Johnson’s (1993) view of more empowered meaning for participation. However, the definition of participation in the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework indicates
a less empowered role for parents, which, it is suggested, “may involve family members:

- working with students on learning activities in classrooms,
- participating in other school activities outside the classroom, or
- participating in activities outside the school itself” (DEST, 2004a, p. 8).

These examples define activities similar to Epstein’s (1995) volunteering (see Table 2-1). Parent participation is therefore used to indicate parental participation in school decision-making processes either in reaction to their own child or as a member of an official decision-making body within the school. The terminology for these differing forms of participation, and the construction of school councils in facilitating this participation, however, require clarification.

*Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation*

The confusion over the use of the term participation in the literature is reflective of its range of possible meanings. Anderson (1999, p. 191) referred to the term participation as a “floating signifier”, having no specific meaning, and thus used and read in many differing ways. Anderson (1999) notes “reforms that call for participation have absorbed and been absorbed by – reforms that promote a variety of goals, values, and interests … often contradictory, ideologically driven and antihistorical” (p. 191). Some of these discourses of reform are identified in this thesis as influential in the formation of parent participation in schools, and the construct of school councils. Although not previously applied in the field of family schools partnerships, Sherry R. Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of citizen participation is useful in exploring these different meanings. Arnstein conceptualised participation by individuals in their community in eight levels, each with increasing citizenry power (Figure 2-3).

In the lower levels of Arnstein’s (1969) ladder, classified as nonparticipation, acceptance of the organisation’s decisions is manipulated (Level 1) or decisions and the compliance of the individual is presented as therapy (Level 2). Arnstein
suggested that this could involve participation on “rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of ‘educating’ them or engineering their support” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219). Therapy gathers participants to focus on “curing them of their pathology” (p. 5) rather than dealing with the causes of problems, such as institutionalised discrimination.

Figure 2-3. *Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation*

At the levels of tokenism, participants may be given regular information such as newsletters and policy documents (Level 3, Informing), asked to give feedback on prepared documents and policies (Level 4, Consultation) or given representative places on decision-making bodies (Level 5, Placation). This representation is tokenistic in that there is little real power to change decisions due to lack of voting numbers on these committees. These levels provide only for “empty rituals of
participation… it allows the powerholders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217).

According to Arnstein, the higher levels of citizen power include empowered input into decisions either as equals (Level 6, Partnership), as representatives of a group with designated powers of decision making (Level 7, Delegated Power), or at the level of full decision-making power (Level 8, Citizen Control). These three forms of decision making offer a more complex and specific understanding of those activities defined in Epstein’s (1995) and DEST (2004a) parent involvement frameworks by this term. This is illustrated in Table 2-2, which compares the terms of Epstein’s (1995) and DEST (2004a) frameworks with Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation.


<table>
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<tr>
<td>(Level 5) Decision-making</td>
<td>(Level 5) Decision-making</td>
<td>Partnerships (sharing of power)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Delegated power (to empowered committees)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citizen Power</td>
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<td>Citizen Control (full citizen control)</td>
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Arnstein’s framework focused on participation as a democratic notion, therefore, the categories other than that of decision making in the Epstein (1995) and DEST (2004a) frameworks do not fully correlate with Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation. There are, however, some overlaps in these other categories. Activities
such as Parenting (Epstein, 1995) might be seen as having similarities to Arnstein’s (1969) level of Therapy, and Communicating (Epstein, 1995) as similar in meaning to Arnstein’s (1969) Informing. However, these activities from Epstein’s (1995) typology would not be regarded as tokenistic or non-participatory in terms of parent involvement in their children’s education.

**Citizen power**
Like the terms parent involvement and parent participation, the meaning of parent participation in decision making in schools is also problematic, with differing activities and roles included in differing applications in research and policy documents. This research adopts Arnstein’s view of true participation, being defined by having power in decisions that affect our lives, thus defining parent participation as referring to activities where parents are included as empowered participants in decision making. By applying Arnstein’s (1969) three levels of citizen power (partnership, delegated power and citizen control) to parent participation in decision-making roles in schools, three forms of parent participation can be identified.

**Partnership**
The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) indicates an individual and family-focused emphasis in supporting increased parent participation in decision making in partnerships with schools, stating: “parents are entitled to be consulted and allowed to participate in decisions concerning their own children” (p. 8). Partnerships therefore refer to the relationship between families and schools where families are empowered participants in school-based decisions relating to their children. In defining partnerships between families and schools, the Australian draft Family-Schools Partnerships Framework quotes Bastiani (1993), describing these relationships as being characterised by:

- a sharing of power, responsibility and ownership, with each party having different roles;
- a degree of mutuality, that begins with the process of listening to each other and that incorporates responsive dialogue and “give and
take” on both sides;

- shared aims and goals based on a common understanding of the educational needs of children; and
- a commitment to joint action in which parents, students and teachers work together.

(DEST, 2004a, p. 14)

Delegated power

Arnstein’s second level in citizen control refers to participation at the level of delegated power (Level 7), where power is delegated to a group of decision makers but remains restricted by governmental policy, with the participants being unable to alter these guidelines and limitations. In schools, this delegated authority can range from minor areas of funds allocation and administration, through to policy, curriculum and employment-related matters.

It is at this (delegated authority) level that most Australian school councils operate, holding delegated authority in areas allocated by the state or private education authority (ACER, 2008; World Bank, 2008). As will be seen in the discussion of school councils throughout this thesis, the most common form of delegated management (McConchie, 2004; Parker & Leithwood, 2000), there is great variety in the degrees of responsibility and power within the delegated authority form of parent participation in school decision making. Depending on the degrees of empowerment of the council, the field of influence of decisions may be experienced by a few, many or all members of the school community (Table 2-3).

Citizen control

At Arnstein’s highest level of citizen power, Level 8 Citizen control, participants are not only able to make decisions in all areas of the organisation, they are also able to change the powers and the areas of responsibility of the organisation. This means that at this level decisions previously made by the education authority are given to the school community, with the community “in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which ‘outsiders’ may change
them” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 222). In schools, this governance would represent decision making by the school community in relation to all areas of educational and school management. In this formation of participation, school councils operate in a similar way to the board of directors of a company.

The cumbersome nature and inefficiencies of involving all members of the school professional or community bodies in all areas of decision making present a challenge for efficient and responsive management of organisations such as schools. In schools, therefore, “participation is usually of the representative kind, where a small number of parents are members of a school governing council, parent association, canteen or fund-raising committee” (McConchie, 2004, p. 3). These school councils are generally focused at the local school level, though some councils represent groups of schools or entire school districts.

**School councils**

School councils, then, are usually formed as representative decision-making bodies involving the participation of parents in decisions at the whole school level, rather than at the level of the individual family or child (McConchie, 2004; Parker & Leithwood, 2000). Most states in Australia have school councils in their schooling systems (ACER, 2008, p. 31).

The aim of the school council, as described by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training in its School Council Guidelines, is “to ensure that the whole community is involved with all the important decisions made by the school” (NSW DET, 1998, n.p.). School councils roles vary from advisory, such as in New South Wales (NSW DET, 1998), to having full decision-making powers in specified areas, and in some instances, through to full control of the educational and administrative management of the school in some independent schools and in public schools in countries such as Israel (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999).

In public schools in Australia, school councils are regulated by the state education authority, and are delegated specific areas of responsibility (ACER, 2008, p. 31). In
some states, such as New South Wales, these areas of authority are very limited, with the decisions of councils remaining as advisory to the principal in status only (NSW DET, 1998). Other Australian states have devolved decision-making responsibilities to schools across areas that include full decision-making powers. In Western Australia, for example, school councils in each school (or small group of schools) are responsible for “establishing and reviewing … the school’s objectives, priorities and general policy directions … the planning of financial arrangements necessary to fund those objectives … [and] evaluating the school’s performance in achieving them” (Western Australian Department of Education and Training, 2004, pp. 30-31). In Victoria, local school councils are responsible for “Education policy; School charter, annual report and triennial review; School budget/finance; Principal appointment; Workforce planning; Student code of conduct; Student dress code; [and the approval of] excursions” (Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) Victoria, 2001, p. 5), as well as school maintenance, employment of ancillary staff and managing the school canteen. Public schools in Australia remain subject to state and federal policy and curriculum guidelines, though in some states, as indicated in the example of the role of school councils in Victorian public schools, school councils can approve their own policies and allocate resources to areas of priority in achieving these guidelines.

Throughout the literature, varying combinations of the differing formations of school councils appear, with some studies clarifying the specific attributes of the school council being applied, while many others fail to detail all, or sometimes any, of these critical attributes of the situation being discussed or reviewed (Baker & Soden, 2005; Boethel, 2003). In poststructural terms, these differing constructions of the formation and roles of school councils represent the differing balances of discourses in the context of the policy production at the time of its development (Ball, 1994). Some of these dimensions have great significance in the ways the school council functions within the school and within the larger organisation. As elaborated in Chapter 5, Pedagogical constructions of school councils, the many differing combinations of these variables present major difficulties in building a meaningful body of literature on which to base the development of practice in schools.
Conclusion

This thesis addresses the construction of school councils as a form of parent participation, and its consequential inclusion as a form of parent involvement. School councils are therefore the object of study in this research. Dewey’s conception of the purposes of education in modern society frames the research in terms of equity and social justice in the provision of education, providing the pedagogical focus of the thesis in the analysis and contestation of the school council construct. It is the positioning of school councils in the pedagogical environment that is of concern for this research, and in particular, its taken-for-granted acceptance in policy and practice in schools. Of particular concern to this thesis are issues of marginalisation and exclusion that result in disadvantage for some students and their families in our schools in relation to school councils as a form of parent participation in children’s schooling. The following section represents the beginnings of the Foucaultian stance of refusal, introducing the theoretical foundations of this thesis (Chapter 3) and elaborating on the application of this methodology in this particular research (Chapter 4).
II

Refusal

Chapter 3  Theoretical framework: Philosophical foundations of
Foucaultian inspired research

Chapter 4  Genealogy as method
Chapter 3
Theoretical framework:
Philosophical foundations of Foucaultian inspired research

The framework we bring to the process of interpretation determines
what we ‘see’, what we notice and register as important.

(Held, 1996, p. 9)

Introduction
Foucaultian research differs from other approaches to understanding our world in
that it applies a theoretical framework that rejects the search for single origins or
inherent structures in our human experience, and does not attempt to provide the
foundations for a predictable future. Instead, Foucault offers a socially-based
philosophy in understanding the human world. This chapter provides this theoretical
understanding, focusing on the main themes and principles of Foucaultian
philosophy and how these theoretical understandings are applied in Foucaultian
inspired research. This chapter is therefore theoretical, with the following chapter
elaborating on the application of these principles in this particular research.

In exploring our experience of the world Michel Foucault focused on identifying the
relationships of power that make certain knowledges (truths) and ways of being
(subjectivities) recognisable (Butler 1997, p. 5, original emphasis) as true, while
simultaneously marginalising other knowledges and subjectivities as unacceptable,
incomplete or illegitimate. These three themes, of power, knowledge and
subjectivity, guide researchers in developing methods suited to the focus of their
particular inquiry that will allow the development of an explanation of their current
existence. It is the application of these theoretical understandings, rather than
adherence to a set of specified methodological procedures, that establish the rigor of
Foucaultian projects.
Foucault’s focus on the conditions of existence of our knowledges and subjectivities results in a profoundly historical approach to research that studies knowledge and being at the level of its (social) production. Foucault called this historical approach archaeology, and when applied to investigations of power and the construction of particular knowledges and subjectivities, genealogy. This focus on how knowledges and subjectivities come to appear as natural, inevitable and true makes Foucault’s genealogy suited to this investigation which is focused on the production of school councils, and its acceptance as natural in frameworks of family-school partnerships.

Foucault’s purpose was always to question the taken-for-granted, to expose its constructed and thus conditional status, revealing its unstable rather than fundamental status. In doing so, a Foucaultian approach exposes the inclusions and exclusions of our existing constructs of truths about the world and our selves. The revelation of these exclusions invites these excluded knowledges to speak again, opening possibilities for the emergence of new and reconceptualised constructs that are inclusive of the marginalisations of existing constructs. As such, Foucaultian research is a critical practice, a critical project based in an historical understanding of the present, and with a focus on an unpredictable future.

Foucaultian principles guide the researcher in order to understand the way things are, and are intended to disrupt the taken-for-granted by exposing “the non-necessity of what passes for necessity in our present” (Burchell, 1993, p. 279). These principles are detailed in this and the following chapter, and applied throughout this thesis. Following a brief introduction to Foucault, this chapter explores the main themes and principles of Foucaultian philosophy and how these come together in the notion of discourse. Foucault’s concepts of the governance of truth are introduced and the principles of self-governance elaborated. The final section of this chapter discusses the application of these principles in researching our worlds, and how they are applied to form a methodology that is suited to an investigation of school councils in the context of current notions of family-school partnerships.
The aims of this chapter are to:
1. establish the theoretical foundations of Foucaultian research;
2. elaborate on Foucault’s stance of “refusal” and its theoretical and practical implications for research;
3. indicate how these principles are applied in research methodology;
4. identify some critiques of Foucaultian theory;
5. introduce the approach of this research.

Michel Foucault
Michel Foucault (1926–1984) was a French philosopher-historian who held degrees in philosophy and psychology and completed a doctorate on madness. His first chair was as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Clermont-Ferrand; from there he moved to the University of Vincennes, and then in 1970 to the College de France, where he was Professor of the History of Systems of Thought. Foucault designated this title himself so as to differentiate his particular approach to history as the history of thought rather than the traditional approach of history, being the history of ideas.

Foucault’s understanding of the social construction of knowledge (which is discussed further in this chapter) meant that he did not accept attributions to “the author”, “great works” or the “great man” (Foucault, 1972a) and, consistent with this belief, he offered only occasional details of his personal life. Maintaining this view, this chapter therefore focuses on the thinking rather than the life of Foucault. Biographical details of Foucault’s life have, however, been gathered from details within his writings and are available in works by Eribon (1991), Macey (1993) and Miller (1993).

Foucault’s thinking emerged during a time when Marxism and existential phenomenology were prominent in French intellectual life. Foucault rejected these philosophies as based in a flawed structuralism, and as such continuing what he saw as the problems of other philosophical frameworks, including religion. Foucault sought to expose these errors throughout his own studies, and thus to simultaneously develop an understanding of the world that showed its socially constructed nature,
and expose the inequities arising from and held in place by those existing understandings. This thought made a major contribution to the formation of the poststructuralist movement – though Foucault rejected such labels as too restrictive to capture the complexities and temporal existence of any construct, including thought.

**The principles of Foucaultian theory**
Foucault’s rejection of positivist and metaphysical explanations of the world (such as those of humanism, Marxism, existentialism and religious ideologies) was based on their essentialist, structuralist foundations and their normalising effects on the world. To Foucault, these foundational explanations relied on a belief in a pre-existing truth or structure to human epistemological and ontological experience, either as a metaphysical essence of being or on structuralist notions of a pre-existing order in our world. Foucault rejected these views of reality and their deterministic understandings and effects, though he agreed with structuralism’s rejection of an ontology of an “unchanging universal human subject or human nature as being at the centre and origin of all action, history, existence and meaning” (O’Farrell, 2005, p. 27).

Instead of structural or metaphysical explanations, Foucault viewed all knowledge, including our knowledge of our selves (our subjectivity) as being socially produced, the result of the socio-political and thus historical environment. Foucault therefore viewed metaphysical and structuralist theories as being founded not in the essential pre-existing or fundamental orders of relations they claimed to represent, but on their own constructions of truth resulting from the human process of attempting to impose order on the world, and the dominance of particular ways of thinking, or “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 132). Thus, these truths are also situated truths, the product of their specific context of formation.

Foucault’s view of our constructs of truth as being contingent on the context means that our truths about the world (and also ourselves) are seen as arising in and from a complex environment of competing knowledges and ways of seeing in the world. To
understand the constructs of our world, our truths, therefore, Foucault asserted that we need to understand their (socio-historical) contextual construction. That is, we need to understand the “webs of power” (Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 116) that form the context and thus the content of these productions of truth.

The contextual rather than universal production of knowledge also meant that Foucault rejected the principle of continuity, the view of a progressive history that moved from a central impulse or towards an improved, more advanced or ideal state that underpins other philosophies. Instead, Foucault introduced the notion of discontinuity, where the events of history are viewed not as a progression, or linked in a linear manner, but as subject to the specific forces of the context, including human error, illusion, accidents and struggles for power (Foucault, 1998/1971). Foucault’s studies applied this principle of discontinuity to the history of thought, demonstrating the reality of this principle across a number of areas of inquiry and disciplines. The principle of discontinuity means that all constructions of understanding are the result not of inevitability but of the particular situation of their production. Thus, methods of understanding this situated formation of a construct are required – an historical approach to understand the particular – a “history of the present” (Foucault, 1991/1975, p. 31).

In taking the moral stance of refusal, curiosity and innovation to the world, Foucault emphasised the need for the development and refinement of our approaches depending on, and in response to, the topic and context of our inquiry. Throughout his works Foucault continually revisited earlier methods, revising, refining and redefining principles as required in particular investigations. Thus, rather than prescribing a specific template for research, Foucault famously described his works as providing “a kind of toolbox which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area” (1974, p. 523). This chapter outlines the theoretical foundations of these tools. The ways in which they are applied in this research are discussed in Chapter 4.
O’Farrell (2005) identified five separate but interrelated principles that informed Foucault’s understandings of knowledge, power and subjectivity, and underpin the techniques that formed Foucault’s methodological toolbox. It is the application of these principles of order, history, truth, power and ethics as embodied in the three themes of Foucault’s work (knowledge, power and subjectivity), rather than a single investigative method, that defines Foucaultian research and provides the consistency between, and rigour of, investigations informed by Foucaultian thought. These principles inform all of Foucault’s work, and their intertwined nature means that even where they are not the primary focus, these principles are always present.

Exploring the principles of Foucaultian research and their application is the purpose of this chapter. This chapter therefore also acts as a refusal; a refusal to accept what is presented as natural, common sense or truth, by firstly establishing the theoretical framework that informs this stance towards the world. These principles also form the basis for the stances of curiosity and innovation, and thus the chapter also sets the theoretical foundations of the application of Foucault’s moral stance and its application in this research on parent participation in the form of school councils.

The multi-layered nature of this chapter, where differing principles are touched on during discussions of others, sometimes prior to their complete development, reflects the intertwined and interdependent nature of Foucault’s principles. This approach reflects Foucault’s own works in which he elaborated on his theoretical principles while simultaneously developing different methods (tools) for researching differing areas of study. It is this feature of Foucaultian theory that makes a dissertation of these principles challenging, and explains why Foucault’s philosophy is sometimes criticised as complicated and difficult to understand (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997; O’Farrell, 2005). To overcome the difficulties of the interrelated nature of Foucault’s principles, and their relation to developing a research methodology, this chapter discusses the principles of Foucaultian thought and research by focusing its discussion around the three central themes of knowledge, power and subjectivity, and around the application of ethical refusal. The application of these principles in the
methods of genealogy – the approach that is applied to the research in this particular study – is then explored.

Knowledge

For Foucault, our knowledge about the world, the things we accept as fundamental truths, are not reflective of any essential quality of these things, but instead is the result of our attempts to impose our will on the world. This imposing of our wills creates what we accept as knowledge by placing our ordering, based on our particular ways of understandings the world, onto the things of this world. Thus, our “truths” are in fact our own created knowledges about the world, based on the ways we accept the world should be viewed, in that time and place.

Knowledge as truth

In The Order of Things, Foucault (1994/1966) describes the processes by which we use words, language, in an attempt to understand, control and order, or impose our will on our worlds – that is, to form knowledge. Foucault illustrates how the words we use, in these attempts to establish order, are not of the same order as the things they name, indicating how words act only as a series of references, describing things as like or not like other things. Words, and the orders we create, are thus only representations of the things themselves. An analogous relationship therefore exists between words and things; words place only an approximate order on the things of this world (Foucault, 1994/1966).

To illustrate his analogous relationship, Foucault (1994/1966) demonstrates how our orderings of things, and thus knowledge, has differed at different times, by exploring how changes in this relationship, changes in the type of analogy applied, have applied at differing historical times. To do this, Foucault traced changes in these orders in three domains of knowledge that we now know as literature, economics and biology in three historical contexts: 16th century, 17th century and modern Europe. Tracing the formation of knowledge in these three fields, Foucault identified for example that in 16th century Europe, the principle of resemblance was applied in ordering things together. Foucault gave examples of how the use of aconite to treat
illness of the eyes was based on the resemblance of the black seed with its white membrane covering to the eye, and how the walnut’s resemblance to the human head and brain meant that the skin of the nut was used in medicines to treat “wounds of the pericranium”, while the kernel, with its resemblance to the human brain, indicated that it was useful in treating brain-based medical conditions such as injury (Foucault, 1994/1966, p. 27).

Through his investigations of literature, economics and biology in the different historical contexts, Foucault concluded that there is at any time in a society “only one [accepted] episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge” (1994/1966, p. 168). The ways we organise our knowledge into disciplines, or areas of knowledge, becomes a process of ordering things in different ways – as geological, economic, linguistic, social, emotional, religious and so on, based on the accepted way of establishing knowledge.

In the 17th century, the principle for ordering knowledge was comparison, with things ordered in groups and tables by the principles of similarity and difference rather than resemblance, for example by the comparison of the physical features of animals or plants (Foucault, 1994/1966, p. 27). Foucault demonstrated how economic and grammatical (language) knowledges were similarly ordered by resemblance in the 16th and comparison in the 17th centuries. In modern society, things are ordered by scientific logic and proof (Foucault, 1994/1966). The modern relationship between words and things makes other orders, such as those based around resemblance or simple comparisons, no longer legitimate. Thus, for example, we measure rather than compare, and increasingly we measure against others to establish norms or normalcy in our ordering of things.

Foucault therefore asserted that there is no single underlying, pre-existing, or structured order of things, that is essential knowledge, but instead that we impose our structures on our worlds, creating what the things of our world are seen to be, using our own orders. Consequently, the way we impose our thinking on the world, through language, makes these things what they are to us, at that moment in time.
Truth about the world, and ourselves, is of human construction. Therefore, according to Foucault “nothing is fundamental” (1984a, p. 247), “truth is a thing of this world” (Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 131). The way our orders are placed on the world is through our use of language. Thus these orders, and their truths, are discursively created, the result of our imposition of a particular way of seeing the world and its objects. This notion of discursive action, or discourse, is central to Foucaultian theory, and is discussed later in this chapter.

We can see therefore that different ways of organising knowledge are possible and that these orders are created by us, and thus not based on any essential truth. The establishment of particular orders has the effect of creating distinctions of belonging and not belonging, of what are, and are not, valid ways of knowing, and thus what is valid as knowledge, in a binary process of inclusion and exclusion. Knowledge from “valid” ways of seeing, and that belongs in these orders, is taken as being true, correct, right, and acceptable. Knowledge from invalid ways of thinking about the world that does not belong in these orders comes to be seen as false, incorrect, wrong and unacceptable, or other. Foucault’s investigations of the relationship between words and things, and the orders we create, demonstrated how these ways of ordering things are socially derived and changeable, contextually situated rather than fundamental. The ways in which particular knowledges become established as truth in a particular context (discipline, setting, culture or society, for example) is through a social process of establishment and maintenance of power, the establishment of the regime of truth of the field.

Regimes of truth
Each way of seeing the world, or defining truth and thus knowledge, has its own rules for establishing what is possible, and not possible, as being true, and thus the term for these rules and their assertion on the world, regimes of truth. Foucault (1980a/1977 p. 132) described regimes of truth as referring to “the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true”. These regimes of truth relate not just to the establishment of knowledge, but to the establishment of fields of knowledge, such as education or
medicine, and to regimes of truth within these, such as pharmacology, psychiatry, behaviourism, constructivism, and so on.

Regimes of truth, then, provide the rules that make the formation of particular things of knowledge possible. In Madness and Civilisation, Foucault (1989/1961), for example, shows how madness is only possible as the result of the particular regimes of truth of medical knowledge and psychiatry. In these medicalised regimes of truth, behaviours that were once considered “limit” experiences of insight (Foucault, 1989/1961), became something pathological and unacceptable, and thus became the subject of treatment as a medical and psychological problem – madness. As this example demonstrated, it was not the particular way of being that changed, but the application of the rules in the world that created the division of behaviours that were accepted (sane) and therefore the other (mad) – the rules created the “thing” of madness, which did not exist prior to the application of these particular regimes of truth.

The possibilities of differing ways of ordering the world, that is differing regimes of truth in a situation at differing times, means that our truths about the world (knowledge) are seen as temporary phenomena, the result of the particular regimes of truth in that particular context. Further, since any discursive formation is produced by both the inclusions and exclusions of that situation, any construct of truth or reality “is essentially incomplete, owing to the system of formation, its strategic choices” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 67). Therefore, to understand a phenomenon, or particular construction of truth, such as a school council, we must understand the context of its production not as a part of a continuum or progression towards an ideal state, or as reflecting a manifestation of an essential truth, but as a situated truth, the result of the regimes of truth in that specific situation, and as representing only one of many possibilities.

Consequently, Foucaultian research is situated in the moment of existence of the object of study, and seeks only to describe the specific way things are in that context that create that knowledge, or truth, at that time. Foucaultian research thus also
refrains from prescribing particular futures (solutions or answers) in the light of the unpredictable nature of the arrangements of discourses beyond their present constructions. This research, therefore, provides a description of the current discursive formations of school councils and, through its critical focus, offers only possible ways forward for innovation in the field of parent participation and school councils.

Refusing knowledge as truth
Our constructs, therefore our orders, the things we accept as truths, are constructed in a specific environment. In the construction of these truths, other possibilities have been marginalised and other knowledges excluded as part of this process. Since changes in the discursive environment, changes in the regimes of truth may result in different constructions of truth in the world, no truth should be accepted without challenge to its claims of legitimacy.

Foucault’s demonstration that our orders are not based on any fundamental essence, deterministic structure or natural order, but on a socially constructed relationship of words and things, means that we must maintain a kind of scepticism towards the world, so that we can question the naturalness with which the world is presented. Thus we come to understand the theoretical foundations of refusal in Foucaultian research, and Foucault’s explanation that in considering our knowledges and truths, “the privilege with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction of rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized” (1972a, pp. 25-26). Refusal of the acceptance of the construct of school councils as “natural” and thus as a complete knowledge, forms the start of the research of this thesis.

**Power**
All regimes of truth carry forward a particular set of rules for the formation of truth, with its possibilities of formation of knowledge and its simultaneous refutation of other possibilities. The way in which knowledge is formed by the possibilities and
impossibilities established by our regimes of truth involves power – the power of inclusion and exclusion, and thus the power of creating the possibilities of being and not being true.

Power as a productive force

The centrality of power in Foucaultian theory is identified in the definition of regimes of truth as being both “the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated” and the “specific effects of power attached to the true” (Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 132). It is this productive process of discourse in the production of true and untrue, belonging and not, rather than a repressive force, that Foucault identifies as power:

> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things. It induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body (1980a/1977, p. 119).

Foucault’s understanding of the productive forces of regimes of truth means that “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere” (1990/1976, p. 93). In any situation there are therefore a multitude of regimes of truth, each asserting its power, its formative ways of knowing into the world. How things emerge as accepted as true in that context depends on the contestation between these differing conceptualisations of the world.

This contestation is captured in Foucault’s alternative term for regimes of truth as games of truth (Foucault, 1988c), where a strategic battle for truth in the context must be fought in order to establish the truth in that situation. Foucault (1980a/1977, p. 132) stated, “There is a battle ‘for truth’, or at least ‘around truth’”. This battle is not really about truth, but about the dominance of a particular set of rules, and the dominance of their particular truths. Our truths therefore are seen as representing the current dominances and exclusions in the web of power in the particular context of the emergence of a construct. Constructions of parent participation in the formation
of school councils are, therefore, the result of the contestations of power and the resultant balance of powers at the moment of their emergence in the field, the product of the regimes of truth and games of truth, the assertions of power, in the particular contexts of their emergence.

Resistance
Foucault’s view of power as a productive force means that there is always resistance, from other regimes of truth, in the contestation to establish truth. Originally, Foucault proposed that wherever power is exercised this resistance was also active (Foucault, 1980b/1977p. 142). However, in the 1980s Foucault refined the concept of power and resistance, indicating that since power also involves the choice of acceptance (otherwise it is not the productive force of the assertion of truth but violence and control by force), resistance is also part of this freedom to choose. Thus resistance is always potentially a part of the production of truth in a given context: “there is no power without potential refusal or revolt” (1990/1979, p. 84).

Power as Foucault defines it, is therefore seen as being in the relations between, rather than something one holds and wields over others. Foucault gave as an example the power of the monarch as being in the relationship of authority to speak (the result of a particular arrangement of truths) and in others’ acquiescence to that person or group. The power of the monarch is reliant on the active consent of the people. In this relational view, power becomes seen as involving both the exertion of force and the freedom of choice of resistance or acceptance.

That is not to say that people do not use violence to gain control of others, for example in a physical sense, but this is “control” rather than power as defined in Foucaultian theory. Power, instead, involves the assertion of particular truths, and their acceptance. These truths, formed by the webs of power in the context, are held in place not through violence or control, but through what Foucault referred to as the “apparatus” or “disposotif”, being the “system of relations … between … discourse, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures,
scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions” (Foucault, 1980c/1977, p. 194).

Since where there is power there is also this possibility of resistance from the exertions of power by other regimes of truth, no knowledge emerges except from within complex networks of power. This resistance may be from marginalised or silenced regimes of truth; however, their resistance is always present. Current constructs of truth are reliant on these silences for their existence. Thus neo-liberal discourse, for example, is reliant on the silences of discourses of social democracy, socialism, and of other forms of liberalism.

The importance of the temporal and spatial contexts in producing these arrangements of power means that no particular regime of truth is seen as holding a right of dominance, but instead, what holds in one situation is the result of that particular discursive environment. Although marginalised by the dominant discourses in the context of the establishment of a construct of truth, other discourses are still potentially able to reassert their power-knowledge in the situation. Resistance, therefore, provides the possibilities of renewal, of reconceptualisation, and change.

Regimes of truth assert their power-knowledge into a contestation by asserting their scientificity in the construction of truth. In a religious context, this scientificity might be established by reference to articles of faith, or Biblical texts; in the school situation, scientificity might be established through proofs of pedagogical efficacy – either philosophically in terms of (discursively) accepted practices, or in the achievements of desired outcomes. Scientificity is, as Foucault illustrated, based on the accepted episteme of our times. Therefore, a construct of truth, knowledge or subjectivity only exists while the scientificity of the discourses in the situation remains dominant. Resistance can therefore gain traction by the establishment of a more complete truth within the scientificity of the discourse, that is, from within the discourse itself, such as the generation of further scientific evidence to refine or refute earlier scientific evidence; or gain traction through changes in the dominances
of the discursive environment, such as has occurred where religion-based philosophies become more or less dominant.

The construction of accepted truth is therefore not a singular expression of a discourse, but the result of the balances of power of a number of contributory discourses. In a context of multiple discourses, each with its own knowledge/power, the production of truth, our everyday accepted realities, becomes a process of contestation, creating a complex environment in the “battle” to establish truth.

“Power’s conditions of possibility actually consist of this moving substrate of force relations: the struggles, confrontations, contradictions, inequalities, transformations and integrations of these force relations” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 84). Thus, power and resistance constitute an ongoing process, game, or battle, rather than a finalised war.

Power-knowledge
As a productive process, power is everywhere: “It produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, 1977, p. 194). The ubiquitous nature of these truths, held within the structures and everyday procedures of our world, leads us to accept them as natural, fundamental or essential to our world. Thus we carry on our lives accepting these productions of truth as common sense, taking their naturalness for granted. This acceptance of these constructs as truth confirms the validity of the ways of thinking about the world that form these accepted truths. This self-reproducing, self-reinforcing process of the production of our understandings of our world is captured in Foucault’s use of the term “power-knowledge” (1972b, p. 17).

Knowledge is both the product of, and produces power. Power and knowledge are in a cyclical and self-reinforcing relationship, hence Foucault’s use of the hyphenated term power-knowledge. There is therefore, no knowledge without power, and no power without knowledge. Thus Foucault’s assertion that “there can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth that operates through and on the basis of this association” (1980d/1977, p. 93). This understanding
of the power-knowledge relationship is central to understanding Foucaultian theory and his notion of discourse which is discussed later in this chapter.

Refusing power

Foucault's thesis on power shows us that what we accept as truth is not fundamental, essential to the object, but the result of the specific arrangements of power in that specific situation. The power Foucault speaks of then is not the same as structuralist notions that see power as processes of domination and oppression, such as in Marxism’s class struggle, nor essentialist notions of a greater metaphysical power, nor Freudian power as the Id, nor the humanist powerful individual. Power is instead exerted (with greater or less success) by all regimes of truth in the process of production of their particular objects of knowledge.

As each context has its own currently held balances of power, a discursive formation, “if placed, and interpreted in a new constellation, … may reveal new possibilities” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 67). By refusing and exposing the current dominances of power, Foucault seeks to reactivate the processes of contestation, creating the opportunity for the emergence of differing balances and thus differing constructs to emerge. This research, therefore, disrupts the current discursive arrangements that hold school councils as a commonsense and naturalised construct in the field of parent participation in their children’s education.

Foucaultian research is intended to activate this instability in the discursive arrangements that support current constructions in order that the possibility of new knowledges in the situation might emerge from a new balance between discourses in the context – the process of reconceptualisation. These possibilities are created by the new arrangements of power rather than by any inherent quality hidden within the existing construct. That is, a new discursive formation is constructed, based on the balances of discursive power in the new context, and thus is itself also an approximation, with its own inclusions and exclusions and, like all constructs of knowledge, inherently unstable. The refusal of power, or power-knowledge, is therefore intended to be an ongoing rather than temporary stance.
Subjectivity

In power-knowledge, power creates the possibilities for the emergence of particular knowledges, while these knowledges act to reassert the power that formed them, in their (re)stating of the truths of the world. The way this occurs is through discursive action, and involves the human subject. This process can be seen in the formation of the expert, where a subject or group of subjects is given particular powers to speak the truth in certain areas of knowledge, and to hold certain rights, privileges and powers. These experts are then able to (re)speak the truths of the discourses that position them as experts, and thus reinforce the truths of the discourse – a cyclical process which means these expert-subjects thus become a conduit for the discursive power of the regime of truth that created them as experts, reinforcing and recreating the conditions of possibility and thus the further emergence of these truths.

Consequently, “the subject that power has constituted becomes part of the mechanisms of power, the vehicle of that power which, in turn, has constituted it as that type of vehicle” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 22). This process of the formation of the subject is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Foucault’s ontology

Regimes of truth also allow the subject to tell the “truth about itself” (Foucault, 1988d, p. 128). That is, our subjectivity is the result of the regimes of truth in the contexts of our lives. Thus, for Foucault, our subjectivity is not an essence, as proposed by humanist philosophies or in the metaphysical explanations of religion, but results from the same discursive powers (regimes of truth and their power-knowledge) that establish particular truths about ourselves and our ways of being as speakable, as true. In producing particular subjectivities as true, regimes of truth also produce other ways of being as false.

In offering particular ways of being as true, while positioning others as not recognisable as true, as illegitimate, or as other, the regimes of truth in the context provide models of these true and other ways of being for us. Foucault (1984b, p. 291) stated, “the individual in constituting him or herself as the subject of his or her own actions uses those models that he finds in his culture, his society, his social group”.

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These models offer us clear indications, embodiments, of what is and is not possible as a way of being in that context – what subjectivities are true (and also successful, powerful and thus not marginalised, disadvantaged or excluded).

The term “subjection” (Foucault 1980d/1977, p. 97) is used to describe this “process[es] of the construction of subjects in and as a collection of techniques or flows of power which run through the whole of a particular social body” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 22). This notion represents a discursive and corporal shift from essentialist or structuralist notions of being, to one that allowed Foucault to see our being as fluid rather than fixed in any way, and as shifting, the result of our taking up and embodiment of the discourses around us which create the conditions of possibility. Foucault concluded, “the individual, that is, is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects” (1980d/1977, p. 98).

Since we occupy multiple contexts in our lives, we may also occupy multiple and contradictory subjectivities. It is human agency, the freedom to choose or resist, that allows us to construct these boundaries about ourselves, by ourselves. Butler (1995) explained “to be constituted by language is to be produced within a given network of power/discourse which is open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergences with other such networks. Agency is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed” (p. 135). Thus, our subjectivity “is constantly dissolved and recreated in different configurations, along with other forms of knowledge and social practices” (Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 118). We are therefore engaged in an active and ongoing process of the constitution and reconstitution of ourselves.

Foucault saw this process of subjection, the building of our subjectivities, as different from the notion of identity. The embodiment of power in the forming of our own subjectivities is what allows us to construct our own boundaries, define for ourselves what is good and bad, and allows us to see the possibilities for ourselves (Popkewitz, 1992). Identity makes this process more permanent, restricting the subject. Foucault
was interested in dissolving identity, making the subject one of multiple possibilities, multiple and shifting identities or subjectivities.

For Foucault, our souls were thus not essential to us in the terms of a metaphysical reality, but represented the multiple subjectivities we choose to accept or resist in our discursive contexts. Foucault did not deny the notion of the human soul, but viewed it too as a product of the world: “It would be wrong to say that the human soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of power” (1991/1975, p. 29). Our subjectivities, therefore, are not essential to us, as proposed in metaphysical theories, but are the embodiment of particular discourses, and the result of our own actions of choice. Our individual identities, therefore, represent the truths we choose to take on, to embody as our own.

Foucault’s concept of subjection means that we cannot look within to discover a true self (self-discovery) or to an external point of explanation (pre-existing or arising from fixed relational structures or a metaphysical reality). Instead we are engaged in an ongoing process of self-transformation as we take on differing subjectivities that are made available – “an ontology of the present” (Foucault, 1986a, p. 96). Foucault’s ontology, therefore, is one of context, fluid rather than a fixed essence, and multiple as our contexts change. Thus, our ontology becomes:

1. a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge;
2. a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others;
3. a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents (Foucault, 1984c, p. 351).

Consequently, neither our knowledge nor our subjectivity can be considered universal, stable and thus essential or permanent; they are instead contextual and unstable. Like the stance of refusal in relation to the constructs of knowledge in our worlds, we must also refuse, at least in order to question, our truths about ourselves.
Ontologically, therefore, Foucaultian research does not ask who we are but asks who we are in the context of our present moment: “Who are we – now?” (May, 2005, p. 69).

Refusing subjectivity
Through discursive practice, therefore, power produces the human subject, “a particular kind of subject who will in turn act as a channel for the flow of power itself” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 21). When the subject speaks, he or she therefore speaks from a particular position. By refusing the truth value of the subject as presented to us we are able to ask about its constructed rather than essential nature. Thus we can consider what regimes of truth the subject speaks from, what arrangements of power allow this subject as true, and to speak truth, and what possibilities are excluded by this arrangement of power.

The selection of particular identities has particular material and corporeal consequences (such as being marginalised, locked away or exposed to the particular treatments by dominant discursive positions). The regimes of truth that are dominant in a particular context mean that in taking on a subjectivity we become subject to the truths of the situation, and thus we are either included or excluded as true in that situation as well. Not all ways of being will be acceptable in all situations, and some may never be accepted. Our agency, our freedom, is therefore constrained, but by refusing to accept without reflection a particular subjectivity we are enabled to question the present state of things. The stance of refusal allows us to question our self-truths (curiosity) and opens possibilities to us of other ways of being (innovation).

As the embodiment of the regimes of truth in the situation about belonging (truth) and not belonging (unspeakable as truth), the creation of the “other” marginalises and excludes these others as not acceptable as true. The treatments, marginalisation and exclusions attached to not being true become acceptable in the situation, and embedded by these constructs of truth. Thus, refusal becomes a moral act in that it seeks to identify injustices that arise from existing arrangements of truth, in order
that less exclusionary reconceptualisations become possible through the opening of a space for these marginalised regimes of truth to speak again into the discursive (productive) situation. It is this critical application of Foucaultian research that makes this framework suited to the work of this thesis. This understanding of Foucaultian theory as critical theory, in a postcritical sense, forms the major purpose of Foucaultian research, and is discussed later in this chapter.

So truth, the truth about the things of this world and ourselves becomes the result of the taking on of particular ways of thinking and seeing the world, the regimes of truth in the particular context of their production. These constructs of reality are formed through the mobilisation or assertion of power by these regimes of truth into the world, through discursive action, or discourse.

**Discourse**

The concept of discourse is central to understanding Foucaultian theory. Discourse as Foucault understood it brings together the three themes of knowledge, power and subjectivity, mobilising power in the formation of truth. In this sense, discourse is inclusive of the term regimes of truth, but captures the notion of power/knowledge and subjectivity to refer to a “practice” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 46), the productive process, where things (knowledge and subjectivities) are spoken into being as true or not. That is, the rules of separation of belonging and not belonging as true are spoken into the world, through our message systems, creating the possibilities for this separation in the space of their enunciation.

As introduced earlier, the term regimes of truth describes the rules by which objects are formed as (im)possible. These rules are asserted into the world (spoken) as statements. These statements result in the formation of the things of this world, the objects and subjects of truth. Foucault (1972a, p. 87) defined the statement as “a function that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space”. Thus, “to speak is to do something” (p. 209).
Foucault also defined the term discourse as “a certain way of speaking” (1972a, p. 193). These ways of speaking are socially defined and represent the particular ways of seeing of particular groups in society. Discourses “are characterised by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge, by the setting of norms for elaborating concepts and theories” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 11). Thus, discourses represent a collection of statements, which when spoken produce the conditions of possibility for the production of particular truths. The term discourse is therefore better defined as referring to “the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation [of knowledge] for example, clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 107-108).

Discourses therefore represent the multiple rules of belonging and not belonging which establish the possibilities for the formation of things as real (true) or not. And thus we come to understand what is possibly Foucault’s most often quoted definition, that discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972a, p. 49).

The production of a truth as the result of the assertions of the multiple statements that make up a discourse was captured in Foucault’s (1972a) use of the term event. However, as more than one discourse may create the possibilities for the emergence of a construct, or many constructs, the constructs of our world exist as they do as the result of “a population of events in the space of discourse in general” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 27).

Thus it is not enough to see these produced truths as representing a single discursive product. Instead, these things, our knowledges and selves, are produced by the multiple powers in the environment. It is the balance of the webs of power of the multiple statements of the differing and distinct discourses in that context that create an event. That is why Foucault rejected explanations of the world that rely on a single source – a great person, a great work, or a metaphysical or existential reality,
instead emphasising the complexities and specificity of the context in the formation of truths in our worlds.

Discourse, then, in Foucaultian terms refers not to the linguistic notion of the exchange of information, but to the productive assertion of certain ways of seeing the world, a process that creates the conditions of possibility for the formation of particular objects and subjects. Foucault’s explorations involved establishing the constructed nature of truths through identifying the rules of production of particular truths in selected areas of interest. These discourses are identifiable “by the objects they produce, the ways in which they treat these objects, and the concepts that are applied commonly, and sometimes exclusively” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 44).

This thesis, then, investigates how school councils have been constructed as truth in the context of parent participation in their children’s schooling in our society, and the subjectivities of these regimes of truth in this context. It also looks at how these systems of production maintain these truths (about knowledge and ways of being) in the space of schooling, that is, this thesis addresses the question of why the construct of school councils exists as a taken-for-granted truth in schools in our society.

Foucault’s investigations and explanations of power, then, explored the ways in which particular truths, our knowledges and subjectivities, are established in our worlds. That is, to continue Foucault’s analogy, how we maintain the war once the immediate battle is won. To understand how truths come to be held as true in a society, Foucault developed the notion of governmentality. Like many of Foucault’s concepts, his theories of governmentality were established alongside the development of other concepts, such as genealogy. Thus although this thesis deals with the genealogy of the construct of school councils, there is some interrelationship with the concepts of governmentality. An explanation of Foucault’s theory of governmentality and its concepts is therefore necessary in building an understanding of the work of this thesis.
**Governmentality**

Foucault defined governmentality as “the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end” (La Perriere, in Foucault, 2000/1978, p. 208). These ends are reliant on the production of particular types of subjects. For example, neoliberal discourse relies on the production of self-maximising choice-making individuals (as consumers) (Apple, 1998), rather than contributors to the social body. Therefore, “the way we feel and act is already regulated by the disciplinarian techniques that have constituted our ‘soul’” (Foucault, 1977, p. 30). Consequently, “the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals” (Foucault, 1980e/1977, p. 55). Foucault’s concept of governmentality explores how we arrange things to bring about certain relations of power – over individuals, ourselves and groups of people.

**Governing others**

Governmentality requires a range of techniques or technologies designed “to harness and integrate micro-forces of power into general strategies” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 86). The contemporary Foucaultian scholar of governmentality, Nikolas Rose, described these techniques as “an assemblage of heterogeneous elements: knowledges, types of authority, vocabularies, practices of calculation, and architectural forms” (Rose, 1999, p. 52). Dussel (2004, p. 89) noted that these techniques of power are not simple, but require a multitude of “intellectual technologies” to make the individual subject visible, and thus manageable, “to shape, normalise and ‘instrumentalise’ the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others” (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 8).

Thus governmentality involves a diverse range of techniques designed to maintain the truths of the discourse as dominant, rather than the “single will to govern” (Rose, 1999, p. 53) of a person or group. Understood in this way, our knowledges and ways of being become the objects of management by those in positions of privilege, as the result of their taking on of the subjectivities offered as true in the situation. Governmentality therefore does not imply the subjugation of people by others, but
involves the strategic application of techniques of power that continue the current webs of power-knowledge. Governmentality is a deliberate process of managing the discursive production of truths.

The technologies of governmentality ensure the production and maintenance of certain knowledges and subjectivities as true, embedding them in the structures of the society as natural, as commonsense, while excluding the possibilities of alternative truths to be (safely) spoken. These techniques, therefore, guide and police the production of knowledge and the ways of being of a community, or society, in accordance with the regimes of truth of the discourse.

In order to construct these ways of governing others, techniques that divide people into groups of belonging and not belonging are required. Tests, measures, checklists and procedures, designed from within the dominant discourses, are one technology used to separate the normal and the pathological, the good person from the delinquent. All such tests and procedures are based in the truths speakable in their field, based on their particular regimes of truth, and which form these objects as delinquent, mad, slow, gifted and so on by the very presence of the discourse (see earlier discussion). National testing regimes and benchmarks represent such technologies in schools. The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) presents particular knowledges and ways of being as true in the educational context. School councils are one of these normalised truths. Within school councils, further checklists of expected outcomes act to position parents in the ways formed as true by the discourses that produced the framework, thus (re)speaking these truths as commonsense reality.

The technologies of governmentality also have a normalising effect, making particular subjectivities normal, and positioning others therefore as abnormal. To belong provides access to the benefits of the dominant society, whereas not belonging marginalises, and allows particular treatments (sanctions, incarcerations, medical treatments, exclusions and so on) to be applied. In turn, these treatments confirm the legitimacy of the truths of the discourse, and they become accepted as
truth – taken for granted and seen as fundamental, essential and representing the way things really are.

Surveillance
To manage subjects in a society, techniques are required to render people and their actions visible. Surveillance is the technology that allows this management of subjects possible, by making us visible within the discursive formations of the setting. Modern methods of ongoing measurement, self-appraisal checklists, national benchmarks and outcomes and tables of competencies are examples of these technologies that render the subject visible and thus manageable. These technologies are discursive statements or events, and are formative of particular knowledges and subjectivities, as well as acting to divide the true from the not true, or other. To be not true invokes the range of treatments prescribed to address these errors or deficiencies.

Discipline and control are no longer based on public punishments such as flogging, the stocks or execution, but on surveillance, the making of the subject as visible, and thus subject to discourse. Thus as Foucault (1977) noted, discipline is no longer maintained and exerted in our society by the methods of “spectacle”, as when the punishment of criminals was inflicted on their bodies, but of “surveillance”, another form of discipline. Thus “the individual is carefully fabricated within [our social order] according to a whole technique of forces” (Foucault, 1977, p. 217).

Self-surveillance
In Discipline and Punish (1977), Foucault explored this notion of surveillance further. As well as exploring how discipline, as the control (governance) of others, had changed from public spectacle acting on the individual’s body to techniques of control around the body, through systems of control and surveillance, Foucault identified the establishment of self-surveillance as an ultimate technique of governmentality.
Self-surveillance is explained through Foucault’s discussion of the panopticon prison. The glass-walled central observation room, which towered above the cells surrounding it, meant that prisoners could always be seen by their guards. Consequently, the prisoners behaved as though they were being watched, even when they were not. The effect was referred to by Foucault as self-surveillance.

This self-surveillance, the result of always being visible, is an ideal technique in governmentality. Technologies that render the individual always visible within the discourse are therefore required to induce this self-surveillance. In schools this constant visibility is created by regular testing and reporting against checklists of “true” knowledges, annual reports against benchmarks, and against other students and schools, reporting against performance indicators and achievements of targets and similar regimes of testing, recording and comparison.

The positioning of parents in roles of accountability in schools, such as in school councils, and as responsible for the performance of schools, also has the effect of making the school always under surveillance. Benchmarks and mandatory reporting provide a technology to direct schools’ self-surveilling behaviours. The centralised establishment of these performance indicators, formed by the dominant discourses, means subjects are produced by these technologies, the concept of performativity. Performativity represents a more complex version of Kickert’s (1991) “steering at a distance” that not only directs our behaviours but forms our subjectivities, while proscribing the possibilities of others in the context.

Consequently, the formation of school councils can be seen as a technology of governmentality. The primary focus of this research, however, is an investigation of the discursive formation of school councils as a form of parent participation in their children’s education. The function of school councils as a technology of governmentality therefore forms only part of the discussion of the discursive production. This function is addressed in Chapter 8 which focuses on the neoliberal (advanced liberal) formation of school councils as truth.
Refusing governmentality
As technologies of governmentality, the processes of surveillance and self-surveillance are part of the discursive production of truth. In allowing these technologies to guide, limit and maintain our subjectivities, we allow these truths about the world and ourselves to become naturalised, accepted as the truth, and thus to govern our subjectivity. Refusing the necessity, the obviousness or naturalness, the unity of these technologies allows us to investigate their discursive production, identify their truths and exclusions, and thus question their apparent naturalness. Foucaultian studies of governmentality investigate the range of techniques that make these subjectivities available and maintain them and their orders of knowledge.

Governing the self: Morality and ethics
Foucault’s understanding of power, as always everywhere in the relations between subjects, means that individual subjects, as discursively created and as producers of discourse, exist within a context of power. At the same time, we must also attend to our own actions in these relationships, and in particular, our relationship with ourselves. This understanding led to Foucault’s focus in his later writings on what he termed the care of the self, or ethics.

Foucault used the term ethics to refer specifically to this relationship with ourselves. Foucault defined his use of ethics as “the considered form freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (1984b, p. 284). Our ethics are what enable us to act morally. According to Foucault, ethics are formed differently in different cultural groups. For example, Foucault explored the ethics of the Christian, Ancient Greek and Ancient Roman cultures (see The Uses of Pleasure (Foucault, 1986b) for these more detailed discussions). Foucault saw these ethics in each society as addressing four areas of concern:

1. An ontology – the focus of our moral conduct (addressing our acts, desires or in our current society it is, according to Foucault, our feelings).
2. A deontology – which guides our conduct (such as a Bible, the model of an “exemplary life” as in Ancient Greece, or the cultural rules of rationality in the modern world).
3. An aesthetics – the way we do “ethical work” on ourselves (such as through physical discipline, self-restraint, fasting, meditating and so on).
4. A teleology – the aim of this work (such as pure, sanctified, self-actualised).

In these ways subjects act to govern their own ethical action, based on their subjectivity in relation to these four areas of the self. In each society, these areas are formed by differing dominant discourses. These discourses make available particular types of subjectivity in relation to these four areas, and thus exclude others in their formation. Foucault’s moral stance of refusal, curiosity and innovation is designed to challenge the existing constructs of ethics and to open the possibilities of differing ways of governing the self – and thus the emergence of differing and multiple ways of being.

Morality was used by Foucault to refer to our relationships with others and the world. Although Foucault did not believe in essentials, fundamentals or underlying universal truths, his stance towards others was one of social justice. The stances of refusal, curiosity and innovation, introduced in the first chapter of this thesis, are based on the formation of a moral relationship with others. The concept of governmentality as being “the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end” (La Perriere, in Foucault, 2000/1978, p. 208) adds further importance to the questioning of the truths of our everyday worlds and lives.

**Foucaultian methodology**

If our knowledges about our world, and ourselves, cannot be based on any underlying structure or essence, but instead arise as the result of discursive action, as indicated by Foucault’s understandings of knowledge, power and subjectivity, then in order to understand these worlds, a method of investigation that can expose the discursive production of these realities is necessary. As our constructs of reality are situated in the specific context of their production, these methods must identify the discourses, included and excluded, that made up that environment at the time of the production of the construct. Since the emergence of a construct is the result of discursive action, it is necessarily situated in the past. Thus, the methods required for
such research must be historical in their approach, aiming to identify these discourses from a past moment in time.

**An historical research method**

Based on the understandings of knowledge, power and subjectivity that inform Foucaultian theory, Foucault rejected traditional views of history that focus on:

1. A clear progression – instead pointing out the discontinuities, ruptures, chance and coincidences, as well as the excluded in these explanations of the present;
2. The teleological view of a progression of improvement towards an ideal state, such as that in colonial views of history, which are based on assumptions of a pre-existing and desirable perfect state, or ignore the contingencies of discursive formations;
3. The Hegelian view of a clash of right and wrong, and its metaphysical foundations in notions of good and evil;
4. Marxist views of class struggle and Marxism’s explanations of power in the possession of the means of production;
5. The view of a single origin of an event, or all events;
6. The works of a great person, which provide a continuity emanating from one person, or group of people, as a single source of history.

(see The Order of Things (Foucault, 1994/1966) and The Archaeology of knowledge (Foucault, 1972a).

Foucault saw these orientations to history as offering a singular view, excluding other histories, and ignoring the complexities of the discursive context. Instead, Foucault sees discontinuity, complexity and multiple histories, and historical happenings as specific (discursively created and situated) events. That is, history is not a progression towards, nor inevitability, but the result of the particular (discursive) context of the time and place, and thus specific to that site, local and regional rather than global.
Foucault therefore did not subscribe to these a-historical investigations that searched for underlying or foundational structures represented in the objects and experiences of our world. Instead, his interests lay in exposing the uniqueness and instability of all constructs, through an investigation of their (socio-historical) discursive formation. Thus, in looking at the past, or the recent past (present), Foucault proposed a historical method that looked into the production of the constructs of our world as context-bound events. A technique that is able to identify these contextual influences, or discourses, is therefore required.

Archaeology
As the result of the making of statements and the formation of an event, the constructs of the world represent artefacts of discursive action. These artefacts carry the inscriptions of their formative discourses, either in themselves or in the materials (other discursive artefacts) that surround them. The conceptualisation of an archive of artefacts led Foucault to refer to his methods of investigating the formation of constructs by the analogous term archaeology.

Foucault’s early work in The Order of Things (1994/1966) and The Archaeology of Knowledge (1972a) developed his archaeological methods in “attempting to mark out and distinguish the principles of ordering … and exclusion” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 105) that made discursive formations and episteme possible (Donaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000). Foucault named this application of his archaeological methods genealogy, representing:

a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history

(Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 117).

In Foucaultian methodology, while genealogy overtly addresses issues of marginalisation and disadvantage, archaeology too is overtly political. Foucault’s
Madness and Civilisation (Foucault, 1989/1961) and The Birth of the Clinic (Foucault, 1973), for example, were not only investigations of constructions of knowledge, but were intended to expose the workings of knowledge-power in order both to disrupt the formations of truth and to illustrate how these knowledges came to be formed as they were. The difference between the terms is more that genealogy applies Foucault’s archaeological approach in addressing issues of the relationship between knowledge, power and subjectivity in a critical project designed to create an opening of possibilities for the future. It is this application of genealogy that forms the methodology of this thesis, and which is discussed in the following chapter.

**Critiques of Foucaultian theory**

Foucault’s methodologies were embedded in his theoretical understandings of the world, and set out to expose the constructed, and thus non-fundamental and non-essential nature of the things we accept as truths. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, these understandings have been criticised as complex and difficult to understand (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997; O’Farrell, 2005). Although complex, and requiring the reader to build up their understanding of these concepts through a process of construction and reconstruction, through revisiting concepts and re-reading a number of times a large range of texts, Foucault’s concepts establish a way of seeing the world that supports and is supported by his own research in which these concepts are developed and illustrated in a practical way.

Although acknowledging the importance of “the distance that theory gives us in order to think through difficult issues” (Apple, 2001, p. 33), Apple also pointed out that one of the dangers of applying highly theoretical methodologies is the difficulty in translating findings and critiques to those not immersed in these theoretical frameworks. Apple (2001, p. 33) saw this overly theoretical focus as resulting in an apparent “vacation of the empirical space” that has in our times created the opportunity for neoliberal and conservative discourses to fill.

Another criticism that can be made regarding the usefulness of Foucaultian research is that its focus on the particular (the particular context at that particular time) might
be seen as “eventism” – a focus on a single construct, which means that any findings of such research are limited to that site. This is of course the case. Foucault did not offer prescriptions for the future. However, it is the action of these methodologies in specific situations that Foucaultian research is concerned with, and their opening of possibilities for the future. Thus, although limited to a specific construct or event, Foucaultian methods are intended as the beginning of a process of reconceptualisation, rather than an end in themselves.

Thus, it is the methodologies and their principles rather than the findings that are transferable, with their intentions of disrupting the taken for granted and exposing it to the processes of re-contestation and reconceptualisation in order that injustices, created by the marginalisation of other discourses in the context, may be (re)exposed. There is, however, no way of knowing what the outcome of the reconceptualisation process will be in any situation, including in the context of the analysis. The results of Foucaultian research are therefore a “game opening” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 85), not a concluding move.

The lack of a specific analysis of the differing discourses in terms of an evaluation against more valid discourses has also been criticised as a form of relativism, in which one discourse is seen as equally valid to another, with the result that all should be accepted. Foucault indeed avoided comparing the intrinsic worth of discourses with his work focused on an explanation of the existing rather than an explication of its merits. Foucault’s work was, however, overtly critical, intended to promote the aims of inclusion in order to address injustices arising from existing constructs. Although it is possible to see the approach as relativism, the application of Foucaultian methods, such as in this thesis, is intended to initiate this reconceptualisation process in relation to issues of equity and social justice.

The nature of archival research, such as Foucault’s, is also limited by its reliance on recorded processes and events. Thus, there is a problem in that there are silences, both those of unrecorded voices and of excluded voices, that although part of the context of production remain unavailable in those records. As Donaher, Schirato and
Webb (2000, p. 101) identified, “Historical events resonate not merely through the archives that have been collected, but also through its gaps – the historical material that has been lost or has not been collected”. For this reason, Foucault’s own works were sometimes criticised by historians as factually inaccurate (Smart, 1985, p. 63).

Part of the reason that Foucaultian research involves “a vast accumulation of source material” (Foucault, 1998/1971, p. 370) is that these projects seek to discover the other voices that are silenced in existing constructions of truth. There are therefore an infinite number of possible discourses that may be represented or marginalised within a construct. Foucaultian research could therefore be potentially unending. Thus, investigations are limited to identifying those discourses that are evident within the construct, in the context of its time of formation, as evident in the artefacts of that time.

Further to this critique of the availability of artefacts of the discourses in the context of the research, another researcher may at a different time be able to identify additional discourses to those identified by a researcher at a particular time. Foucault acknowledged these limitations to his works, stating these studies did not aim to completely explain political situations or provide the definitive solutions, but were “philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems” (1981, p. 4) and remained “tentative” (p. 4), aiming to open up spaces for debate rather than offer conclusions.

Foucault’s work has also been criticised as being gender blind, “ambivalent about feminism” (Morris, 1997, p. 370). Although that critique has been levelled at Foucault’s own work, as indicated earlier, his methodological principles and methodologies have been found suitable by some feminist researchers, and have led to the development of the methods of feminist poststructural research.

Despite these criticisms, Foucaultian methods offer a way of understanding the world, and our place within it, as it is discursively formed. By disturbing the current, accepted truths of the past and present moment, Foucaultian research offers a way of
addressing injustice at its source of production. Foucaultian methodology is therefore suited to this investigation which questions the formation and acceptance of the construct of school councils as a formation of parent participation in schools, and the concerns of this thesis with the issues of equity and social justice in the educational context.

Conclusion
If our knowledges and subjectivities are the result of the regimes of truth in the particular situation at a particular moment in time, and if these are not fixed as fundamental or essential but unstable and shifting, then knowledge and subjectivities can only be understood in relation to their particular conditions of possibility. Foucault therefore did not provide a singular method that searches for underlying, deterministic, structures of our world, whose purpose is to develop generalisable, transferable or predictive knowledge, such as in the methods of phenomenology or scientific testing. Rather, Foucault provided a set of principles that underpin and inform a research project aimed at explaining the present and opening possibilities for an unpredictable future. Foucaultian research is therefore an opening move rather than a conclusion to a specific question.

Foucaultian research, then, is not an application of a rigidly defined template designed to squeeze particular truths from an object of research. Instead, Foucaultian principles guide the researcher to understand the way things are by disrupting the taken for granted, exposing “the non-necessity of what passes for necessity in our present” (Burchell, 1993, p. 279).

As part of Foucault’s methodology, refusal emerges as a profound movement, not a dismissal but an embodiment of the theoretical principles of order, truth, the subject, history and ethics. In refusing to accept what is given as truth, taken for granted as the way things and we should be, Foucault asked us to interrupt existing discursive arrangements, for the moment, to hold things at a distance and “to wonder at how it came to appear so natural” (Rose, 1999, p. 58).
This chapter has elaborated on the principles of Foucaultian research and their specific application in the movement of refusing the acceptance of things as fundamental or essential. The following chapter begins the process of curiosity – elaborating on the methods of genealogy and their application in this particular research. This method chapter is followed by the three chapters that include the data and its analysis in terms of the discourses that form the current construction of school councils; that is, the section asks the question as to how this thing has come to appear so natural in the context of parent participation in their children’s education.
Chapter 4
Genealogy as method

[Genealogy is] ...a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc. without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or remains in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.

(Foucault, 1980f, p. 117)

Introduction
Genealogy is the term Foucault used to describe the application of his theoretical principles, introduced in the previous chapter, to investigations of the discursive formations in our worlds. Foucault’s understanding of the ways in which power is asserted by regimes of truth, and in games of truth, means that an archaeological investigation of the constructed nature of the truths of this world represents more than a distanced and dispassionate history, but also involves an investigation of power. Genealogy not only describes, but also consciously disturbs existing configurations of these regimes of truth, disrupting the games of truth that have resulted in a construct emerging into being. This disturbance of the current state of things is intended to open possibilities for recontestation and renewal. In this context, genealogy also describes the critical application of Foucault’s principles through the archaeological method. This chapter elaborates on how Foucaultian principles are mobilised in the genealogical method, and the application of these processes in this particular research.

The concept of the significance of the discursive context in Foucaultian research means that a genealogy needs not only to describe the field of the emergence of the construct being researched, but also the context within which the research is taking place. The significance here is that disturbing a taken-for-granted truth in a new context results in the recontestation process taking place in a new discursive context. This chapter therefore also introduces the context in which this research was
undertaken. The application of Foucaultian theory to this particular study, and its investigations of school councils, is elaborated in this chapter, which details the “tools” selected and their use in this particular study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how Foucaultian principles and methods provide a framework for the critical investigation of constructions of school councils, and how this critical framework structures the following section of this thesis.

**Genealogy as the search for origins**

Foucault derived the term genealogy from Nietzsche’s use of the same term in describing an investigative approach to researching the history of institutions and systems of thought. However, Nietzsche’s genealogical studies were evaluative, offering judgements and thus based on the assertion of one discourse over another: “its perception is slanted, being deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation” (Foucault, 1998/1971, p. 90). Foucault’s genealogical project refused this process of asserting the greater value of any discourse, which positions one as speaking from a particular discursive space, speaking the power-knowledge of the discourse, and thus becoming part of the discursive productions of truth in the current context. Foucaultian genealogical research instead focuses on these events as the result of past discursive action, and seeks to produce “a pure description of discursive events” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 27), as they occurred in a particular temporal and spatial (and corporeal) historical moment.

In developing this genealogical approach, Foucault drew on Nietzsche’s discussion of history as the search for ursprung (origins), defining genealogy within the principles of knowledge, power and subjectivity as the seeking of origins as herkunft (descent) and entstehung (emergence), while rejecting the search for origins as wunderursprung (the miraculous origin) (Foucault, 1998/1971). The notion of descent is similar to a bloodline, the historical discursive sources (parentage) of a construct, while emergence indicates the situated context of production. That is, genealogy looks for historical origins not in progressions of history (teleology), universal structures (such as in phenomenology), or metaphysical essences (such as
humanism and spiritualism) but in its discursive descent (herkunft) in the specific (situated) discursive context of its emergence as truth (entstehung).

Foucault’s genealogy therefore becomes a history of the descent, at the moment of emergence, and thus the previously mentioned description as a “history of the present” (Foucault, 1991/1975, p. 31). This history of the present (Foucault, 1991/1975, p. 31) “may be loosely characterised by its use of historical resources to reflect upon the contingency, singularity, interconnections and potentialities of the diverse trajectories of those elements which compose present social arrangements and experience” (Dean, 1994, p. 21). That is, genealogy applies the techniques of historical investigation (archaeology) to identify and gather data from historical sources, and analyse them to form an understanding of the rules of their production.

Context is thus central to the development of a genealogy. As the construct has been formed by a set of specific discursive arrangements in a particular discursive environment, an understanding of the context of production is necessary in order to reveal those discourses that are marginalised and silenced in the existing construct. It is these marginalised and silenced discourses, and those in the context of the genealogical investigation, that Foucault aims to re-activate so that they may re-contest their truths.

This contextual focus of genealogical research also limits the findings of these studies to the specific context/s studied. These contexts may be related to formations in isolated or localised contexts, or national and international contexts. A discursive field however is complex, and thus localised, national, and internationally circulating discourses may contribute to the formations of truth within these settings. Further, the particular arrangements of discourses may also differ in differing contexts. The findings of a genealogy can therefore have some relevance to those in similar settings, those in contexts where these discourses also circulate, for those working with similar constructs, or for those working in similar discursive fields. Thus, although the findings of genealogies are not generalisable in the same way as the
findings of quantitative studies, the findings of these studies do have some transferability in the same way as the findings of qualitative research.

The contribution of a genealogical investigation, then, is to offer insight into the constructed nature of the formation being studied, and to open up possibilities for new constructs to emerge, with the aim of developing a greater awareness of their exclusionary potential, and more inclusive of those disadvantaged by previous constructs. These analyses also serve the purpose of challenging us to question all constructs around us, as representing only one possibility of discursive arrangements, and thus to remain curious as to their formation and open to the processes of innovation. Always, however, this contribution is intended as a critical intervention in the existing arrangements of the world.

The research context

This research took place in New South Wales, Australia, and was focused within the discursive field of school education. In this context, as in other Westernised countries, there has been growing interest in increasing parent participation in their children’s education, largely based on the correlation between the introduction of parent involvement and participation strategies in schools and improved student results (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jordan et al., 2002; McKeand, 2003). However, as will be identified in the following chapters, there are also other discourses at work here.

Data for the project was gathered throughout the research, with interviews recorded during 2004 and 2005. Data analysis and the writing of the thesis document occurred throughout 2006 to 2008. During the time of this research, each Australian state and territory was responsible for its school education system. However, the Federal Government (Howard Liberal-National Coalition: 1996-2007) was engaged in an ongoing process of educational reform. The reforms involved increased central control, increased accountability, increased privatisation and increased competition, in a neoliberal inspired attempt to raise quality and improve the outcomes of schooling, particularly in response to the demands of globalisation. The formation of
school councils as construct to facilitate parent participation in their children’s education was included as part of the federal government’s focus on schools in Australia, and in its draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a).

Family-school partnerships also form part of the new (Rudd) government’s policy emphasis, with its establishment of a Family-School and Community Partnership Bureau (Gillard, 2008). In the final stages of editing this thesis, the Rudd government adopted the draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a), renaming it the Family-school partnerships framework: A guide for schools and families (DEEWR, 2008). This revised version of the document contains minor changes to the original draft. In this now officially released document, the relevant category of “decision making” has been revised to refer to “collaborative decision making” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 12). The term “school councils” (DEST, 2004a, p. 20) has also been revised to now refer to “School councils or school boards” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 12). That is, the participatory language of collaborative decision-making (discussed on Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis) is emphasised, while simultaneously notions of school councils have been extended to the more independent (neoliberal) notion of school boards, as discussed in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

As indicated in Chapter 1, the construct of school councils has also emerged at other times in recent history, in different education systems and in different countries. The investigations of this research focus on the thinking (discourses) that are involved in the production of these formations of school councils as a form of parent participation in their children’s schooling, particularly in Australia. To better understand this formation, the research also draws on different national and international (Western) constructions of family-school partnerships and of school councils.

The result of this broader approach to data gathering is an identification of the dominant discourses in differing formations of school councils. From this information a clearer understanding of the particular formation of school councils in the current Australian context can also be developed, thus providing an answer to the
question of how this construct came to be accepted as natural, as a truth, in this situation. This focus also allows the thesis to develop understandings of the range of school council constructs in Western educational systems, and attempt to prompt the “innovation” process by identifying the discursive arrangements that produce these constructs, and re-expose their exclusionary effects in the current context. Thus, this thesis provides an analysis that invites a critical challenge to all school council constructs within the discursive field of Western education, including its most recent formation in the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a).

Data collection
Foucaultian studies are reliant on data gathered from the evidence of discursive action, or artefacts. Since the artefacts of discursive action, the knowledges, constructs and subjectivities formed as possible and impossible, are seen as containing the traces of their discursive descent and emergence, the sources of data for a genealogical investigation include anything in which the traces of discursive action are “recorded”. Together these artefacts make up the body of data used in analysis (Foucault, 1972a). The archive where this data is found in Foucaultian studies can include books, notes and speeches, as well as official documents, policies and procedures, architecture, laws, rules, artworks, and any other material artefacts of the time. Thus, a genealogy may begin with a single discursive construct, physical artefact, or text, and quickly lead to the inclusion of a “vast accumulation of source materials” (Foucault, 1998/1971, p. 370) which form the body of data for analysis. This research began with the single construct of school councils as a form of parent participation in schools.

In this research, the archive includes a range of written and spoken (recorded and reported) documents, and participant interviews. The documents were drawn from sources related specifically to the construction of school councils within Western style education systems, that is, predominantly from Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, with a small number of specific examples from Canada and Israel. The interview participants had all been members of a school council, and had
experiences across a number of school systems. Each of these data sources is in
detail below.

**Documentary sources**
The documentary sources used in this research were drawn from policy
documentation, policy support statements and research literature. This research
literature represents the product of particular discursive productions of knowledge
around the construct of school councils, and thus becomes both the source of
evidence in terms of a review of the literature, and a data source in its own right. For
this reason, the literature informs the discussions in each of the chapters, as well as
being the focus of data analysis. There is, therefore, no specific literature review
chapter, but instead, the literature is reviewed throughout the thesis. Each source of
this documentary evidence is described below.

**Core documents**
For clarity, and for direct relevance to the Australian context, the archive of materials
in this study is mapped around the emergence of school councils in the Australian
draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a). Although not
specifically confined to this particular formation, this focus allows a point around
which to detail the investigations that led to the identification of the dominant
constructions of school councils discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, and a single
example against which to compare differing discursive possibilities that produce
differing formations of school councils. Surrounding the production of the Australian
draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) are a set of immediate
documents and advocacy statements that supported the most recent formation of
school councils in the Australian setting, and which themselves represent an archive
of historical data. Thus, these documents form a core around which other artefacts
that have informed this study can be related (see Figure 4-1). These core documents
include media releases and speeches by the then Minster for Education and Training,
Dr Brendan Nelson, supporting the development of the framework (Nelson, 2004a,
2004b); a literature review commissioned by the Federal Government from the
Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (McKeand, 2003); and a
“Family School Partnerships Issues Paper” from the Australian Council of State
School Organisations (ACSSO) (McConchie, 2004).

Figure 4-1. Core documents surrounding the initial development of the

(i) Core document 1.
DEST (2004a). Draft Family-Schools Partnerships Framework. Canberra:
Commonwealth Government of Australia.
This document represents the work of the two peak parent bodies representing the
families of children in state and private schools in Australia, the Australian Council
of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC).
The document was developed with the support of the Federal Government
Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). The development of the framework was informed by the following four documents.

(ii) Core document 2.

On 28 May 2004, in a Ministerial media release entitled Framework for Successful Family-School Partnerships (Nelson, 2004a), the Minister for Education, Science and Training announced, “A project to identify best practices of parent-school partnerships has been launched, outlining the principles for effective parental engagement with schools” (p. 1). This project was to involve the two national parent advocacy groups in schools, the ACSSO and the APC, in the development of “a Family-School Partnerships Framework for effective partnerships” (n.p.). The framework developed was to be trialled in schools, with the trial intended to “showcase successful strategies for forming and sustaining strong partnerships between families and schools, and will assess their impact on education outcomes” (n.p.). The purpose of this framework was to enable parents “to become real partners in the education of their children” in order to improve student outcomes “in the form of improved learning, behaviour, engagement and community relations” (n.p.).

(iii) Core document 3.

The second advocacy statement in support of the development of a Family-School Partnerships Framework from the Minister for Education, Science and Training is the transcript of the Minister’s speech at the opening of the roundtable meeting at Old Parliament House, Canberra, whose task it was to inform the development of the
framework for trial in schools. In this speech, Dr Nelson outlined “why parental engagement in school education matters” (n.p.) and introduced the basis for the development of the framework. From this roundtable meeting, the ACSSO and APC were given responsibility to draft a family-school partnerships framework for use in Australian schools.

(iv) Core document 4.

Informing the discussions at the roundtable conference was a Federal Government commissioned review of the literature from the ACER. This paper provided a review of the different terms applied in this field and described successful programs and approaches in a number of countries. The paper also identified common challenges in developing family-school relationships and made recommendations to guide the development of the Australian framework.

(v) Core document 5.

The fourth core document is an issues paper prepared by the ACSSO on behalf of both the ACSSO and APC, also to inform the roundtable conference and the development of the Family-School Partnerships Framework. This paper similarly provided a number of definitions of key terms, as well as developing a series of focus questions that might guide the drafting of an Australian Family-School Partnerships Framework. These focus questions were supported by research findings in relation to key topics including “the nature of family school partnerships” (p. 4), ways of thinking about the roles of parents in schools, barriers to parent involvement and participation in schools, and provided a review of further literature and international approaches to family-school partnerships.
Supporting materials around the core documents
Genealogy also draws on a wider “field of entangled and confused parchments, documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times” (Foucault, 1998/1971, p. 369) in addition to the construct or artefact under investigation, and the sources close to its production. In this particular research, these additional data sources included policy announcements, documentation and support materials, political and departmental speeches and announcements, media releases, media statements by politicians and public servants, school brochures, newspaper articles and advocacy statements from interest groups such as state Parents and Citizens Associations, the national ACSSO, the APC, and teachers’ unions. Supporting these sources was often a body of research literature and associated literature reviews and meta-analyses that were also drawn on as part of this data gathering.

The research literature
Research literature informs a genealogical study in different ways than in other forms of research. Foucaultian researchers view such reports as records containing the discursive production of these artefacts, and as artefacts of discursive action themselves. The research methods chosen for these research projects present a particular way of seeing the world (phenomenological, scientific, Marxist, and so on). The products of these processes, the claims of truth, are themselves artefacts of this discursive action.

Foucaultian studies do not attempt to analyse, evaluate, or critique these research documents by applying a differing discourse to their processes and findings, as is the case in other research methodologies. Instead, the documents themselves are taken as artefacts of discursive action, and form part of the archive for discursive analysis, in order to identify the dominant and marginalised discourses that are present in the discursive field in which the construct being researched has emerged. That is not to say that research does not inform a genealogical investigation. After all, Foucault was extremely scholarly and rigorous in his investigations. However, the way in which this literature is used is as data, as discursively produced and as discursively
productive, and thus its use is in identifying (as evidence of) this discursive action. Consequently, the research literature becomes part of the data of a genealogical investigation.

The literature relating to school councils appears throughout the thesis, and particularly in the following chapters, as data in identifying the discourses, and allowing these discourses in this identification to speak again. This critical work is detailed in the second part of this chapter. The literature was also drawn on in the first two chapters, which established the context of the research in this thesis.

**Additional documentary sources**

In addition to these sources directly related to the focus on school councils, and other closely related materials such as official statements, research and general educational policy documents, additional sources that provide an understanding of the discourses identified in this analysis, and their contributions to the production and emergence of the particular constructions of school councils, form part of the “vast accumulation of source materials” (Foucault, 1998/1971, p. 370) that informs this research. In particular, Chapter 6 draws on a range of historical materials to identify the central principles that inform the political constructions of parental participation discussed. Chapter 6, therefore, provides a genealogy of the modern discourses of democracy that produce differing constructions of school councils, and identifies the principles that these modern forms articulate, and rearticulate, in differing ways in these processes of discursive construction.

**Interview data**

According to Foucault, all our behaviour, the ways we “reflect, write, judge, speak … is governed by a theoretical structure” (Foucault, 1994/1966, p. 51) – “the surface effect of more firmly grounded unities” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 6). The ways we “perform ourselves” (Donaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000, p. 46) are therefore artefacts of discourses, and so are part of the archive, a source of and evidence of discursive action, inscribed on our being. Discourses “live themselves out through people” (Robinson & Diaz, 2006, p. 32). Whereas archaeological investigations show how
discursive formations are possible, genealogy also investigates the power associated with discursive formation, and in particular, how this power acts on our bodies forming our subjectivities. The traces of discursive action can therefore also be found in the ways we experience and express ourselves in differing contexts.

Stephen Ball (1990, p. 2) noted that discourses establish both what can be recognised and spoken as truth in a particular situation, “but also who can speak, and with what authority”. Rather than investigating these contestations as a question of “who exercises power?” Foucaultian studies ask, “How does it happen?” (Foucault, 1988d, p. 103). That is, genealogies seek the answer to the question of what discursive arrangements, what arrangements of power-knowledges, makes it so that some voices are able to be heard, to speak truth, whereas others are marginalised as illegitimate. The participants’ experiences of the contestations with and between differing subject positions within these councils, therefore, also provides the researcher with data identifying these discourses which have formed the range of possible and impossible subjectivities available in the discursive field in which school councils have emerged.

In selecting participants for a genealogical study, issues of statistical significance give way to experiential knowledge in the contexts of production. Thus, members from that community where these constructs emerge can offer insights into the discourses that are formative of the subjectivities and knowledges within that cultural setting in relation to the construct being investigated. Potentially, any member of the community could offer their constructions of school councils as data, from which dominant and marginalised discourses might be identified; however, by drawing on those with direct experience of the construct of school councils, the directly relevant (dominant) and impossible subjectivities that relate to this construct can be more specifically identified.

Introducing the participants
This research involved interviews with six participants with a range of experiences as school council members. The participants were all from New South Wales, and had
been members of school councils in primary schools between 2002 and 2006. These participants had experiences as members of school councils in public schools (Barry, Karen and John), Catholic schools (Barbara), and independent schools (Anna and Michael). All names of participants and family members are pseudonyms. Schools are referred to by their administrative structures, and in no place are names used that might identify individual schools or those related to these institutions. These participants are introduced below in alphabetical order.

Anna
Anna, a part-time high school teacher in a public school, joined the school council in her children’s independent primary school to provide educational expertise, as the council was responsible for both the financial and educational management of the school. This was in the same school as Michael, though both were members at different times. With the council elected by the school community, Anna became a member of the school company at its annual general meeting.

Anna’s partner is a business manager and executive, and they would be described as middle class professionals. Anna’s teaching background has made issues of equity and social justice important for her in school management; however, her focus was to bring her educational skills to the development of educational policy and curriculum in the school in her area of expertise. Anna did not see herself as being involved in the financial, legal, and legislative matters of the school.

After joining the council, Anna found there were a series of conflicts around issues addressed at council meetings. These issues spanned the range of council responsibilities, and Anna identified a lack of expertise and conflicting agendas as the cause of these conflicts. Anna found herself isolated in matters where she advocated teachers’ workplace legal and industrial welfare, and also found that her expertise and understanding of educational issues was at odds with the more short-term focus of members who were untrained in educational content and pedagogy.
In a council dominated by male professionals and by a focus on financial and administrative matters, Anna found her input ineffective. Further, Anna found these clashes distracting from how she saw her role and the role of the school council and at times quite distressing. Anna noticed other members also withdraw from interaction at meetings after similar clashes. Anna chose to refocus her efforts towards helping in the classroom on her non-work days, and using the time and energy previously given to the role of school council member to involving herself in other activities with her children outside school hours.

Barbara
Barbara is the mother of three primary school aged students at a local religion-based primary school. Barbara is a part-time registered nurse with a postgraduate specialty and lives with her partner Tony, a specialist tradesman. Tony is a second generation Australian from a Mediterranean family. Barbara could be described as a middle class professional, but her partner is working class and from a working class background and Barbara sees the family as more representative of working class Australians.

Barbara’s three children attend a local religion-based systemic school with a school council that runs as a fundraising committee and as the voice of parents, in an advisory and consultation role to the principal. Barbara reported that many decisions were made at the system level, and so Barbara’s participatory role was contained to school-based policies and to community organisation roles. For example, the council was able to select the school uniform from a range of approved options, and had a feedback and endorsement role in some policy development. The council had no curriculum or educational management role.

Barbara felt she had enthusiasm and skills that could help build the social, family, community atmosphere of her children’s school. Barbara joined the school council and worked towards building community events and school-based activities with an emphasis on social outcomes for the families within the school. Over time, Barbara noticed the school council emphasising financially rewarding activities with little
involvement for the children and little value in building the school as a community. Barbara also noticed that particular members of the council held sway over decisions and felt that others’ ideas were not being heard. When Barbara confronted the school principal over one particular issue where this had occurred, the principal advised Barbara that it was important for the school to maintain the support of the family of the dominant individual.

The family referred to by Barbara as being dominant in the council was also central to the school’s fundraising activities. As prominent local business owners, the family had been able to arrange donations from other businesses of goods and services, and they were always highly involved in organising fundraising activities. The principal highlighted these facts and also that the family had several children and would have a continuing relationship with the school for many years. Barbara also noted that two of this family’s children had been the school captains in their years.

Barbara positioned herself as part of the family-school social fabric, seeing parents as part of the school community and with responsibilities to develop this aspect of the school’s life. The role of the school in this relationship-building was to ensure that parents were included where possible in these types of activity. The school was also responsible for giving parents guidance in working with their children at home and providing them with opportunities to assist in class where it was possible. Barbara had no interest in being involved in matters of educational expertise, though she believed that parents should be part of the curriculum and policy development process in terms of being able to raise questions during the development process. She also believed that matters of professional management of staff were the school’s responsibility. Barbara joined the council with these roles in mind.

After having worked in a committee as part of the school council planning a school-based social activity focused around multiculturalism, only to have the activity cancelled in order that the school’s efforts went towards a fundraising activity suggested and driven by this prominent family, Barbara resigned from the council. Barbara saw the council structure as not providing the opportunities for family
involvement and community building she had sought. Barbara decided to put her efforts into activities in her own children’s classroom and in her children’s education and lives outside of school, and resigned from the school council.

Barry
Barry is a member of the school council in his child’s public primary school. Barry was previously a member of the Department of Education in a professional role, and although no longer in this position, is dedicated to the ethos of public schooling. Barry sees his role on the council as supporting the school in endeavouring to meet the needs of the wider school community. In doing so, Barry recognises the social endeavours of schools. Barry was invited by the school principal to join the school council.

As a member of a school council of a public school in New South Wales, Barry’s role is limited by the legislative formation of the role as being advisory to the principal. The council role is separate from that of the Parents and Citizens’ Association, being more directly focused on providing a voice for parents in educational and policy matters. Barry sees his role as being a support for the principal and voice for parents when decisions are being made on matters such as policy development.

Barry has focused his attention towards engaging the school community in supporting the work of the school. He supports the management of regular working bees and the work of other members in building the school community to being more inclusive of those often excluded in these efforts.

Barry is also supportive of the professional aspects of the school, seeing curriculum and educational design matters and staff management as the responsibility of the staff, principal and Department of Education and Training. Influenced by his previous professional role in the department, Barry sees his participation as a way he can support the school staff and his children’s teachers, and thus support his own children’s schooling experience.
John
John, a parent of a child in a public primary school, joined the school council as part of his commitment to supporting quality in the school. John was also an active member of the school’s Parents and Citizens’ committee, and joined the council to “sort the accountability stuff out”. John felt that there was too little communication with parents and that the school’s results would improve if there was greater direct accountability to the school’s community.

John is a curriculum consultant and his partner an educational consultant. They would be described as middle class in many aspects of their daily lives, including income, home ownership, and career. John is involved in a range of community and social justice projects as a volunteer and organiser, and places great emphasis on these issues in his professional work. John also sees the school as belonging to the community it serves.

In terms of his role as a member of the school council, John joined with the idea that the increased accountability would improve the school’s performance in curriculum areas and in building better communications with parents, as well as provide a way of building the school community. After two years as a member of the school council John found there was little real involvement in matters that were associated with accountability or school improvement. John resigned because the focus of the council had become that of fundraising and taking responsibility for particular school events, and as such was “unnecessary duplication” with the role of the Parents and Citizens’ Association, on which John also served.

Karen
Karen is a university lecturer and is involved in her children’s (public primary) school council. Karen’s partner Matthew is a high school teacher with several areas of expertise, and both are active within both school communities. Karen and her partner could be described as middle class. They are committed to community outreach and have been engaged in social justice projects within and beyond their schools.
Karen joined the school council when a position became vacant. Karen’s focus is on building the school’s community feel and ethos, and extending the social outreach within the school. This stance fits within the focus of her family in supporting others in the community as part of good citizenship. Although wanting to provide a model of this ethos for her children, Karen is also committed to this as part of her commitment to the wider society.

With similar views to the school principal at the time, Karen and the school council made endeavours to include the voices of all those they could from the school community and build the school’s provisions for meeting the needs of all in the school community. Karen applied her research skills in gathering suggestions from the school community, including carefully developed endeavours to include the views of those in the school that are often not given a voice, including families from minority, marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds.

After building communication opportunities and surveying the needs of members of the school community, Karen found the emphasis of the council shifting towards policy development compliances under a new principal, with issues of equity and community development given less attention as a result. Karen withdrew from the council to concentrate on other supportive endeavours within the school and within her children’s classrooms.

Michael
Michael is a manager of corporate training who works for a large national company. An experienced high school English teacher and previous head of department, Michael successfully moved into the corporate world some years ago. Michael was on the school council of an independent school where the council was also the board of directors of the company. Membership of the school council was through election by the members of the school (all parents and teachers could join as members of the “limited by guarantee” school company).
Michael lives with his partner Tracey, an experienced primary school teacher who is now a full-time mother. With two children at the school, Tracey provides volunteer assistance in her children’s classrooms and helps in many school activities. Tracey is at the school for some time several days each week. Michael describes himself as being from “a long line of highly educated professionals”. Given their professional backgrounds and Michael’s role in the corporate world, Michael is best described as being at the higher end of middle class professionals.

Michael is passionate about professionalism in schools and in community building through high levels of two-way communication. These are the aspects Michael sees as central to successful organisations, and with which he works within the corporate environment. Michael’s main aim in joining the school council was to develop avenues for communication in the school to enhance the professional standing of the school and build its community.

Michael’s intention in building communications and community within the organisation was to enhance the educational environment of the school for all children, and including his own. He had hoped the children would learn effective communication and community skills through their immersion within such an organisation. Michael also felt that he could act as a voice for parents in school decisions, particularly those of the grades in which his children were enrolled.

Even though he was trained and had had a successful teaching career, Michael was adamant that the school council should not have a role in deciding curriculum content or classroom pedagogy. He saw his role as being an advocate in asking questions in relation to educational matters, but only insofar as supporting the need for better communication on these matters, rather than as an agent for change in curriculum matters or as an act of accountability.

After four years, Michael found school council meetings dominated by the financial and educational administration requirements of the school and maintaining regulatory requirements. For volunteer members, the time demands of these
legislative requirements on them as school managers meant that little time or priority was given to building and maintaining open communication within the school, community building, or school planning and development.

Michael felt that his time was being spent doing the work of middle management, in which he felt he lacked the necessary expertise or interest. Michael’s role as a “voice for parents” was not realised, apart from in the setting of fee increases, and he noted there was little benefit for his children directly or even indirectly achieved by his school council membership. He found the demands of the role meant that family time was being sacrificed for things that were far removed from helping in their lives. Michael decided to resign from the school council in order to focus his efforts on his family and on supporting his children’s classroom teachers.

**Summary of data sources**

These sources of data represent the localised and individualised formations of discursive action – formations of the possibilities of these power-knowledges in the field of their emergence. This data set includes the core documents from the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework, research literature, policy documents, advocacy statements and media releases, and the reports of participants with experience of school council membership.

Data from these sources contributes to the data set of this analysis, along with additional materials that provide a deeper understanding of the discourses identified. These additional sources include publications that address the features of these discourses, such as books and journal articles, that clearly articulate the rules of the production truths, “the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge … [and the] … norms for elaborating concepts and theories” (Foucault, 1997/1971, p. 11).

**The researcher**

Foucault was not concerned with the subject who produces a particular product, such as a work of research, seeing the individual as a production and re-producer of
discourse, rather than the origin of knowledge. Thus, Foucault’s focus was on the discourses that made the production of the work possible, in the specific and particular context. This is why Foucault provided little personal information on his own life throughout his career.

Researchers, however, do bring their own discursively produced subjectivities and identity to their research. Thus “anyone producing knowledge occupies a relational and historical site in the social world which is likely to shape and set limits to the knowledge formulations produced” (Cain, 1993, p. 88). Some information on the positioning of the researcher is therefore of relevance. This thesis represents research carried out in New South Wales, Australia, between the years 2002 and 2008 as part of a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The researcher had many years experience as a primary school teacher and as a member of school executive staff in a kindergarten to year 12 school, and had several years’ experience working with school councils as a parent, teacher representative, and as a member of school executive. More recently the researcher has been employed as a lecturer in education at a regional Australian university.

In Foucaultian research, the researcher attempts to describe things as they are, without judgement or bias, by holding “what is closest … in an abrupt dispossession so as to seize it at a distance” (Foucault, 1998/1971, p. 382). This distance is not the same as the objective stance of positivist research. Nor is it “bracketing” in the Husserlian phenomenological sense of holding at bay one’s biases. Instead, this diagnostic distance (Rose, 1999) is objective in the sense that it seeks to develop a “pure description of discursive events” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 27), using the historical evidence of discursive action. Thus, this “pure description” is a presentation of discursively produced facts, without the biases of evaluation or judgement. It is an objective historical description of how things came to be as they are at a particular moment in time and space.

Within this Foucaultian objectivity, however, there is a bias towards a critical project. Foucault’s purpose in disrupting the current, and drawing our attention to the
constructed nature of those things we accept as given, was always to create an opening for those discourses marginalized, silenced, and excluded to speak again. The intention of this was that it might make it possible for injustices held in place in the current construct to be addressed. Thus, genealogy involves an opening of the possibility of possibilities for renewal (Foucault, 2000/1978, p. 159).

Thus, although objectivity in terms of the process of analysis and description, the project itself is intended as a critical project, a purpose which has been strongly taken up in feminist poststructuralism. This intention, to identify issues of injustice is part of the work of this thesis, and inspires its approach to analysis and contributes to the movement towards innovation that structures the remainder of this thesis. These critical elements of this project are introduced as part of the following discussion of the approach to data analysis used in this research.

Data analysis

The data gathered in genealogical investigations is analysed with a particular purpose in mind. This purpose is detailed in Baker’s description of genealogical research. Barker (1993, p. 65) considered genealogy as best described by what it is not rather than what it is, stating that genealogy “has no recourse to metaphysics, it is not teleological, it does not search for origins, it is not based on continuity, it does not seek either to establish singular historical meaning, nor to recover the essential truth and unity of history”. Instead, genealogy seeks a description of things as they are, detailing their discursive construction.

In searching for the historical origins of constructs, genealogical researchers immerse themselves in the vast collections of documents and source materials as they search for the rules of formation of these constructs. Data analysis in genealogical studies is thus a patient and meticulous process (Foucault, 1998/1971, p. 369) of identifying consistent rules of the formation of truth and non-truth contained in these materials. This searching for the common rules of formation is in effect a thematic process of data analysis similar in many ways to the processes but not the objectives of other qualitative forms of analysis. Genealogical analysis involves a contemplative
immersion in the data in order to begin to see these connections, the common sources of the traces of discursive action, that have formed these artefacts as possible and others as unrecognizable as truth in that situation. That is, this analysis involves the identification of dominant, marginalised, and silenced discourses. This process involves returning again and again to the data sources in a process of checking and becoming more aware of the discursive voices and silences, in the careful and thoughtful process of developing the researcher’s awareness of these themes – the scratching over many times referred to by Foucault (1998/1971, p. 369), but this time by the genealogist.

In this research, this process was aided by the interview data, which provided evidence of the discursive formation of these parent’s subjectivities, but also of the processes of contestation they experienced as these “truths” encountered differing “truths”, or others whose subjectivities differed. This data provided insights, glimpses of the contestations within the discursive field, and of discourses that were otherwise already silenced in the documentary data. The participants also expressed multiple subjectivities in these roles, giving further indication of the multiple discourses that form these discursive fields.

Data analysis in this research continued, guided by the process of returning repeatedly to the data, checking and rechecking for new categories and confirming those identified, until no new discourses were identified, and these categories (discourses) accounted for the data gathered the concept of “saturation” (Bowen, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) applied in other qualitative methodologies. As a concept, the achievement of saturation should be detailed (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003). In this research, saturation in analysis was achieved through the processes of returning again to the data as new or possible additional discourses were identified, in order that all possibilities evident were considered. The result of this process was the identification of pedagogical and political (democratic) constructions of school councils. These democratic constructions include participatory forms of social democratic and representative democracy, and a market based neoliberal (advanced liberal) formation of this participation by parents in
school decision-making processes. These categories (or discourses) were also checked against the experiences of the participants to see if they were materialised in the experiences of these parents in their participation in school councils. Thus this research identifies and considers the formations of school councils as pedagogical, social and representative democratic, and advanced liberal constructs.

Although poststructural research attempts to provide a pure description of the discursive arrangements in a particular situation, as individual subjects, researchers also bring their own histories to the research process. The selection of these discourses as being dominant needs to be recognised as normative, based on the reading and analysis of one researcher, with particular historio-cultural experiences and thus sensibilities. Other researchers in this field might identify other discourses as dominant. For example, an additional discourse, evident in family-school partnership literature based in parent-controlled Christian schools and associated with religious advocacy of home schooling, identifies parents as decision makers in schools as part of a divine responsibility. Here a religious discourse is dominant, and accepted as truth in that particular field. The dominance of religious discourse in Western countries, particularly in past decades, has been strongly influential in the formation of notions of liberty and equality, and could thus be argued to be dominant in the formation of democratic discourse, and hence in the construction of school councils.

However, there was little indication of this religious formation of the role of parents and parent involvement in the family-school partnership literature beyond these specific articulations. The identification of this discourse as being less dominant in the formation of school councils, and thus the decision not to explored it further in this particular research, is an example of the normative effect of the processes of analysis in the research. Although not identified as a dominant discourse in the construction of school councils in Western countries, this discourse remains strongly formative of this specific construction of school councils for those associated with this view.
For individuals, therefore, parent participation in the decision-making processes of schools may be constructed in ways other than those identified as dominant in this thesis. The following chapters focus in turn on the elaboration of these three dominant discourses (pedagogical, democratic and neoliberal constructions of school councils) and the conditions of possibility that allow these constructions to emerge. In doing so, details of the data containing the traces of these discourses in differing contexts are given, and their particular conceptualisation of school councils elaborated.

Thus, a thorough, though never complete, picture of the discursive environment that has produced a particular construct or “truth” is developed. The contextual specificity, and the limitations of the availability and accessibility of data, mean that such descriptions, like the things they describe, are never complete. Consequently, although such studies are meticulous and draw on a large body of materials, they are also “tentative” explanations (Foucault, 1981, p. 4), offering only one analytical understanding of the construct, a “game opening” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 85) inviting the recontestation of discourses and a reconceptualisation, rather than offering “the final word”.

**Ethical considerations**

All the documents gathered for this research, including the transcripts of speeches and advocacy statements, were drawn from publicly available and published sources including official websites, media releases, newspapers, research journals, books and conference proceedings. Research ethics approval was gained from the sponsoring university’s Human Research Ethics Committee for the interview phase of the research before participants were sought (UWS HEC 03/053 and modified in April, 2004) (see Appendix A). Ethics approval was not required from particular school systems for the research as participants were addressing their personal experiences of participation as parents in school councils and since the study did not analyse a specific institutional formation of school councils, nor evaluate any particular council’s performance. In addition, these participants were self-identified through personal contact and through others involved in the research.
Potential interviewees were identified through known contacts and through self-identification as interested parties heard about the project. One participant was identified through the process of “passive snowballing” (Hawe, Degeling & Hall, 1990). Snowballing is a technique used in identifying potential “key informants”, being those with particular knowledge or experience of the focus of the research, and involves gathering details of possible participants from research participants (Patton, 1990). Passive snowballing involves potentially interested participants self-nominating through hearing of the research, either through another participant, the researcher’s conversations or presentations, or through other information about the project. The snowballing effect occurs when the researcher’s details are passed on through these contacts to these interested persons, rather than a person’s details being passed to the researcher possibly without that person’s knowledge or consent. Those interested are then able to contact the researcher for further information should they be willing to participate in the project. All participants, except this single participant identified through passive snowballing, were self-identifying after they heard of the research through social contact with the researcher or others who knew of the project, or from presentations of the research topic within university settings, or at research and educational conferences.

On expression of interest, participants received a package that included an invitation to participate in the research. The invitation provided an explanation of the project and details of the requirements for inclusion and participation in the study (Appendix B), an expression of interest form (Appendix C) and a participant consent form to be signed prior to the interview (Appendix D). These documents had the prior approval of the sponsoring university’s research ethics committee. Participants were also asked to provide biographical information of relevance to the study and its analysis (Appendix E). All parents who had expressed interest agreed to participate in the interviews and nominated a place where they were happy to have the interview recorded. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interviewing technique (Burns, 2000), following an interview question guide (Appendix F). Such in-depth interviews rely on a free-flowing conversation between the participant and
the researcher (Punch, 2001) and allow access to the participant’s subjective experiences (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 2000).

Before the interviews commenced, participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and non-identification of other persons, places or specific schools they might mention. Following a time for clarification questions, the participants signed the consent forms and the interview commenced. Participants were asked to focus on their understandings of their roles as members of the school council, including their motivations for joining, the work they considered important, and their experiences, achievements and challenges as members of a school council. Participants were also asked how school councils’ roles in schools might be improved. Interviews took from 40 minutes to an hour, and were then transcribed for analysis. All participants were given contact details for follow-up interviews or to clarify their comments, should they wish this to occur. No participant chose to follow up on this option.

**The critical work of the thesis**

Foucault’s genealogy, as indicated in the previous chapter, provides both an historical description of the discursive descent and emergence, and challenge to the apparent naturalness of a construct, a “challenge directed to what is” (Foucault, 1981, p. 6). Foucault’s intention, to disturb these current discursive arrangements as a game opening in which “subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 1980d/1977, p. 81) might speak again, provides the basis for the three critical considerations that structure the approach of the following chapters. How these effects of Foucaultian theory are applied, form the basis for the remaining discussions in this chapter.

Foucault (1990/1976, p. 12) sees discursively produced truths as being held in position through elements of control. The foundations of this control (of truth) are threefold, being:

- The “discursive production [of truth] … which also administers silences”;
- “The propagation of knowledge … [which can] … often cause mistaken beliefs or systematic misconceptions to circulate”; and
“The production of power … [which] … also functions as prohibition”.

(Foucault, 1990/1976, p. 12)

These three forms of control link to Foucault’s notions of “regimes of truth” (discursive productions of truth); “games of truth” (which can involve the circulation of misconceptions), and deliberate misconceptions or “lies” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 108) that are part of the tactics deployed to win the “battle ‘for truth’” (Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 132); and the maintenance of these truths (and misconceptions) through a continuation of the conditions of (im)possibility for other truths to be legitimately spoken (i.e., as prohibition).

In discussing the differences between an archaeologically developed description, and a genealogical project, Foucault stated, “‘archaeology’ would be the appropriate methodology of analysis of local discursivities, and ‘genealogy’ would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released, were brought into play” (Foucault, 1980d/1977, p. 85). Thus, genealogical research invites and involves a critical challenge to the elements of control by bringing into play subjugated knowledges, which, in the newly opened space of possibilities, speak again, challenging misconceptions and the discursive conditions that have, until now, prohibited these knowledges from being recognised.

**Genealogy as critical research**

Genealogical research therefore provides a critical challenge to our existing constructions of truth at the level of their control, that is, at the levels of their production and maintenance or at the levels of their discursive production, propagation of knowledge, and production of power. The critical challenge to these three elements of control of our truths forms the structure of the following chapters, which consider three dominant discourses in the field of education in Western societies which together produce differing constructions of school councils, the games of truth that allow these constructs to emerge, and the silences on which these
constructs rely for their formation and continued existence. Each chapter presents first a description of the discursive origins of the different constructions of school councils. The chapters then consider some of the misconceptions that circulate in relation to these conceptualisations, and finally reintroduce the marginalised and silenced discourses identified in Western constructions of school councils. These three elements form the critical work of each chapter and this thesis.

Genealogy as a critical opening for silences to (re)speak their truths
As a “challenge directed to what is” (Foucault, 1981, p. 6), genealogical research disturbs the apparent naturalness of the constructs we accept as fundamental in our everyday worlds, identifying the nature of their construction and exposing the discursive arrangements that hold them in place. In doing so, the critical effect is an opening of previously closed possibilities, and thus a genealogical inquiry is a “critical intervention into epistemology” (Barker, 1993, p. 75).

The first critical action of this research is therefore to disturb the appearance of school councils as natural, fundamental and commonsense in relation to parent participation in their children’s schooling in the field of school education. The (re)exposure of the constructed nature of school councils as a formation for parent participation is critical in that it disturbs the taken-for-granted acceptance of this construct, and reopens the field from which it emerged to the forces of recontestation. In doing so, this analysis provides a space in which other discourses can speak again into the context of (re)contestation and in doing so open the possibility of (re)conceptualisation in the field of family-school partnerships.

Exposing games of truth: Challenging misinformation and rearticulation
The establishment and maintenance of truths involves not only assertions of power-knowledge in a particular context, but also inadvertent “errors, [the] false appraisals, and [the] faulty calculations” (Foucault 1980a/1977, p. 132), “accidents, dispersion, chance events” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 108), and sometimes more intentional struggles involving “catty fights, minor crudenesses, ceaseless and nasty clashing of wills … [and] … lies” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 108). In these games of truth,
misinformation and more deliberate “lies” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 108) form a tactic “to diminish the magnitude of power and control, and … misdirect or deflect power and control” of another discourse (Covacio, 2003, p. 664). By limiting or weakening knowledge, and thus its discursive power as power-knowledge, “misinformation is often applied to dominate or control situations to ensure submission or subjugation” (Covacio, 2003, p. 664). These games of truth in the “battle ‘for truth’” (Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 132) that have resulted in the current construct may also be exposed as the result of a genealogical investigation. That is, the critical effect of genealogical investigations of constructions of truth becomes twofold in both exposing the discursive foundations of these constructions and “unearth[ing] their ignoble origins and thereby questioning their claims” (Cousins & Hussain, 1984, p. 264).

This questioning of claims involves the exposure of any misinformation that has formed part of the maintenance of the existing constructions of truth. It is not, therefore, a critical intervention that evaluates or judges as superior the truths of one discourse over another, but instead involves a challenge to these “misinformations” to show their location in the discourses from which they claim to belong. This process is therefore critical in that it involves a challenge that results in the injustices that arise from the current construct forming part of the recontestation process. In this research, these contestations are mobilised not in a positivistic critique of the past, but as a way of exposing the games of truth in the current construct of school councils. Thus, following the identification of each discourse, the following three chapters address this challenge of “questioning their claims” (Cousins & Hussain, 1984, p. 264) in relation to school councils by reintroducing the voices of academia, drawing on research literature specifically relating to school councils that addresses these claims. That is, each discourse is invited to recontest its position in relation to school councils as parent participation.

An insurrection of subjugated knowledges
The third critical approach in this research also results from the archaeological description of the discursive formation of a construct, and relates to the opening of
possibilities of those discourses previously marginalised and silenced by and within the construct are able to speak again, through the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 1980a/1977, p. 85). By exposing the dominant discourses in the formations of school councils, those discourses that have been marginalised are invited to re-speak their truths, reintroducing these ways of speaking that are silenced in the acceptance of the existing construct. By subjugated voices, Foucault was referring to those voices that were considered illegitimate in the context and thus had not been recognised in the construction process, rather than those that had spoken and been dismissed. However, in disturbing current discursive arrangements, all voices in the context of production are invited to reassert their truths, those voices that are heard in the existing formation and those that are considered illegitimate or not up to the task (Foucault, 1980d/1977). The processes of recontestation provide an opportunity for these previously dismissed discourses, as well as others in the context of this interruption, to have a formative effect in the emergence of new constructs.

Foucault noted, however, that no sooner are the discursive arrangements that hold a construct in place “disinter [red] … and put into circulation, than they run the risk of re-codification, re-colonisation” (Foucault, 1980d/1977, p. 86). In this process, the powers of those alternative discourses exposed by the genealogical investigation become “annexed” (Foucault, 1980d/1977, p. 86) by the dominant discourses rearticulating these knowledges in order to subsume them within, and thus maintain, the existing order. This process can be seen in the neoliberal rearticulation of individual rights and community in terms of individual choice (self-interest). In this case, democracy becomes an expression of individual rights rather than community responsibility, and so the notion of equity becomes rearticulated as an equal right to participate rather than the provision of resources to provide for more equitable possibilities of participation. Thus, neoliberalism is able to claim the truth of equity, annexing some of the power-knowledge of the democratic discourse within and in support of the neoliberal agenda.

The use of genealogy in critical research
The critical approach of the insurrection of currently subjugated knowledges applied
in this thesis draws on the similar uses of this process in feminist poststructuralism. In seeking to address the issues of injustice in relation to our gendered identities within the wider context of our existence, feminist poststructuralist researchers apply a specifically focused and critical application of genealogical research. Feminist poststructural research identifies the discursive formation of constructs of gender within the field in which they emerge, with a particular focus on the discursive arrangements that make these identities recognisable or unrecognisable in particular contexts. Thus, feminist poststructuralism reintroduces “matters of femaleness and maleness and the differences and dominations between and within them … [These issues] … are made a central feature of analysis and … [this] analysis implies a challenge of some sort to any inequitable relationships of power which involve gender or sexuality” (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore & Rennie, 1997, p. xi).

In doing so, feminist poststructuralism makes a conscious attempt to hold open the possibilities of these voices being heard in the context of recontestation, to facilitate their inclusion in the context of reconceptualisation, in order to address issues of disadvantage. However, in focusing on disadvantage relating to our gendered identities from a poststructural perspective, feminist researchers are able to look beyond the male-female binary of traditional feminism, to embrace the range of our experiences as gendered, as well as cultured, raced, classed and sexualised beings. Feminist poststructuralism intends to expose all gendered constructs, and so remains open to all gender discourses. Its focus on exposing “any inequitable relationships of power which involve gender or sexuality” (Kenway et al., 1997, p. xi) also fits with Foucaultian poststructural research, which is specifically designed on the principles of multiple truths, disrupting power relationships that exclude some (other) truths, and these truths which produce us as recognisable and unrecognisable in particular contexts – the principles of power, truth and subjectivity. That is, feminist poststructuralist research focuses on issues of gender within the complex discursive contexts in which we exist.

The emphasis on issues of gender in feminist poststructural theory, however, means that there are also tensions in relation to Foucault’s refusal to assert any particular
discourse over another in his research. Poststructural theory challenges the notion of fundamentally female (or male) characteristics or identities, that is, the notion of an essence that is female or male. Instead, feminist poststructuralism proposes these apparent essences as socially constructed, differing from notions of these characteristics and experiences as being fundamental and based on gender. Where feminist research might remain focused on issues of female identity and experience, feminist poststructuralism broadens the scope of such research to include all gendered subjectivities. The inclusion of issues around female and male identities means that feminist poststructural research is neither pure poststructuralism or pure feminism. The linking together of feminism and poststructural theory, therefore, does not represent a complete integration of the two, but instead a specific application of poststructural theory in the addressing of these specific areas of injustice.

The projects of feminism as conceptualised within a poststructural framework, and of poststructuralism in relation to issues of injustices arising from the differing constructions of our gendered identities, are therefore combined in a sort of synergy rather than fusion, a “productive intersection” (Bailey, 1993, p. 119) within the remaining tensions. These tensions, while not fully resolved, have allowed the toolkit of Foucaultian research methods to be applied in addressing the specific injustices around issues of gender. Investigations applying feminist poststructural methods, such as those of Blackmore (1999b, 1999c), Davies (1989, 1994, 1996), Davies, (1993), McNaughton (2001), Robinson and Diaz (2006), Walkerdine (1990), and Weedon (1997), for example, have produced further understandings addressing complex issues in relation to our gendered subjectivities.

As an “integrally political approach” (Cain, 1993, p. 93), feminist poststructural investigations apply the findings of the archaeological investigation in a “tactical and strategic use of the genealogies identified [as] part of feminism’s project” (Cain, 1993, p. 93). Robinson and Diaz (2006, p. 24) defined the aims of feminist poststructural research as being “to disrupt the normalising discourses that constitute and perpetuate social inequities in society and operate to privilege certain identities and marginalise and silence others”.

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In a similar approach to feminist poststructuralism’s specific inclusion of issues of gender in genealogical studies, the research in this thesis seeks to ensure that matters of equity and social justice, central to Foucaultian research, are included (insurrected) in the recontestation process. That is, that once exposed, these issues are not immediately subject to the processes of re-codification and re-colonisation or annexure, but are held open by the re-insurrection of research literature that speaks from this position. Like feminist poststructuralism, this research does not restrict itself to focusing on any particular essence of our being, but considers the effects of marginalisation and exclusion (inequities and injustices) that arise as the result of the silencing of alternative discourses within current constructions of school councils. Rather than focusing on any particular construct, such as race, culture, or gender, this research attempts to re-expose those discourses that remain subjugated within current constructions of school councils (including those based around our racialised, cultured or gendered identities).

Thus, this research asserts discourses of equity and social justice in order “to disrupt the normalising discourses that constitute and perpetuate social inequities in society and operate to privilege certain identities and marginalise and silence others” (Robinson & Diaz, 2006, p. 24), in order to create the possibilities of a more just reconceptualisation in the field of family-school partnerships. Each of the following chapters therefore reintroduces the discourse of equity and social justice in the discussion of each discursive construction of school councils by the inclusion of research literature (the discourse of academia). The inclusion of this research represents the third critical process in this project, arising from the exposure of the construct of school councils as unstable and as representing a particular arrangement of discourses in the context of school education and family-school partnerships in modern Westernised education systems.

**Conclusion**

Genealogy is a critical approach to researching the constructs of our society. Although never complete, a genealogical description of the historical formation of a construct, such as school councils, offers an understanding of how things are as they
appear at this moment, and of their own incompleteness. By analysing the artefacts of discursive action in the field of parent participation and school councils, the dominant discourses that hold this construct in place as an everyday common sense, or truth, are exposed, and the space reopened to the processes of contestation by other previously silenced discourses, with the aim of creating possibilities of reconceptualisation in this field.

As an opening for the future, the methods of genealogy therefore move beyond presenting a portrait of the present as it is in its inclusions, in a methodology of presentism. Nor do these methods present these views of the present as a form of relativism, which would avoid any form of critical action. Instead, the methods of genealogy search both the construct and its context, in order to describe how things came to be possible as they are in both their inclusions and their exclusions – to expose the games of truth, as well as the results of these battles. As Foucault (1981, p. 6) explained:

Critique doesn’t have to be the premise of a deduction which concludes: this then is what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal … It isn’t a stage in a programming. It’s a challenge directed to what is.

The following three chapters represent the analysis of this research in its “challenge to what is”, being the construct of school councils as parent participation in their children’s schooling. These chapters discuss the three dominant discourses identified in this analysis, focusing on pedagogical, participatory (social and representative) democratic and advanced liberal discourses and their construction of parent participation and school councils. These chapters therefore work together, rather than separately, providing a deconstruction of the current formation of school councils, the exposure of related games of truth, and in developing a space for the insurrection of the subjugated knowledges. Each chapter includes research relating to the particular construction of school councils in each discourse, and its positioning in the
field of education in modern society. In this way, these chapters form a platform for the Foucaultian process of “innovation”, which forms the focus of the final chapter of this thesis.
III
Curiosity

Pedagogical constructions
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Political constructions
Chapter 6 A genealogy of modern democratic discourse
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Chapter 5

Pedagogical constructions of parent participation in school councils

Partnership arrangements must result in tangible academic and social benefits for students, alongside benefits for teachers, for school leaders and for parents, families and communities.

(McConchie, 2004, p. 3)

Introduction

As a pedagogical construct, school councils offer parents a role in supporting the achievement of positive student outcomes through participation in schools’ decision-making processes. This participation at the school level is intended to positively influence the schooling experience for students and their families and to promote the achievement of social and academic outcomes. Not all research, however, is fully supportive of this construction of school councils, with researchers reporting contradictory findings, and challenging the rigour of the research on which this construct relies. A critical analysis of parent participation in school councils also identifies equity and social implications of this participation that require further consideration. These concerns challenge the pedagogical construction of parent participation in school councils and the positioning of this construct within the field of family-school partnerships. This chapter identifies the formation of school councils as a pedagogical construct through an analysis of policy and support documents, research literature and the participants’ statements about their roles (subjectivities) as members of these councils, and draws on this data in beginning the critical processes of this thesis.

The formation of school councils as a pedagogical construct provides the first construction of school councils to be considered in this thesis. In this regard, this chapter stands alone. The two chapters that follow then offer an exploration of the political and social constructions of school councils in modern Westernised, and
increasingly globalised, communities. These chapters address the participatory
democratic discourses of social and representative democracy (Chapter 7) and the
market-democratic based neoliberal (advanced liberal) (Chapter 8) constructions of
parent participation in school councils. Together these chapters represent the
Foucaultian stance of curiosity, offering a genealogical explanation of how this
construct has come into being in the context of modern education.

**Pedagogical constructions of schooling**

The construction of schooling in Western education systems, as asserted in Dewian
Declaration (MCEETYA, 1999) and the Australian (draft) National Declaration on
Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008), places pedagogical or
educational aims as central in evaluating the practices of schools. The Organisation
for Economic Co-operation and Development report, prepared by the Australian
Council for Educational Research, reflecting these notions, identified modern
schooling as being for the benefit of individuals, “in [the] general quality of life and
in the economic returns of sustained, satisfying employment”, and for the benefit of
society “in economic growth and the development of shared values that underpin
social cohesion” (ACER, 2008, n.p.).

These notions are also represented in statements of the aims of education systems.
The New South Wales Department of Education, for example, states that: “The key
priority of public schools is to provide children and young people with the
foundations for lifelong learning so that they become literate, numerate, well-
educated citizens with the capabilities and confidence to make a positive contribution
to our society” (NSW DET, 2008a, n.p.). Policies and practices within schools are
developed to support these organisations in this pursuit of the provision “of high
quality education and training” (NSW DET Corporate Plan, 2008b, n. p). Within this
understanding of the purposes of schooling, the practices of family-school
partnerships become constructed as pedagogical, that is, as one way of enabling
families and schools to form a partnership in support of student achievement.
Pedagogical constructions of family-school partnerships

The construction of family-school partnerships as a pedagogical process is supported by theories of developmental psychology and by research evidence that links this form of parent participation with student achievement. Specifically focusing on the relationships between home, school and community, Epstein’s (1987a) theory of overlapping spheres (see Chapter 3, Figure 2-1) emphasises the importance of increasing the congruence between these influential contexts in supporting children’s development. Epstein particularly emphasised the importance of forming a partnership between the home and school that more effectively supports student learning (Epstein, 1987a, 1995, 2001) (see discussion in Chapter 2). Family-school partnerships frameworks provide different strategies that enable this overlap to be achieved. In this conceptualisation, family-school partnerships are constructed in terms of their pedagogical value in supporting children’s achievement of the goals of schooling.

Developmental theories that support family-school partnerships place families in a central role in supporting children’s development (see for example Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979) ecological theory of human development and Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of human needs). These theories produce notions of developmentally appropriate practice in schools (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2006), which also emphasise the role of the family in promoting children’s development and education. In these theories, parent involvement in their children’s schooling is seen as an important way in which to illustrate to children the family and school working together to support the child’s development (Carter, 2002; Epstein, 1995).

The pedagogical nature of these practices of parent involvement and participation is positioned in research and policy literature as a defining feature of family-school partnerships. Australian educational researchers Goos et al. (2002) include the potential pedagogical benefits of these practices in defining family-school partnerships as activities “that have a positive effect on the academic success of children in school” (Goos et al., 2002, p. 19). The ACER review informing the
development of the framework also states that “[t]he aim of sound relationships with parents is to promote the motivation and academic achievement of children in schools” (McKeand, 2003, p. 3). The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a), is based on this understanding that “family-school partnerships improve student motivation and learning” (DEST, 2004a, p. 5).

**Family-school partnerships as “good parenting” practice**

The pedagogical construction of parental involvement and participation as a key or essential element of school success, also positions family-school partnerships as an element of effective (good) parenting practice (de Carvalho, 2001; Henderson et al., 2004; Mills & Gale, 2004). In their report to the Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence, a Kentucky parent advocacy group (Henderson, al., 2004, p. 3) noted that “parents should feel responsible for doing all they can to support their children, reach out to other parents and work with the schools to improve student achievement”. The role of the good parent is, therefore, to become involved or participate in their children’s schooling in the most effective ways.

Parents who involve themselves in more visible parent involvement activities are often judged as good parents by schools (Hara & Burke, 1998) while those that are not seen to be involved become judged as “don’t care” parents (Mills & Gale, 2004, p. 269). In their case study of an inner city parent involvement program Hara and Burke (1998), for example, link active (visible) parent involvement in their children’s schooling with good parenting, claiming that: “…parents who are involved with their children’s education are those who consistently demonstrate good parenting skills, communicate with the school staff, volunteer their time in the school, help their children learn at home, take an active role in school-related decision making, and who regularly collaborate with the school community” (p. 219).

One of these more visible forms of parental involvement is participation in school decision-making bodies, such as school councils. In opening the roundtable conference convened to develop the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships
Framework (DEST, 2004a), Australia’s then Minister for Education Science and Training (Dr. Nelson) (discursively) linked parent participation in school decision making with good parenting practice in asserting that parents “want to be actively engaged and involved in the schooling of their children … and … desire to be active partners in their children’s school education … [in] … all aspects of schooling, from the setting of goals and the defining of the school’s values to the decision making of how to support the achievement of their individual child” (Nelson, 2004b, n.p.). School council participation is, therefore, constructed as part of good parenting, that is, good pedagogical practice for parents, and in schools.

The aim of this involvement and participation, or good parenting practice, is to support student outcomes, and particularly those of one’s own child. One aspect of a good parent is, therefore, to be actively, and visibly, involved in their children’s schools, including in the decision-making processes such as school councils within the school organisation. In this construction, participation in school councils becomes a pedagogical process, part of the role or subjectivity of the good parent, with participation in the school council seen as supporting these educational (pedagogical) outcomes. That is, school councils become, or are formed as, a pedagogical construct that facilitates parental participation in these decision-making processes.

Family-school partnerships frameworks thus position the role of parents as pedagogically critical in supporting their children’s education. Like other policies in the field of education, practices of family-school partnerships are also evaluated in terms of their educational or pedagogical outcomes. The Issues Paper (McConchie, 2004), one of the core documents informing the development of the current Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) similarly noted the intention of family-school partnerships as being to support student outcomes (McConchie, 2004). The pedagogical value or “educational concern … [therefore becomes] … the most important in evaluating parent involvement policies and practices” (Boethel, 2003, p. 52).
Pedagogical constructions of school councils

Early advocacy for school councils was based on claims of the pedagogical benefits of this devolved form of school management which allowed schools to better respond to the particular needs of the local community and to meet the individual needs of students (Mattingly et al., 2002; McConchie, 2004; Moore, 1998). School councils were also positioned as agents of school improvement which again was to be measured in terms of improved student outcomes. The aims of the highly researched Chicago School Reform program, for example, which saw the establishment of school councils in site-based management in 542 Chicago public schools in October 1989 (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1993, n.p.) were identified in pedagogical terms, being “to raise student achievement, attendance and graduation rates to national norms within five years” (Walberg & Niemec, 1994, p. 714). (This notion is further explored in Chapter 8 which focuses on the neoliberal construction of school councils).

Brian Caldwell (1998), “an important intellectual architect of the self-managing school in the Australian context” (Lingard et al., 2002, p. 14) similarly described the purpose of school councils as being to serve pedagogical purposes. According to Caldwell, the “purpose of these new patterns of management must be expressed unmistakably in terms of their contribution to an end, that is quality of schooling” (1998, p. 20). In reviewing the operations of school councils in Victoria’s public schools, the Victorian Council of School Organisations (VICCSO) noted this achievement through parental participation in school councils, claiming that that when school councils worked well, the “key benefit … is in the educational outcomes of students” (Golby, 2005, p. 2).

Parent participation in school councils is therefore constructed as a way of supporting both the educational efficacy of the school as a whole, as well as a way of parents supporting the education of their own child. That is, the purposes of school council membership are constructed in terms of the pedagogical outcomes of this participation. Caldwell (2008) confirms this in stating that the primary purpose of
school-based management is now widely accepted in Western education systems as being “the enhancement of learning” (p. 243).

**The participants’ pedagogical constructions of school council participation**

The pedagogical construction of parent participation in school councils is also reflected in ways in which the participants in this research position their school council participation in their children’s schools. All the participants indicated their understanding that their participation supported the school and their children to improve learning opportunities and outcomes. For some participants, this construction of their role was not as dominant as their participation as democratic, or neo-liberal, citizens (see Chapters 6, 7 and 8); however, all indicated this pedagogical purpose as one of the ways in which they saw their roles as school council members.

Michael had joined the school council to offer his professional skills in organisational communication to improve the connection between parents and the school. This was an endeavour to address a problem which Michael had perceived, and felt he could help address. Michael also believed this contribution would assist him and his partner to support their children’s education by improving the processes and levels of communication: “I can offer some expertise here, with my experiences in industry and in schools”. Michael also helped with school activities when possible, as did his partner, indicating their constructions of their roles as highly involved parents in their children’s schooling. Michael’s participation was also strongly formed by democratic discourses, which feature more prominently in the following chapters. Michael also talked about how this participation meant that he could understand what was happening in the school. He described incidents where he could explain school processes and decisions to other parents, meaning that they too could work with the school rather than being in “conflict between their own ideas and beliefs and the school”. In this way, Michael saw his school council role as supporting the school and parents in working together in support of students.

Anna’s participation was constructed as part of her support for her children’s education. Anna stated that her primary motive for joining the council was for her
children, “because I love them, and I would do anything for them”. Anna also stated that her role on the council was to offer her skills in “supporting the school” in areas Anna felt might contribute to the quality of the education in the school and to her children’s learning environment. She also explained that she had joined the school council in an attempt to balance the council’s domination by a small group of parents who Anna thought were “there to stir the pot” and “push their own agendas”. She wanted to resist some of the changes proposed by this group that might have impacted on her children’s schooling experiences.

Karen saw her role on the school council in more democratic terms (see Chapter 7); however, she described her intentions as being to help improve the schooling experiences of students and their families across the school, though again in terms of social awareness outcomes. Karen also wanted to improve the school’s communication with parents (which would also have benefits for her support of her children’s education): “I felt that they didn’t have very good parent reporting information and very good communication between parents and the school”. Karen also noted “indirect benefits” for her children’s education, such as easier access to and support of the principal when Karen’s son had some bullying problems.

Karen worked hard on reaching out to the school community in managing the redrafting of the school’s mission statement and goals, using her research skills to gather and analyse survey data and feedback on drafts of these statements, with the intention of ensuring that the school was aware of and met the needs and interests of the broader school community, improving the educational experiences of the broader school population. Karen also recognised potential benefits for her children’s education, stating: “I have this really negative thing about schools that kids whose parents are seen at the school are more likely to get merit awards and things, and recognised in the classroom … so it’s my way of being there in the school”. Karen also indicated an awareness of possible negative effects of her participation in the school council on her children’s educational experience, stating that “I’m glad that my kid’s teachers haven’t been on it”, referring to the school council.
John did not address educational issues directly, but had joined the council to improve the school’s reporting to parents. That is, it was implied that educational benefits would arise from parents’ increased awareness of their child’s progress and learning needs. These improved processes were intended to ensure the accountability of the school to parents. John was also an active member of the school’s Parents and Citizens’ association, and saw the role of the school council in more administrative terms. John was also intending to have the school council develop updated policies, particularly in the areas of social welfare and the environment. John’s participation was also intended to have benefits in modelling values of participation for his own child, and work on the school’s representation of values of social justice, equity, and environmental sustainability.

Barry’s participation was very much managerial. He saw his role as supporting the school and principal, taking the official line in matters (see Chapter 8 for discussion of this term which refers to the advanced liberal application of private sector management techniques in the governance of public services). Barry saw this as a way of supporting the education provided in the school, providing relief from pressures to focus attention on issues “that only affect a small number of people across the school”. Barry was careful not to represent his own children’s interests, restricting (self-censuring) his contributions, though admitting that “internally there have been a couple of times where I thought, ‘Well would I want to say this?’ or have bitten my tongue a couple of times”. Barry rationalised this approach, stating that “as a parent I have to respect maybe I don’t know the whole picture of what’s going on”. In Foucaultian terms, Barry was self-surveilling, holding his participation within this particular formation of his subjectivity within the role of parent school council member.

In response to being asked what prompted her to join her school’s council, Barbara stated, “I wanted to better the environment for my children at school”. She focused her energies on building community activities. Barbara specifically did not see her role on the council as being to pursue her own children’s interests but to work at the whole school level. These efforts were aimed at “mak[ing] school life good for the
children”, representing a general focus on school life that would impact on the whole school community, and would thus support her own children’s experiences of schooling as well. Barbara did become involved in reviewing the bullying policy after an incident in one of her children’s classes, though not involving her child, believing that the policy needed to be developed to ensure a safer classroom and school environment for all the children.

Barbara observed, however, that other some parents used their position on the council to pursue their own children’s interests, and also that there were some advantages in terms of the ways in which members’ children were treated by some school staff: “You see it coming out that these kids will get bronze awards all the time, and your child’s got six or seven … and it flows through the sport, it flows through the schooling, it flows through academia, it flows through having opportunities to go and speak”. This echoes Karen’s concerns that the children of parents who are seen in the school are likely to benefit from this involvement and participation. One council member “scored herself a job in the school office … you know, school hours … and those jobs are like hens’ teeth in this community” (Barbara). Barbara’s participation was more community focused; she became more involved in issues intended to support the maintenance of a safe and enjoyable schooling environment in which all children could learn, although there were matters relating to her own children’s schooling that motivated some of these activities. Barbara noted her participation did have some educational benefits for her own children, through the additional attention and opportunities that her being involved in the school attracted, and that others were more deliberate on their pursuit of their own children’s interests.

These participants constructed their roles as members of the school council in their children’s schools as being in some way pedagogical, in support of their own children’s interests directly or in support of the whole school in achieving positive outcomes for students. The participants brought their own expertise, views and interests to this participation, and became involved in activities within these councils that allowed them to use these skills in this support of the school. These
constructions of the pedagogical value of this participation are supported by some research evidence, although there are significant challenges to the conclusiveness of this research and to the theoretical foundations of pedagogical construction of school councils.

**Research support for pedagogical constructions of parent participation in school councils**

Research investigating the pedagogical contribution of school councils is minimal, as identified in the introductory chapter to this thesis (Boethel, 2003; Caldwell, 1998; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a, 1998b; Lingard, 2000b; McKenna & Willms, 1998; Parker & Leithwood, 2000). Studies investigating the link between school councils and improved school and student outcomes provide only qualified support for the pedagogical construction of school councils. Support for the pedagogical construction of school councils is reliant on two main bodies of research: effective schools research which identifies effective school councils as a common attribute of effective schools (Ranson, Farrell, Peim & Smith, 2005a; Saulwick Muller, 2006) and research on programs of parent involvement in schools which include parent participation in school councils (Desforges with Abouchaar 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Moore & Merritt, 2002; World Bank, 2008).

Attempts to develop a quantitative approach to evaluating school council outcomes have been reported by Bauer and colleagues (Bauer, 1997; Bauer, Bogotch & Park, 1998). Bauer et al. (1998), drawing on earlier work by Shedd (1987) and Shedd and Bacharach (1991), proposed four dimensions of site-based decision making. Bauer (1997) and Bauer, et al. (1998) applied these original dimensions of scope, structure, process and support to develop three internal measures and one external measure to describe school councils. This methodology then applied a regression analysis to explore relationships between these differing features and outcomes of site based decision making in schools and schooling outcomes. The measures of success for school councils developed by Bauer (1997) and Bauer et al. (1998) described three areas of responsibility and influence of the board: clarity of goals and extent of powers of the board (scope), processes and implementation of decision making by
the board (structure), and the relationships of trust developed between board
members and the school (process). Baeur (1997) treated the category of support as an
external factor rather than one endogenous to the functioning of the management
team, and so analysed this factor both with and independently of the other three. This
approach to analysis allows the researcher to establish the importance of the three
internal and one external characteristics of council functioning and their relationship
to the outcomes used within the analysis.

Analysing data from 50 school councils in New York, Bauer et al. (1998) concluded
that the three internal elements of school council functioning were positively related
to perceived efficacy, with the provision of support also having some influence on
these perceptions. That is, Bauer et al. measured the outcomes of these processes not
in terms of student performance, but in terms of the perceived efficacy of the
processes of the functioning of the council, and perceived effectiveness. Bauer et al.
recognised this weakness in their data and findings, but argued that their work was
focused on better understanding the processes of school councils rather than on
establishing the educational effectiveness of these councils in improving student
outcomes.

Another study that attempted to investigate the effect sizes of relationships between
parental participation in school councils and student performance drew on survey and
student performance data from a random sample of 177 of Chicago’s 470 elementary
schools to identify the specific attributes of school councils that are associated with
improved school performance (Krishnamoorthi, 2000). This study analysed the
relationship between student performance in mathematics and reading in
standardised examinations, and ratings of school council performance using 10
indicators of Local School Council (LSC) operations. For increased validity,
Krishnamoorthi (2000) divided the 177 schools into two groups for separate analysis.
In Krishnamoorthi’s (2000) analysis, of the school council traits identified through
the questionnaire data, two attributes correlated with student outcomes: an absence of
obstacles to the constructive deliberation of a Local School Council was associated
with higher reading performance, though less significantly correlated with
performance in mathematics, and the general ability of LSCs to fulfil their duties was linked to higher performance in mathematics but less so with reading performance (Krishnamoorthi, 2000, pp. 16-17). There were significant differences between the two analysis groups, indicating a degree of uncertainty about these identified relationships. LSC attributes not associated with improved student performance included the ethical behaviour of the council, budgetary process, relations with the wider community, evaluation of the principal, the school improvement plan, councillors’ views of the chairperson or principal, and the training of councillors. The apparently equivocal and potentially contradictory results of this analysis indicate the need for much larger studies in investigating and establishing the efficacy of school councils in influencing student educational outcomes in different areas of performance.

Effective schools research
Effective schools research focuses attention on high performing or effective schools (Ranson et al., 2005a, p. 3), schools “that achieve high standards regardless of gender, family backgrounds or socioeconomic status” (Masters, 2004, n.p.) (see for example Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003; Mayer, Mullens & Moore, 2000). These studies then seek to identify attributes of those schools and elements of “best practice” (Nelson, 2004b, 2005a; Saulwick Muller, 2006) in order to inform practice and policy development in other schools and schooling systems. The characteristics of these schools can also inform further research in order to substantiate the contribution of these practices, and to better understand these processes.

In research into effective schools, high community participation has been identified as a common feature in these schools. Community participation includes participating in the school’s decision making processes, and membership of the school council (Golby, 2005; Masters, 2004; Moore, 1998; Ranson et al., 2005a; Saulwick Muller, 2006). Effective schools research has identified this participation to include “an active role in discussing, monitoring and supporting their children's learning … [and involvement] … in setting goals for the school and in developing school policies” (Masters, 2004, n.p.). Parental participation is consequently
recommended as “best practice” in schools (Golby, 2005; Moore, 1998; Ranson et al., 2005a; Ranson, Arnott, McKeown, Martin & Smith, 2005b; Scanlon, Earley & Evans, 1999). The association of community participation in these schools is, however, a correlation that requires rigorous testing in order to establish the efficacy of this form of parent involvement in influencing school outcomes. The reliance in the field of family-school partnerships on this form of research is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, identifying it as a challenge in establishing a sound theoretical foundation on which to base policy and practice in schools.

**Research from whole school partnerships programs**

The second major source of research into the effectiveness of family-school partnerships in producing improved outcomes in schools relies on investigations of programs of parent involvement, or whole-of-school programs. Whole school programs of parent involvement involve the initiation of a range of parent involvement and participation practices including home, class and school-based activities. These programs are often based around typologies such as that of Epstein (1995) (Mattingly et al., 2002) or frameworks such as the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a).

Whole school programs of parent involvement and participation are described as “comprehensive” (Epstein, 1995, p. 5; McKeand, 2003, p. 19) or “balanced” (Epstein, 1995, p. 5), and simultaneously introduce differing forms of involvement and participation into the school (see for example Comer, 2005; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Hara, & Burke, 1998; Haynes, Comer & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Jeynes, 2005; Sanders, 2000; Simmons, Stevenson, & Strand, 1993; Workman & Gage, 1997; and reviews by Boethel, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jordan et al., 2002; McKeand, 2003; National Council of Jewish Women, 1996). Parent participation in these programs, particularly when based around common typologies or frameworks such as that of Epstein (1995), is predominantly included through the formation of a school council (McConchie, 2004; Parker & Leithwood, 2000). Evaluations of these programs then report on the outcomes of the group of practices, rather than studying the individual efficacy of the various parent involvement and participation strategies.
These evaluations are overwhelmingly positive in terms of the social and educational outcomes (see for example Hara & Burke, 1998; Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Berla, 1981, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson et al., 2004; Jeynes, 2005; Jordan et al, 2002).

Research into programs of parent involvement and participation is largely representative of projects carried out as part of school renewal programs based in poorly performing schools in low socio-economic and disadvantaged urban environments (Comer, 2005; Desforges with Abouchaar 2003; Jeynes, 2005; World Bank, 2008). A large amount of this research reports or draws on evaluations and data from the implementation of these programs as part of the city-wide Chicago schools reforms project (see for example Comer, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1991, 2005; Haynes, Comer & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Hess Jr., 1995, ; Lipman, 2002; Moore, 1998; Ryan et al., 1997; Sebring et al., 1995; Shipps, 1997; Wong, 1997). The Chicago schools reform project arose out of concerns about low school completion rates and poor outcomes in Chicago schools. At the time of the introduction of these reforms only one in five ninth grade students in Chicago’s schools scored at or above the Illinois state average for reading (Moore & Merritt, 2002), and 83% of Chicago’s elementary schools in 1990 had less than 40% of students reading at the norm for their age group (Moore, 1998).

Beginning in 1989, Chicago’s school reforms were based around the belief that democratic participation of the school community in schools, including in decentralised school management structures, would drive increases in schools’ effectiveness (Bryk, 1998) and address these poor educational outcomes in schools. The central and most radical reform in Chicago’s school reform project was the devolution of decision making to local school councils that were made up of representatives of parents, staff and the community, with parents and community members comprising the majority of council membership (Bryk, 1998; Designs for Change, 2005; Hess Jr., 1999a, 1999b; Woestehoff & Neill, 2007). This devolution of responsibility and power was accompanied by increased decision-making powers and responsibilities for school principals, an emphasis on the support needs of
students, and a shift towards what are now referred to as authentic pedagogies (Designs for Change, 2005; Newman, Secada & Wehlage, 1995). Principals were employed by the school council on fixed term contracts, with these contracts also renewed by the school council.

In the first three years of the Chicago school reforms, student performance on social and academic measures declined (Designs for Change, 2005; Walberg & Niemec, 1994; Moore, 1998). However, more recent research has indicated that in the longer term these reforms were successful in increasing student attendance, school completion and academic outcomes (Bryk, 1998; Designs for Change, 2005; Hess Jr., 1999a, 1999b; Moore, 1998; Moore & Merritt, 2002; Sebring, et al., 2006; Smith, Lee & Newman, 2001; Woestehoff & Neill, 2007). This success has led to claims that these improvements were linked to the introduction of parent majority councils in these schools. For example, the recent evaluation of the Chicago school reform project by the National Centre for Fair and Open Testing (Woestehoff & Neill, 2007) identified the decentralised model of school governance as associated with more successful schools in the project, and recommended that “elected parent-majority Local School Councils must be the default governance structure in all [non-charter Chicago Public Schools] schools” (Woestehoff & Neill, 2007, n.p.).

Thus, there is some support for the pedagogical construction of school councils, identifying some relationships between school councils and student performance. Because of the strong link between this research and the specific contexts of schools in disadvantaged communities within a particular area of the United States, and the methodologies used in gathering and analysing this data, these conclusions have been contested by researchers and educational theorists. In particular, the rigour of the research on which many of these conclusions are based, particularly when related to parent participation and the efficacy of school councils, has been challenged. These challenges, including concerns relating to the methodologies and methods applied in current research, the implications of alternative research and analysis, and the implications of the pedagogical construction of school councils, form the basis of the discussions in the remaining sections of this chapter.
Challenges to pedagogical constructions of school councils

Despite the formation of school councils as a pedagogical construct, conclusions that improvements in student outcomes are linked to the introduction of this form of school-based management are contested by contradictory research findings, and by criticisms of the methodological basis of the research informing the conclusions (Baker & Soden, 2005; Blackmore, Bigum, Hodgens & Laskey, 1996; Cooper & Christie, 2005; Jeynes, 2005; Krishnamoorthi, 2000; Mattingly et al., 2002; World Bank, 2008). These challenges relate to the small number of studies that specifically investigate the efficacy of parent participation in school decision-making processes and to a general lack of rigour in the relevant research.

Inconclusive and contradictory research base

Although school councils have been included in successful family-school programs, critiques of the validity of the methodologies applied in evaluating these programs challenge conclusions that parental participation in school councils has contributed or produced these outcomes (Baker & Soden, 2005; Blackmore et al., 1996; Krishnamoorthi, 2000; Mattingly et al., 2002; World Bank, 2008). In a meta-analysis, Leithwood and Menzies (1998b) analysed research literature that attempted to evaluate the pedagogical outcomes of school-based (school council) management. From the 83 studies published between 1985 and 1995, four forms of school-based management, reflecting the dominant membership of these councils: administrative (departmental) control, professional (staff) control, community (parental) control and equal (shared) control. The first three of these are conceptually equivalent to those discussed by Murphy and Beck (1995). The fourth is a form hypothesised by Leithwood and Menzies to represent councils where members share power, with equal numbers of representatives from each stakeholder group.

Of the 83 studies reviewed by Leithwood and Menzies (1998b), only eleven attempted to investigate the effect of the management structure on student academic and social outcomes (using measures such as attendance, school completion rates, and achievement scores). Six of these studies identified improvements in student outcomes, while five identified no change or negative changes in student
performance (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998b, p. 336). In the six studies that had identified positive effects on student outcomes, three represented professional form of school councils and three applied community forms of administration. All three studies that were based in schools applying the professional model of site-based management produced positive outcomes. Three of the five schools that were associated with declines in student achievement had community control forms of school council, thus providing contradictory evidence on the efficacy of the community-based formation of school councils. The other two schools with declining outcomes had administrative forms of school councils. None of the studies reviewed by Leithwood and Menzies focused on equal control indicating further need for research. Leithwood and Menzies concluded that “there is virtually no firm, research-based knowledge about the direct or indirect effects of SBM [school-based management] on students” (p. 340).

An analysis by Walberg, Paik, Komukai and Freeman (2000) of studies published between 1966 to 1997 of decentralised decision-making in schools identified “little or no influence on value-added learning” (p. 165). Walberg et al. found instead that “conditions in classrooms and schools have far more consistent causal bearings on learning than how decision-making responsibilities are divided among units of government” (p. 155). Instead of arguing for one particular model of decentralisation in schools, Walberg et al. argued that the evidence suggested a need for a mixed management and administration model, where specific areas of responsibility are managed by different levels of governance along the continuum from fully decentralised to fully centralised decision making, in order to achieve the most pedagogically effective model of school governance. The findings of Walberg et al. and the earlier analysis by Leithwood and Menzies (1998a, 1998b) provide some confirmation of the findings of Krishnamoorthi’s (2000) analysis that identified contradictory results around the relationships between the different aspects of school council operations and student results, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

**Methodological challenges in developing a rigorously informed theory base**

A further challenge to the published research in this field concerns its rigour. The
range of potential school, home and community-based influences on student outcomes presents researchers with difficulties in designing research to investigate links between school councils and student performance, particularly using experimental research methods (World Bank, 2008).

In a meta-analysis reviewing the 41 publications registered on the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) database relating to evaluations of programs of parent involvement between 1960 and 2002, Mattingly et al. (2002) observed that these evaluations were characterised by methodological problems, and overall provided “little empirical support for the widespread claim that parent involvement programs are an effective means of improving student achievement or changing parent, teacher, and student behaviour” (p. 549). The World Bank (2008) review of site-based management in schools also noted that “One first general conclusion on the evidence base of SBM since 1995 is that the sample of carefully documented, rigorous impact evaluations is very small” and also that “the few rigorous studies used empirical strategies that are open to question” (p. 12). These methodological limitations relate to the design of research and methods employed in gathering meaningful data, the complex contexts of school-based research, and limitations in the interpretation of findings of such research.

A significant challenge in establishing a causal relationship between school councils and student performance is the problem of establishing projects that isolate the variables in the research context, and the changing nature of these contexts during the course of an investigation. The key problem facing experiment-based research designs is the establishment of a valid control group against which to measure the efficacy of school councils in improving student outcomes (World Bank, 2008, p. 2). There are no reports of controlled experimental research where the single variable introduced into the situation is the formation of a parent and community-based school council. In part this is because the introduction of a school council is usually conceptualised within a wider parent involvement framework (Mattingly et al., 2002). Instead of this experimental form of research, quantitative methods have relied on correlational, multivariate analyses and regression analyses to identify
statistically significant relationships between aspects of school councils and student outcomes.

Correlational analyses
Correlational or regression-based analyses rely on the analysis of numerically scored data sets to identify statistically significant relationships between variables within a particular context, such as a single school site, or across multiple sites such as within a school district. For example, effective schools research and research evaluating programs of parental involvement in schools apply these methods in attempting to identify and measure the effect size of particular practices. In the field of family-school partnerships, measures of parent activity, or the processes within a school council are correlated with measures of student performance or other school outcomes (such as attendance or school completion rates).

This form of analysis is prevalent in research evaluating the efficacy of parental involvement and participation in schools (Baker & Soden, 2005; Mattingly et al., 2002; Thorkildsen & Scott Stein, 1998). Krishnamoorthi (2000) used this form of analysis to investigate the relationships between different aspects of school council activity and student outcomes. Gertler, Patrinos and Rubio-Codina (2006) also used correlation analysis of the relationship between changes in decisions and measures of accountability in school councils with statistical data on student outcomes to “estimate the effects of [the program] on three educational outcomes: the probability that the student fails an exam, repeats a grade or drops out of school” (p. 9).

The reference by Gertler et al. (2006) to these analyses as providing estimates of a program’s effectiveness in relation to these outcomes is significant in acknowledging the limitations of this form of analysis. Some researchers have noted these limitations in the presentation of their findings. Trivette and Anderson (1995), for example, in a comprehensive analysis of the United States Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (referred to as NELS88) (NELS, 1988), identified a strong positive correlation between student outcomes and parent involvement. That is, parents of higher achievers were more
involved than those of lower achieving students. Trivette and Anderson pointed out that this correlational analysis could not identify whether students’ good results encouraged higher parent involvement or higher parent involvement improved student outcomes. Similarly, Earley and Crease (2003) qualified their report on the relationship between school-based management and student outcomes, noting that: “it appeared as though there was a positive relationship between effective schools and effective governing bodies though the causal direction could not be determined” (p. 3). This inability to determine the causal direction of these relationships in such analyses (Gertler, et al., 2006) limits the usefulness of these findings, suggesting that they are more appropriately considered as indicative of possibilities for further investigation.

The ways in which categories of variables are operationalised in the situation also requires specific investigation when drawing conclusions from statistical correlations. The Designs for Change report (Moore, 1998) identifying a correlation between parental participation in school councils and student reading and mathematics outcomes, for example, identified 15 attributes of Chicago schools that were associated with improved results. Closer analysis reveals that there were potentially contradictory or mediating attributes within these variables, with the attributes of “having effective principal leadership and supervision”, and “high teacher influence on decision making”, for example, being identified as related to improved student outcomes in these schools (Moore, 1998, p. 165). These last two attributes related directly to the influence of school staff rather than to elements of parental involvement.

Although studies based on correlational analyses have provided evidence of links between effective schools and effective school councils, these studies provide indications of potential causal relationships, rather than definitive proof of efficacy, and indicate a need for further research. The Designs for Change report (Moore, 1998) discussed earlier in this section acknowledges the results of its correlational-based analysis as “one step in an ongoing research process” (p. 62), offering a “set of
practices [that] merits further investigation, in determining how best to improve urban schools in Chicago and elsewhere” (p. 87).

The results of correlational studies are further challenged by an over-reliance on subjective data. Whereas measures of student outcomes (such as improvement in examinations or in school attendance) are readily developed, the main source of research data in evaluating the success of school councils has been through gathering data based on the perceptions of school council members and other stakeholders (Baker & Soden, 2005; Boethel, 2003; Gertler, Patrinos & Rubio-Codina, 2007; World Bank, 2008). The use of numerically based Likert scales in gathering this data, which allow survey respondents to rate their agreement or disagreement with different elements of school council operations being evaluated, allows this data to be analysed quantitatively. This reliance on subjective data in correlational as well as other studies of school councils further limits the usefulness of these studies.

Reliance on qualitative data
Although qualitative methods can provide valuable information in answering specific types of questions, their subjective nature reduces the validity of their application in attempting to identify casual relationships and effect size of the different forms of practice included in these studies (Baker & Soden, 1998; Malen, 1999, p. 209; World Bank, 2008). The Designs for Change (Moore, 1998) analysis of Chicago school reform data and student performance, for example, used teachers’ perceptions of the efficacy of their school council in “having contributed to improving various aspects of the school’s educational program and environment” (p. 165) in identifying local school council contribution as one of the features of these effective schools. Similarly, research investigating the relationship between parent participation in school councils and student performance referred to earlier in this chapter (Krishnamoorthi, 2000; Ranson et al., 2005a) was reliant on interviews and surveys of perceptions for analyses.

The problems of this reliance on subjective and non-controlled measures in qualitative research in this field of inquiry are illustrated by an early analysis of the
efficacy of the Chicago school reforms. After the reforms had had three years of operation, research by the Consortium for Chicago School Research, which surveyed the views of 13,500 principals, teachers and school council members, indicated a belief that the reforms were producing improved school outcomes (Walberg & Niemec, 1994). Yet school performance data indicated that “in almost every instance scores have declined” (Walberg & Niemec, 1994, p. 713). The official data revealed that in the period of operation student attendance was down, graduation rates had dropped and dropout rates remained unchanged (Walberg & Niemec, 1994). It is, however, important and interesting to note, as previously mentioned, the enduring improvement in results in Chicago’s schools that followed this initial decline in performance (Bryk, 1998; Designs for Change, 2005; Hess Jr. 1999a, 1999b; Moore, 1998; Moore & Merritt, 2002; Sebring et al., 2006; Woestehoff & Neill, 2007).

A more recent example of the problematic nature of the reliance on quantitative data relates to the evaluation of the trial of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework. In this evaluation researchers combined data from observations in site visits to schools, interviews with stakeholders, and “a survey of parents” (Saulwick Muller, 2006, p. 14) to identify the efficacy of this framework and to identify sites of “best practice” for a more intensive case study. Of the 61 family-school partnerships projects included in the trial of the draft Australian Framework, 12 were identified as examples of best practice and included in a case study of these schools (Saulwick Muller, 2006). Nine of these projects relied on the perceptions of participants to evaluate the successes of their program, two used increased participation numbers to measure success, and two used no measures at all (one study used both perceptions and measures of participant numbers, making the above total to 13 measures). None of these 12 case studies investigated the effects of their program on students or their performance.

Although the Saulwick Muller (2006) evaluation of the trial of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) reported that it provided “strong findings which demonstrate clearly the benefits to parents and to the educational well-being of children that arose from these partnerships projects” (p.
14), no measures of the impact on students of the introduction of the framework were included in the study, and no measures of changes in student performance were attempted. Parents who participated in the project reported “knowing more about the kinds of activities going on in the school generally” (60%), “knowing more about what their children were being taught in school” (62%) and a belief that the program “had been good for their children’s education” (p. 14). These findings, though positive, were limited to the perceptions of parents from these programs rather than providing evidence of pedagogical success in terms of improved student outcomes.

The reliance on non-objective data means the conclusions of such research remain indicative of possibilities rather than providing specific evaluations of these programs, or any identification of causal relationships between school councils and particular outcomes in schools. Apart from representing non-objective measures, from critical and methodological perspectives evaluations using “sentiment surveys” present significant problems in attempting to judge the efficacy of councils in that:

- By reporting the dominant experiences of participants, important differences among people’s experiences may be overlooked and significant issues marginalised or given insufficient attention.
- The views of others members of the school community, such as those who did not participate as active members of the school council, might differ and therefore also need to be canvassed.
- Contextual influences on outcomes may not be evident.
- This form of data also does not provide the rigorously gathered evidence required to support any particular practice from within the framework, including that of parental participation in school councils.

Although qualitative research methods offer an insight into human experience, the data remains idiosyncratic, being based on the perceptions of particular participant groups and based in particular contexts and sites. Though suited to answering particular types of research questions, these methods provide largely indicative rather than definitive information as to the impact on student performance of parental participation in school councils. Identifying causal relationships for measures of
outcomes requires verification through more rigorously established measures than currently relied on in this field of inquiry. In addition to the challenges of applying quantitative research methods and the limitations of qualitative methods in research in the field of family-school partnerships, a number of methodological concerns have been identified as prevalent in this research literature (Baker & Soden, 2005; Mattingly et al., 2002; World Bank, 2008). These challenges to the rigour of the research foundations of family-school partnerships practice are now elaborated.

Multiple variable studies
The reliance of research investigating family-school partnerships on studies of programs of parent involvement in schools (Mattingly et al., 2002) presents further problems in identifying the efficacy of the different parent involvement and participation strategies, in that this simultaneously introduces a number of new variables into the research context. In the journal articles reviewed by Mattingly et al. relating to parent involvement and participation in schools, 83% of the 213 studies reported involved “more than one type of intervention” (p. 552). Although multi-strategy initiatives may have produced evidence of improved schooling outcomes (see e.g., Comer, 2005; Haynes, Comer & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Hara & Burke, 1998; Sanders, 2000; Simmons, Stevenson & Strand, 1993; Workman & Gage, 1997; and reviews by Jordan et al., 2002; McKeand, 2003; National Council of Jewish Women, 1996), the reliance on multi-variable programs precludes the identification of the contribution of particular strategies. The introduction of a range of variables into a site also prevents the identification of non-productive variables, or variables associated with reduced outcomes, as the individual contributions of these strategies are masked when other strategies included in the program are more highly effective.

Limitations of the research contexts
The context within which family-school relationships research is conducted also presents a challenge to the value of this research in informing practice. The Chicago school reforms, for example, were conducted in schools that were performing poorly compared to other schooling systems (Moore, 1998; Moore & Merritt, 2002). The
school-based management literature is overly reliant on studies conducted in low performing schools (World Bank, 2008), and particularly programs in underperforming or disadvantaged schools in the United States (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003, p. 19) and “dysfunctional schools” with histories of disadvantage, poor performance and low parent involvement (Comer, 2005, p. 39) (see also Jeynes, 2005). The findings of these studies may therefore represent an artificial result due to the low base from which the programs begin. The context of high performing schools may also limit the transferability of the research findings. For example, Ranson et al. (2005a, p. 315) do identify that all high improvement schools in their study were situated within “advantaged catchments” while all lower performing or declining schools (six of the 15 schools in the study) were from rural areas.

In addition, existing research in the field of family-school partnerships does not account for “the complex interaction between all the factors in students’ lives” (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003, p. 106) or the differing contexts of students’ schooling experiences. Links between the socio-economic background of students and the complexities of its intersection with the gender, cultural and ethnic identities in influencing student’s schooling outcomes have been the subject of ongoing research (Considine & Zappalà, 2001; NSW DET, 2007b). Home-based factors such as parenting style and home environment have also been linked to student schooling performance (Christenson & Christenson, 1998; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 1987a, 1994; Finn, 1998; Trusty, 1999). In-school factors such as teacher quality (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2007), quality of teaching methods (NSW DET, 2003), and quality of school leadership have also been linked to school performance in terms of student outcomes (Designs for Change, 2005; Masters, 2004; Moore, 1998; Moore & Merritt, 2002; Ranson et al., 2005a, 2005b).

Duration of research
A further limitation is the reliance on studies carried out over short periods. In new programs, these evaluations may capture the results of the initial enthusiasm about the changes in the school environment, or conversely may not allow sufficient time
for the effects of the program to become apparent. Extensive analysis indicates that comprehensive school reform (within which the implementation of school councils is one element) takes five years to establish sustained change in schools (Borman, Hewes, Overman & Brown, 2003). The World Bank’s review indicated that it requires an average of around eight years for changes in school management to impact on student test scores (Cook, 2007; World Bank, 2008).

In the Mattingly et al. (2002) review of 213 studies, 85% related to studies of less than one year, and over half (59%) were carried out over less than six months. The trial study of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (Saulwick Muller, 2006) was similarly conducted over a limited time period, beginning in May 2005 with the findings presented in July, 2006. Longer term knowledge is critical to the establishment of sustainable practices in schools that provide ongoing support for positive student outcomes. The difference between the initial outcomes of Chicago school reforms and the longer term outcomes, discussed earlier in this chapter, is illustrative of the importance of longer term and follow-up research studies.

Over-interpretation of research findings
There has also been a tendency in the family-school partnerships literature to over-interpret the results of studies. This has included the over-interpretation of small statistical relationships, the generalisation of limited research findings, and the assumption of causal relationships and the direction of these relationships rather than testing them further (Baker & Soden, 2005; Brough & Irvin, 2001; Thorkildsen & Scott Stein, 1998). In another example, despite the limitations of the Saulwick Muller (2006) study of the trial of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a; Saulwick Muller, 2006) discussed earlier in this chapter, the researchers generalised their findings in their conclusions that: “This action research project demonstrates that partnerships between families and schools can: improve educational outcomes for students; contribute to the building of social capital in the community; positively alter school culture; stimulate self-growth among parents, and enhance the professional rewards for principals and school staff” (Saulwick Muller, 2006, p. 14).
Theoretical foundations of frameworks: Definitions and models

These challenges to the reliability and validity (consistency and strength) of research informing the field of family-school partnerships are illustrative of and related to the lack of rigorously developed and robust theoretical foundations on which to base these practices. In an extensive review of family-school partnerships research, Jordan, Orozco and Averett (2002) identified the development of a sound theory base as critical for informing future research and practice. This theorisation is limited by the concerns and challenges relating to the existing body of research, by a lack of consistently applied definitions of the key concepts and terms within this field, and by the ways in which existing typologies are interpreted in informing research and school-based projects.

Inconsistent terminologies and concepts

A fundamental limitation in the theorisation of the field of family-school partnerships is the lack of consistency in the definitions of key terms applied in research and policy (Baker & Soden, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jordan et al., 2002; Mattingly et al., 2002). As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, understandings of the terms parent involvement and parent participation varies significantly. In their study of over 2000 articles and related documents, Fan and Chen (2001, p. 6) noted that “the operational definition of ‘parental involvement’ in the literature was diverse and very different across individual studies”. There are also “many meanings” applied to the terms school-based management and school councils across the literature (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000, p. 145). Walberg et al. (2000, p. 155), for example, identified 22 definitions of the term decentralisation within public education, and Leithwood and Menzies (1998b) identified four overall forms of school council formation.

The evaluation of the trial of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a; Saulwick Muller, 2006) provides a recent example of the need for clear definitions of these central terms. In pronouncing the success of the trial, the evaluation confirmed the value and contribution of the different elements within the framework as part of best practice in schools, including parental participation in decision making in schools. Although 28% of the 61 schools across
the full trial of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) claimed to have included parent participation in decision making in their program, in all but one of these schools this participation was based on one specific program, the “Families Matter” initiative, rather than on participation in a role in actual school management, organisation or administrative decision-making processes (Saulwick Muller, 2006, p. 128).

The Families Matter program was part of a suite of health and wellbeing programs developed by the peak parent bodies in Australian schooling, the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC). The aim of the Families Matter program was to initiate activities that “engage parents, carers and families with schools to promote the health and well-being of young people” in activities that “progressively involve more parents and families, to promote and sustain a productive family-school and community partnership” (Families Matter, 2008, n.p.). The Families Matter program was part of a larger “Mind Matters” project and ran between 2003 and 2006 (Families Matter, 2008, n.p.). These activities might result in the formation of a school council, but were independent of this within their program.

Only one school in the trial of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) attempted to initiate a school council as part of its program (see Saulwick Muller, 2006, pp. 34-43). This particular school was from within the centrally supported Catholic schooling system, and the responsibilities of such a council are limited by its requirement to adhere to the requirements of being within a system. Further, none of the 12 schools evaluated as examples of best practice as part of the trial included parental participation in school decision-making as part of its program (see Saulwick Muller, 2006, p. 52).

Findings from studies using one form of school-based management or set of definitions may not apply to programs based on differing definitions. Further, results in one curriculum area may not transfer to others (Fan & Chen, 2001). The effects of the diverse understandings of the concepts that are central to the field, and the
application of the differing definitions of key terms, limits the application of findings to other sites and complicates the building of a widely informed and rigorously developed research base to inform the pedagogical construction of school councils.

Typologies and models
The foundation of programs of research, and thus the introduction of multiple variables into the research situation, is based on the application of typologies of parent involvement such as that of Epstein (1995) in developing frameworks to guide practices in schools. When these typologies are interpreted as models in guiding practice, this interpretation implies a scientificity that confirms the positive contribution of each element to the outcomes of these programs. Hara and Burke’s (1998) research, for example, was based on the understanding that “Epstein’s parent involvement model” or the “Epstein model” (Hara & Burke, 1998, p. 222, my emphasis) sees this typology as providing “six effective program characteristics and guidelines for building parent partnerships” (p. 221). The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) similarly refers to the application of the “seven key dimensions of effective family-school partnerships” (DEST, 2004a, p. 7), based on Epstein’s (1995, 2001) six types of parent involvement (McConchie, 2004). These programs therefore include all elements from the typology on which they are based.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) literature review which formed the theoretical foundations for the development of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) is similarly based on an understanding that “Epstein (1995) … identified six types of parent-school partnerships that are important for student learning and development, and for schools to become more effective institutions of learning” (McKeand, 2003, p. 3). By referring to these programs as “comprehensive” (Epstein, 1995, p. 5; Epstein, et al., 2002, p. 17; McKeand, 2003, p. 19) or “balanced” (Epstein, 1995, p. 5; 2001, p. 480) a need to include all forms of involvement and participation is implied. A synergistic relationship between these practices may also be assumed. The Australian Council of State School Organisations Issues paper, for example, stated, “The more the
relationship between parents and educators approaches a comprehensive, well-planned partnership, the higher the student achievement” (McConchie, 2004, p. 16).

The ways in which models are understood may also influence the interpretation of the elements they contain. Some researchers have interpreted Epstein’s typology as implying an hierarchical presentation of parent involvement and participation activities, with the implication that those at the top (or bottom) are more highly valued or contribute more effectively to student outcomes. The decision-making mode of participation, the focus of the research in this thesis, appears at the end of the typologies of Greenwood and Hickman (1991), Abrams and Gibbs (2002), and Hester (1989) and as the fifth of six categories of parent involvement in Epstein’s (1995) typology, prior to community partnerships (the reverse interpretation is also possible, but not evident in the literature reviewed). This interpretation of typologies is evident in a number of studies, particularly in the hierarchical use of the term levels, including:

- Peña (2000, p. 53) specifically referred to schools needing to develop “a hierarchy of involvement opportunities for parents, ranging from working with their children at home to participation in school decision making”, indicating an ordering of the different activities in frameworks or models (my emphasis).

- Lockwood (1998, p. 1), introducing a record of an interview with Joyce Epstein, referred to the elements of the framework as representing “six levels”.

- The Australian Council of State Schools Organisations and the Australian Parents Council’s Issues Paper informing the development of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework stated, “The two national parent associations believe that wherever possible schools should strive to engage parents and families in partnerships, rather than at the two lower levels” (McKeand, 2003, p. 3; my emphasis);

- McKeand (2003) also referred to involvement at home or assistance in schools as representing “lower levels” of parent involvement (p. 4).
Johnson, then president of the Federation of Parent and Citizens
Associations of NSW, referred to parental participation in school
decision making processes as a “superior form” of involvement
(Johnson, 1993, p. 28).

The order of appearance of participation in decision making may not indicate an
intended judgement about the efficacy or value of this form of parental activity in
schools. Rather than being constructed around hierarchical interpretation, the often
applied typology of Epstein (1995) is constructed on a continuum from at home and
one-to-one activities with one’s own child, through assisting one’s own and other
children in school, to administrative (at school) participation, and ending with
involvement in wider community activities aimed more at the whole school level.
Although Epstein (1995) listed the “expected results of the six types of involvement
for students, parents, and teachers” (p. 713-716), Epstein highlights that “Research is
still needed on the results of specific practices of partnership in various schools, at
various grade levels, and for diverse populations of students, families, and teachers.
It will be important to confirm, extend, or correct … [these anticipated outcomes] …
if schools are to make purposeful choices among practices that foster various types of
involvement” (p. 704).

The need for critical analyses
The introduction of school councils in school decision-making processes invites the
direct participation of parents in school decisions, decisions which may affect other
families or all those in the school community. There are also potential benefits for
the children of parent school council members (NSW DET, 1998). Frameworks
based on specific models or typologies of parent involvement may become formative
of practices in schools that could advantage families from backgrounds more aligned
with these formations while disadvantaging those from differing socio-cultural and
experiential backgrounds, and potentially further entrenching inequities in outcomes.
Research by Anyon (1995) and Smrekar (1996) suggested that school reform efforts
that involved parents and others from the community in decision making often ended
up reinforcing traditional power relations that disenfranchised poor and minority parents.

Other researchers have claimed that current constructions of parent involvement in schools act to exclude those from minority cultures (Chan & Chui, 1997; Golby, 2005; Harslett et al., 1999; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; McConchie, 2004; Olivos, 2004; Ranson et al., 2005a, 2005b; Vincent, 2001a, 2001b; Vincent & Martin, 2000; Saulwick Muller, 2006, p. 8). Contributing to these inequitable outcomes are the assumptions of equal opportunity of access that underpin models of parent participation and involvement (Edwards & Alldred, 2000; Fine, 1993). Epstein’s typology has been criticised as being strongly representative of white middle-class values and failing to include other ways of being involved in and supporting children’s educational development (Borg & Mayo, 2001; de Carvalho, 2001; Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997).

The discriminatory effects of barriers to participation and the limited number of positions on School councils mean that any benefits that might be attributable to this form of participation may be restricted to families from already relatively advantaged backgrounds. Due to social, economic and cultural barriers that restrict access to such opportunities in schools, these other parents remain “on the periphery” (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002, p. 35) in terms of their involvement in their children’s schools. The advantages of increased involvement and participation are thus limited to those with the time, resources and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1997; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977) to access these opportunities.

In a case study of two school parent groups, Vincent and Martin (2000, p. 475) documented the ways in which “a small group of ‘elite participationists’” in one school, and an “elite group” of parents in another site exclusively managed the tasks of their parent representative group, with “neither group connect[ing] to the wider parent body”. This dominance or capture of positions of influence may also be more calculated (see for example the case studies of Birenbaum-Carmeli (1999) and Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District, chronicling the takeover of their local
public schools by groups of middle class parents). Lutz (1997) also documented the power of small but capable concerned citizens groups in influencing educational reform. This restriction of empowerment to a small number of “elite” parents (Vincent & Martin, 2000, p. 475) raises the possibility of this construct reproducing and enhancing class advantage. In their review of school governance structures across five countries, Whitty et al. (1998) concluded that there was evidence of these decentralised modes of governance increasing disparities in educational opportunities. These limitations are further explored in the following chapters, which address in greater depth these issues of equity and social justice.

There is a need then for a further investigation of the social distribution of the benefits of parental involvement and participation in schools (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000). Blackmore (2000) has suggested that such investigations should form an important part of broader considerations required in the modern context of the restructuring of the relationships between the “state, family, work and education in globalising economies” (p. 17). Blackmore suggested that such research should be guided by the “critical feminist question upon which social justice pivots – who gets what, how, why and with what effects for individuals, particular social groups and society?” (p. 18). The methodologies applied in the research in this thesis, founded in Foucaultian theory, are designed to reopen the construct of school councils to these contestations in order to identify and address marginalisations and exclusions that work to advantage families in different ways in this formation.

**Conclusion**

The pedagogical construction of school councils positions parental participation as supporting their children and their children’s schools in achieving improved schooling outcomes. In this construction, the school council forms part of a school’s site-based management, with parents participating as partners in the decision-making processes of the school. The ways in which these councils are formed and the extent of this participation is dependent on the particular contextual formation of this construct. What constitutes effective involvement and participation, however, remains uncertain.
Although research investigating effective schools, evaluating the success of family-school partnerships and some studies of the implementation of school councils indicate that these constructs are associated with school improvement, contradictory findings, as well as critiques of the processes and findings of the research, contest the formation of school councils as a pedagogical construct. The need for the development of clear definitions for the concepts and key terms in the field also contributes to a lack of clarity in understandings in this literature. The limitation of membership of these councils, and the under-representation of families from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds, also raise equity and social justice questions in this particular construction of parental involvement and participation. Overall, these contestations from the positions of academic rigour and inclusive educational practice challenge the pedagogical construction of this participation, and indicate the need for further research and theorisation on which to found future policy development and procedures in schools.

This chapter has explored the first of the discursive constructions of school councils as parent participation addressed in this thesis, drawing on research and policy literature, with the voices of the research participants illustrating the pedagogical construction of their participation. A number of significant challenges to the theoretical foundations of this construction of parent participation in school councils have been identified, including contradictory research evidence and methodological problems within the literature. The need for the development and application of an agreed terminology for key concepts in this field has also been identified. A rigorously developed literature based on this terminology is also required in order to inform the theorisation of this area of school policy and practice. In identifying these areas, this chapter provides an initiation of the processes of reconceptualisation by reintroducing the discourses of research (the voice of academia) and other marginalised discourses into the field of (re)construction. The chapter has also reintroduced critical consideration of the construct of parent participation in school councils and its inclusive and exclusionary effects.
If considered from a Dewian notion of the purpose of schooling being to prepare individuals for effective engagement in society for their own benefit and for the benefit of the other, a political construction of schooling within the context of the dominant social constructions of citizenship is also indicated. In modern Western countries the dominant political discourse is that of democracy. The following three chapters provide a genealogy of modern democratic discourse and the dominant democratic constructions of parent participation in school councils.

The first of these three genealogical chapters (Chapter 6) provides a genealogy of the discursive descent of modern democracy and its emergence in recent history as social, representative and market liberalism, and neoliberalism in current times. Chapter 6 thus establishes the political context for Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. Chapter 7 explores the construction of parent participation in school councils within the more closely related of these forms of democracy, social and representative democratic discourse. Chapter 8 then offers a more detailed exploration of the neoliberal construction of school councils in contemporary times. Together, then, this chapter (Chapter 5) and the following three provide a genealogy of the different dominant discursive constructions of school councils and also begin the processes of contestation, and thus innovation in Foucaultian terms. The concluding chapter in the thesis then brings these histories and contestations together to provide an impulse and some suggested guidelines in beginning the process of innovation, based on the findings of the research in this thesis.
Chapter 6

A genealogy of modern democratic discourse

Democracy has been championed as a mechanism that bestows legitimacy on political decisions when they adhere to proper principles, rules, and mechanisms of participation, representation and accountability.

(Held, 2006, p. 261)

Introduction

The term “democracy” derives from the Greek terms demos (common people) and kratia (strength or rule), meaning people-power. As a set of ideals, democracy is based on “the belief in freedom and equality between people” (Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2008). As practice, democracy involves citizens in the governance of their society, enabling individuals to freely and equally “participate in making decisions that affect their lives” (Apple & Beane, 1999, pp. 10-11). As “the fundamental standard of political legitimacy in the current era” (Held, 1996, p. xi), democratic forms of rule dominate governance of the world’s nations. The emergence of modern forms of democracy has been strongly influenced by the historical discourses of the classical democracy of ancient Athens, by renaissance republicanism, and by liberalism and the direct democracy of communism of recent centuries (Held, 2006; Olssen, Codd & O’Neill, 2004). These formations of modern democracy have produced differing constructions of citizens, and thus parents as participants in their children’s schooling and school councils.

Although democracy represents the dominant discourse of government in modern Western nations (Freedom House, 2008; Held, 2006; United Nations Development Program, 2002), the concept of democracy has been contested by “the majority of political thinkers” since its adoption in ancient Athenian society (Held, 1996, p. 1), and the meaning of democratic citizenship and governance “remains very much a widely contested concept” (Hyslop-Margison, 2006, p. 33). This contestation occurs
in a context where “ancient and modern notions intermingle to produce ambiguous and inconsistent accounts of the key terms of democracy” (Held, 1996, p. xi).

This chapter provides a genealogical history of these ancient and modern discursive influences on the formation of modern democracy, identifying the ways in which their differing articulations of the central principles of liberty, equality and justice provide the foundations of these modern democratic forms. The influence of these articulations in the emergence of modern forms of democracy is elaborated, and the ways these forms of democracy construct parent participation in school councils are identified. This chapter thus offers an historical understanding of the discursive descent of modern democracy.

**Early historical influences**

Two forms of rule from earlier eras, that of ancient Athenian democracy, and the republicanism of the renaissance that drew on ancient Roman republican rule, have been strongly influential in the formation of the theories and practices of modern democracy (Held, 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Olssen et al., 2004). Between these influences and modern democratic discourses, a centralised and hierarchical form of rule based on notions of rule by the will of God was introduced, and these influences remain evident in the constitutions of some modern democratic nations, though no longer overruling the will of the people in the political decision-making processes of government. These formations of rule (the state) and citizenship are introduced in this section, followed by a discussion of the discursive influences of modern times.

**Classical Athenian democracy**

Early democratic modes of governance were evident in ancient Sumerian society around 3500 BC and in the ancient panchayat systems of local government in villages in India (Dahl, 1989; Klein, 2001). The first nations North American Haudenosaunee people also practised participatory governance methods and are considered by some scholars to be the world’s oldest continuing participatory democracy (Johansen, 1982, 2006), with the Haudenosaunee League dated as being
founded on the lunar eclipse of 31st August 1142 (Mann & Fields, 1997). These earlier North American aboriginal treaties that incorporated the principles of participation in decisions by members of the society predated and informed the formation of the democracy of the United States of America (Johansen, 1982, 2006). However, the foundations of modern Western democracy are usually traced by Western scholars to the democratic systems of ancient Athenian society (Held, 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Olssen et al., 2004).

Athenian democracy emerged around 508 BC with the support of the leader Cleisthenes, following periods of tyrannical rule by individual leaders around discourses of equality and freedom (Held, 2006). Democracy moved sovereignty from the individual ruler to the populace as free and equal beings, through the participation of all citizens in the governance of their state (Dunn, 1992; Foucault, 1990/1979; Held, 1996). The processes of Athenian democracy facilitated participation of citizens in the governance of their society through regular meetings referred to as the assembly. To manage the processes of this large assembly, a smaller council of 500 citizens was selected annually by lot from the assembly. From the council, a committee of 50 council members formed a group for the regular (day to day) business of the society. This group was reselected each month. A different member of this smaller committee was nominated each day to be its president (Held, 2006). Positions requiring specific expertise had different appointment processes and tenure arrangements (Held, 1996). For example, magistrates and other officials also served in committees, with limited appointment tenures. These arrangements meant that all citizens were likely to serve as officials in the community at least once, with a limitation of two terms of service in the official positions (Held, 1996; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006).

Regular changes of those in positions of responsibility ensured a sharing of responsibility across the citizenry. This process also reduced the possibility of smaller groups or powerful individuals gaining dominance. It was this freedom to (participate in decisions affecting their society and thus their own lives), and freedom from (the arbitrary rule of others) that defined Athenian liberty. The membership of
the assembly of all citizens and the processes of rotation of those in positions of responsibility provided a highly participatory and direct form of democracy. Central to participation in the governance of Athenian democracy was the principle of civic virtue. Civic virtue formed the subject as a public individual, where participants advanced the needs of society above the pursuit of personal interests. Freedom to participate was conceptualised in terms of the fulfilment of one’s (public) life as a good citizen, a conceptualisation referred to by Held (2006) as a developmental view of democracy. This developmental view is evident in the construction of modern democratic discourse. For example, The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report (2002) asserts that the advancement of democracy serves a practical purpose in addressing the social needs of people, but also that “democratic participation is a critical end of human development, not just a means of achieving it” (UNDP, 2002, p. v).

In Athenian society, to be a citizen was part of one’s being, a way of life and a fulfilment of identity – a good life was a life of working in the interests of society (Held, 1996). Democracy therefore sought to protect the society against the excesses of tyrannical rule (what Held (2006) referred to as protective democracy), while allowing individual citizens to fulfil their citizenry roles in contributing to the betterment of society (Held’s (2006) developmental democracy). Participation in governance was part of this civic virtue, a service for the benefit of society.

Justice in Athenian democratic decision making was served by the notion of equality of citizens, freedom from the rule of others, and in the placing of the interests of the society ahead of personal interest. Thus, Athenian democracy was not managed by the rule of the majority (as a combined expression of the greatest number), but through lengthy discussion with the aim of consensus. This unanimity (harmonia) was considered as a way of ensuring the correct (fair and just) decision in matters in the interests of society (Held, 2006). The process of voting on decisions (the casting of a ballot) was applied only where consensus could not be achieved (Held, 2006). Justice in terms of the keeping of the law was delegated to the courts and appointed officials.
The emphasis in ancient Athenian society on civic virtue and the construction of the individual as a public citizen meant that the assembly made decisions on all matters in the interests of society. Many matters constructed in modern society as the citizen’s private life were thus subject to the governance of the assembly (Held, 2006). The individual, therefore, was subject to the rule of society as imposed upon themselves through the processes of unanimous (or in some circumstances majority) decision making. All citizens were constructed as free (in terms of civic virtue) and equal (having an equal right to participate, express a view, and vote in matters of governance over their society and themselves).

The success of democracy in Athenian society may have in part been attributable to its particular definition of citizenship as much as its construction of the citizen as participants which limited participation to “free adult males of strictly Athenian descent” (Held, 1996, p. 15). Thus the right to participate (freedom and equality of personal representation) in the governance of society was limited to narrow section of the community, namely male Athenian-born landholders or with business interests in the community (Dahl, 1989). Other members of the community (including women, slaves, labourers, and those not of Athenian birth) were excluded from participation in the governance of society. The homogeneity provided by the non-representation of alternative viewpoints of those excluded from participation could also have provided the stability required in reaching consensus in decision making.

With meetings of the assembly occurring up to 40 times per year (Held, 2006) and with the additional duties of the council and other time-consuming appointed roles, Athenian democracy was reliant on the work of non-citizens for its functioning. The reliance on women, slaves and labourers (and their non-citizen status) was required to maintain and manage the running of business and the home in order that citizens be released to fulfil these participatory duties. Thus, Athenian democracy was highly non-democratic in terms of modern articulations of the principles of freedom, equality, and justice for all.
The complex and cumbersome decision-making processes of Athenian democracy, its reliance on excess resources to release citizens for participation, and its subjugation of others in society, made Athenian democracy vulnerable to economic downturns and civil unrest and restricted its responsiveness to external threat (Held, 2006). Held’s account of Athenian democracy records how Plato and Aristotle were strongly against this form of decision-making. Plato, in The Republic (1974/360BC), criticised both the principle of equality, asserting that democracy “treats all men as equal, whether they are equal or not” concluding that “democracy marginalizes the wise”, and the principle of liberty, which to Plato meant that the citizen was “free to do as he likes” (Plato, 1974/360BC, pp. 375-376).

Plato (1974/360BC) also described how the assembly could be influenced by popular sentiment (fads), passion and strong factions, where citizens could easily be caught up in the present moment, or “gusts of popular passion” (Mill, 1991/1861, p. 346). Plato also argued that voting by majority acted as a form of tyranny in itself, allowing the majority to rule whether they were informed or not in preference to the skilled in matters of judgement. Plato also noted that decisions were sometimes dominated by highly influential families (Plato, 1974/360BC, p. 282). Aristotle (384-322BC) too criticised the construction of citizens as numerically equal, which ignored the differential ability of individuals to contribute usefully and wisely to decisions involving complex matters (Lord, 1984). Aristotle criticised democracy as “a ‘transgression’ of good government” (cited in Held, 1996, p. 19). Li (1999) summarised these critiques of Athenian democracy thus:

The Assembly of citizens was often controlled by a small number of influential families and at times it displayed various problems associated with unconstrained popular sentiment: irrationality, tyranny of uncontrolled passion and tyranny of majority.

(Li, 1999, n.p.)

Athenian democracy failed to spread widely, and over time economic difficulties weakened the society, which eventually fell to the power of more organised and militarily expedient states. With the fall of Athens the reason of man as a source of
wisdom in decision making was replaced again with the reason of the one (monarchy or tyrant) and rule through the exercise of military power, and democratic discourse become marginalised across the Western world for several centuries. Despite its failings, Athenian (classical) democracy was central in the formation of modern democratic discourses (Dahl, 1989; Finley, 1983; Held, 2006). The principles of liberty and equality that formed Athenian democracy underpin modern democratic forms of state rule, and many of the processes, including the participation of citizens in defining the nature of their society, the use of committees, and the processes of majority decision making, have had a strong influence on modern methods of democratic governance.

**Rule by the wisdom of God**

Between ancient Athenian democratic rule and the next influential formation of governance on modern democracy, republicanism, a major change in community governance occurred with the spread of Christianity. This influence was dominant for many centuries, and has resonances in modern society with links between monarchs and the church (the Queen of England is also the head of the Church of England), and with prayers opening parliaments each year in Australia, and oaths remaining in some nations, such as the United States of America.

Wisdom, as wise rule, became not the product of human reason (whether of the many as in democracy, the few as in oligarchy or the one of monarchy) but as originating from the mind of God. Consequently, the role of the individual and society was to work within God’s will (see Saint Augustine, 354–430, The city of God for an expression of this understanding of history as the unfolding of God’s will). In the thirteenth century this understanding was expressed in the works of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who argued that only those qualified to interpret the will of God were qualified to make judgements about divine intent. This created a reordering of the church from being responsible for the spiritual welfare of individuals to being above the state, and a movement to modes of governance where rulers (monarch or council) sought the counsel and approval of the church in decision-making (Held, 2006; Lindberg, 2005).
This deference to the divine will of God, through its interpretation by the church on earth, remained the dominant discourse in the rule of Christian countries until the challenge to the notions of a single faith and single religion during the period of the European Renaissance and Reformation (during the 14th to 17th centuries) (Held, 2006; Lindberg, 2005). These challenges to notions of a single faith repositioned the church. Whereas it had previously been considered the single guiding source of wisdom for the state, the church was now seen as representing one possible view, and as responsible primarily for matters of faith rather than governance of society. Thus the state needed to be independent of the church. Although the church (or churches) could advise, the wisdom of man was again returned to rule in decisions of the state. (Women, slaves and others remained excluded in many significant roles in many Western countries until the recent century.)

The Renaissance introduced a new challenge in attempting to rearticulate the principles of liberty, equality and justice in a new way of governing the emerging modern (post-medieval) society. With Athenian democracy viewed as a failure and impractical in times of a growing urban population and reduced prosperity, and with histories of tyranny in the rule of the one or the few in the centuries that followed, a form of republicanism emerged, influenced by but more participatory than the ancient Roman formation of assemblies of elite responsible for areas of governance. This mixed form of rule contained elements of earlier forms of rule (the rule of the one, the few and the many) in a form of rule that attempted to retain the positive contributions of each, but which also addressed their failings, safeguarding the people against the excesses of the other.

**The republic**

Devised for the management of smaller populations, republicanism’s mixed constitution maintained the people (the many) as the source of (legislative) power. Renaissance republicanism remained highly participatory at this level, with sections of the community having strong representation in the formation of legislation. The separation of powers between the legislator and the executive of government maintained accountability of the few of government to the people. A ruler (the one)
held delegated executive powers, remaining accountable to the people through the
government.

The strength of republican decision-making lay in its inclusion of differing views in
the process of legislation. The participation of different constituencies in the
decision-making processes of legislation was devised so that all interests and needs
were considered. Having participated in these decisions, compliance was thought to
be more likely, since legislation was self-imposed. In doing so, republicanism
represented “a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each
member with the collective force of all” (Rousseau, 1968/1762, p. 60).

Since decisions were formed by the group acting in the interests of all there was also
a need for an agreement of citizens to be bound by and adhere to these decisions.
Thus, the individual sets aside their rights as an independent being, free to pursue
their own benefit, in order to receive the privileges and protections of collective
living. The renaissance philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Rousseau, 1968/1762)
referred to this understanding as the social contract where: “each of us puts his
person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will;
and in a body we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole” ( p. 14).

The social contract affords these protections, not by handing power to an individual
(see for example Hobbes, (1968/1651) who proposed a single ruler with powers in
legal, military, religion and private (civil lives of citizens)) or to a perpetually
appointed government (see for example Locke 1963/1690), or by individuals
pursuing their personal interest (see later discussion on liberalism), but through the
pursuit of the interests of others, that is, in a construct similar to the civic virtue of
classical Athenian democracy. This construction of the citizen produces a public
citizenship, with little or no private sphere beyond the reach of legislation, albeit
legislation in which the citizenry has participated. Consequently, as in Athenian
democracy, there is no private sphere of civilian life. The legislator, acting in the
interests of the whole, has control over all aspects of individual lives.
An element of this republican form of rule familiar to modern day democracy is the use of voting in decision making. Voting also occurred in classical democracy but was applied only where unanimity (consensus) could not be reached. Rousseau stated that in the republic, the minority should always accede to the general will: “the votes of the greatest number always bind the rest” (Rousseau, 1968/1762, p. 153), a condition which Rousseau saw as the result of the social contract itself. Although republicanism rules by majority opinion, this general will is constructed as the combined expressions of civic virtue, or the public interest, thus differing from the will of the majority which represents the combined expressions of private interest (and which forms the basis of market democracy and neoliberal discourses) (see Rousseau, 1968/1762, pp. 72-73).

In terms of the social contract, the individual who had voluntarily given up their sovereignty in pursuing their own interests to pursue the benefit of all in a society, was also entitled to certain minimum protections in terms of basic provisions and freedom to act (with civic virtue) as part of the formation of the general will. Republicanism introduced an understanding of equality that provided restrictions on individual wealth to promote an equality such that “no citizen shall be rich enough to buy another and none so poor so as to be forced to sell himself” (Rousseau, 1968/1762, p. 96), and pursued redistributive policies of providing the conditions considered an entitlement of all in the society. The republican social contract thus protected individuals and their society against the ravages of unabated pursuit of personal interest, as part of the exchange of providing individuals with the protections of society. These distinctions between individualism and the social contract, and this new articulation of equality as an entitlement of access to certain provisions of society, were significant in the formation of modern forms of democracy and their construction of identities in terms of participation in children’s schools in contemporary society.

In the context of early forms of republicanism, unity in society rather than the pursuit of individuality was necessary for maintaining protection against internal and external threats to the stability of the society and its people. Republican forms of
rule, which limited participation to specific groups of individuals who were classified as citizens, and which gave unlimited powers over the community and individual lives to their representative legislators, also established positions of privilege that could be abused by councils pursuing policies (and laws) that benefited themselves more than the population they served.

The medieval Italian theologian and scholar Marsilius of Padua (1275–1342) in Defensor Pacis (The Defender of Peace) (Marsilius, 1324, cited in Held, 2006) identified two forms of republicanism based on this stance of civic virtue, referring to those that focused on the public interest as temperate forms, and those where self-interest dominated as diseased. Where personal interest (or privilege) became dominant, overthrow of governments was the only real form of accountability available, and many early republics returned to the rule of monarchs, with the support of the people, against a diseased republic (Held, 2006). Despite these failings, republicanism has provided modern democracy with procedures for the management of larger populations, including the notions of the people as the source of political power, the delegation of powers to representatives of the public, and the separation of legislative and executive powers.

The repositioning of the individual as being responsible for their own relationship with God and salvation meant that they became personally (privately) sovereign in these matters (see for example the works of John Calvin, 1509–1564, and Martin Luther, 1483–1546), though in many states a single religion continued as a dominant discourse and thus continued officially inform the society (Lindberg, 2005). Where classical Athenian democracy and republican discourses had articulated liberty as the freedom from the arbitrary rule of others and freedom to participate in the formation of their society (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 259), a new, more individualistic discourse, liberalism, was to rearticulate this personal sovereignty as a freedom to (act) in matters that did not (or should not) involve the state.
Modern historical influences

The Reformation and the Renaissance in Europe produced a reassertion of notions of individual freedom. Liberalism emerged as an increasing and ongoing influence in the formation of democracy, particularly in Western nations. In recent decades, liberal forms of democracy, based around the particular construct of representative democracy, have spread to many previously non-democratic nations (Golby, 2005; Olssen et al. (2004). The following section describes the main forms of liberalism evident in modern constructions of democracy.

Liberalism

Liberalism’s reassertion of the freedom of the individual (liberty) came following the repositioning of the church in the period of the Renaissance and Reformation (14th to 17th centuries), and reflected in the works of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), Thomas Paine (1737-1809) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Each of these philosophers and theorists offered differing “liberalist” views of the subject, participation, and governance in support of the principles of liberty, equality and justice. A good summary of the contributions of these writers can be found in Held (2006) and Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2006).

Olssen et al. (2004, p. 74) described liberalism as “a socially and historically variable set of discourses, the interpretation of which has been altered and reshaped, but certainly not disfigured out of recognition, to reflect its modernity”. In contrast to the construction of governance as civic virtue, and liberty as freedom from the rule of others, liberalism is formed by an understanding of liberty as sovereignty in matters of the self, thus establishing the notion of a private sphere.

In liberal societies, power remains with the people through a constitution of the people whereby governments remain accountable to the people. Government in classical liberal societies is thus conceptualised as government by consent (Locke, 1963/1690) with accountability to the people in terms of performance through regular processes of election of governors. Governments may delegate powers to an executive which, as in republicanism, remains accountable to the people through
their representatives in government. Modern liberal democracy and modern republicanism are relatively similar constructs (Held, 2006). The notion of liberty in liberalism is rearticulated as freedom to. Thus, according to liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill, there is freedom in “pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it” (Mill, 1982/1859, p. 72). Thus in liberal discourse, “the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others” (Mill, 1982/1859, p. 68). These powers are delegated to governments on the people’s behalf in legislative and in judicial powers, again within the law of the people as expressed in the constitution.

How individual freedoms are facilitated and protected, and how this “harm to others” is interpreted, forms the basis of three dominant discourses of liberalism: classical liberalism, welfare liberalism and market-based neoliberalism (Held, 2006). Each of these liberalisms forms differing governance structures and different subjectivities in the participation of citizens in society.

Classical liberalism
Classical liberalism is based on the understanding that the human subject is “presumed to do all things in order to his own benefit” (Hobbes, 1968, p. 213), in “the pursuit of the gratification of … desires and appetites … by the faculty of reason” (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 75). Liberalism refers to this seeking of fulfilment as human agency – the force that liberalism liberates and applies in the construction of a society. These individual expressions of desire create a demand, which can be fulfilled by a supplier, thus forming a market. Suppliers seek to satisfy these markets in the most cost-effective and resource-efficient ways, producing efficiency. Access to these supplies is achieved as both demand and supply seek to satisfy their own desires. For suppliers this may be profit, but may also be based on other human needs such as access to resources beyond an individual’s capacity (such as a public sporting facility, museum, or education), security (such as law enforcement) or for the public good (such as mandatory immunisation against a communicable disease).
Classical liberalism facilitates this individual expression of “desires and appetites” by increasing private ownership in the supply of goods and services, reducing the involvement of the state and increasing competition in these markets through deregulation and promotion of individual (consumer) choice within these markets. This form of liberalism therefore advocates privatisation, free markets, reduced government, and devolution of power, allowing individuals to pursue their own interests. Classical liberalism rejects government intervention as likely to cause inefficiencies, ineffectiveness or other distortions of the natural balances in the market. The needs of the population are met by the forces (or markets) created by these combined expressions of need and desire, which are self-regulatory through the formation of a natural balance of supply and demand (the “invisible hand” theory of Smith, 1970/1776).

With government roles restricted to a small number of public roles (such as defence) and the facilitation and protection of individual liberty, government intervention is constructed as causing distortions in this natural balance. The role of government in liberal societies is constructed as being to “secure the greatest happiness for the greatest number” (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 116). Unlike the homogenising processes of republican governance, where all matters came under public rule, liberalism champions diversity through private choice. Each member of society is free therefore to choose their own happiness, within the parameters of avoiding harm to others.

The linking of the right to property with individual (private) liberty in the emerging market economies of 17th and 18th centuries created a role for government in protecting not only the freedoms of the individual, but also their personal assets and their freedom to accumulate this wealth. Thus, in classical liberalism, economic and civic freedoms become linked (Apple, 2001, p. 13). Market-based notions of liberalism have become dominant in recent years with the emergence of neoliberalism, which is addressed in the following chapter.

The classical liberal subject therefore participates in society through their individual expressions of desire. The meeting of these desires is governed by the collective
weight of demand in that society, (the many) triggering supply of that particular interest. With a high degree of individual choice, the classical liberal subject is free, with an equal say in the way they choose between options and in their expression of their interests and desires, these expressions being limited by the principles of not impeding others in their similar pursuit of their own interests and not harming another.

Equality in classical liberalism is articulated as the “equality of opportunity” (Lingard et al., 1999, n.p.), the equal availability of opportunity, to pursue one’s interests (the notion of the level playing field). In classical liberalism, participation was, however, limited in similar ways to previous republican and democratic societies with women, non-working white people and black slaves excluded in the conceptualisations of citizenship in the thinking of prominent liberal philosophers such as John Locke (1632-1704) and Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689-1755). John Stuart Mill, like Plato before him, also proposed a weighted system of voting, with those of greater merit (as judged by occupation) having proportionately more votes than less able citizens (Held, 2006). Plato’s and Mill’s proposals of action to address this issue offered an alternative thinking around issues of equity and justice in society, attempting to discriminate between equality as an equal right to have a say and the ability (in their terms in terms of merit) of individuals to participate fairly, though this is far from its construction in modern society as social justice.

The classical liberal reliance on the market was not always able to ensure the meeting of all needs in society, since these needs or interests may be too small, or regarded as irrelevant by the market (Mill, 1982/1859, p. 72). That is, where there is nothing to be gained by the market supplying a particular demand, markets can choose to ignore these unprofitable or irrelevant markets. Those needs, considered as either an entitlement of the private or a basic human right, must therefore become part of the role of government. John Locke, despite being classically liberal in advocacy of the private, also saw this need for “charity” in meeting certain “entitlements” in society (Locke, 1963/1690, Treatise I, para. 42). By doing so,
governments maintain their role in liberal societies of working to “secure the greatest happiness for the greatest number” (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 116).

Mill (1991/1861) defined the purposes of government as being to ensure “security of person and property and equal justice between individuals” (p. 355). The notion of providing equal justice, although deployed by Mill in his suggestion of proportional voting in a way which discriminated between the worth of different individuals, also provided a role for government that linked equality and justice. This link, though articulated in alternative ways, forms the foundation of welfare liberal discourse.

Welfare liberalism

Welfare liberalism posits the provision of minimum levels of access to the provisions and privileges of society (justice) as a role of the state, in terms of ensuring a minimum level of happiness (liberty) for all citizens (equality), advocating redistributive processes in order to provide for the public good. This emphasis on access recognises that although in principle all individuals are free and equal, the circumstances within which individuals exist means that not all citizens are equally able to “play the game”, even when the playing field is level, or, to stretch the metaphor, even able to get to the field.

Welfare liberalism promotes greater government intervention in restoring access for marginalised and disenfranchised citizens to those things believed by that society to be basic rights and privileges (Rawls, 1971). These basic entitlements in modern democratic societies include “food, shelter, education and a minimum level of security” (Olssen et al., 2004, pp. 117-118). The economist John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) proposed government intervention in the provision of an enlarged sphere of public goods, and rearticulated some things regarded as private goods as public goods in a modern society, including working conditions for employees and the support of a basic standard of living (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 113). Welfare liberalism constructs this support as providing benefits not only to the individual but to society through increased participation in the public as well as private spheres in society.
Education is one area regarded in welfare liberalism as having benefits for both individuals and their society, and therefore as an entitlement of all individuals in society. The purpose of government intervention in education in a welfare liberal state is the maximisation of learning for all students in order to improve the individual’s possibilities for participation in society. Programs such as disadvantaged schools programs in Australia and other support initiatives are products of this discourse.

Welfare liberalism constructs the individual as having certain basic entitlements, regardless of circumstance. Unlike socialism, which also attempts a form of equality of citizenry by limiting the private sphere, including restricting the private ownership of capital (the means of production), governments in welfare liberal states fulfil these conditions by regulating the use of privately owned resources, through industrial law and taxation for example, to provide support for individuals and the community. From a classical liberal view, these initiatives represent the introduction of and support for inefficiencies, reducing incentives and diverting resources from more productive applications. Although both classical and welfare liberalism are founded on the freedom of the individual, the ways in which that freedom is constructed produce different roles for governments in society and in relation to education.

Neoliberalism
In contemporary times, notions of market freedoms based on classical liberalism have re-emerged in what has been referred to as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a dominant discourse in the management of contemporary Western society (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000; Apple, 2001, 2005, 2006; Bourdieu, 1998; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). This dominance is reflected in the ways in which governments manage free enterprise markets and in their provision of services to the community.

Also referred to as advanced liberalism (Rose, 1996), neoliberalism applies classical liberal notions of free markets, minimal government, and individual (self-maximising) freedom in deregulating private enterprise and in the provision of services previously provided by government. In this process, services previously
considered as public goods, such as health, education and other welfare services, are constructed as private goods, and are opened to the forces of competition within the market. At the same time, neoliberal or advanced liberal governments maintain their regulation over many aspects of these organisations, including benchmark expectations and service requirements (Ball, 2003).

Neoliberalism is evident in the financial policies of Western governments in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States, and is also becoming evident in the provision of social (welfare) services in these countries. This includes the ways in which educational services including schooling are provided, and the ways in which these services are controlled and managed.

The dominance of neoliberalism, or advanced liberalism, and its construction of school councils, forms the basis of the discussions of Chapter 8. This chapter also elaborates further on the theoretical foundations of advanced liberalism and the ways in which the citizen and their participation in society are formed.

**Socialism and the communist state**

A fourth political formation, that of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) is identified by Held (2006) as influential in the formation of modern democracy, most notably participatory forms as represented in social democracy. Marx and Engels considered that inequality in society arose from class disadvantage produced by the private accumulation of wealth and enabled through private ownership and the unequal distribution of excess production. In their publication, The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels (1998/1848) outlined a system of equality-based freedom and justice, where class is eliminated through central ownership of resources and through limitations on personal ownership and wealth, with wealth redistributed more equitably across society and directed towards publicly funded resources and infrastructure. Equality is therefore articulated as equality across all in society in terms of rights and responsibilities. Freedom therefore represented freedom from all exploitations, including those related to class. Freedom
also remains in the election of the officials who maintained the equal society. Justice was therefore represented as equality.

The ideal of communism, a highly free society where citizens share in the tasks of the society and where decision are reached through consensus, is reminiscent of classical democratic and early republican participatory decision making and principles of civic virtue. Communism’s ideal state, where individuals were self-regulating and equal, required a dismantling of society, as it was through a transitional process where those in power were able to enforce the new regime of equality and non-private ownership. During the transition to communism, the centralised government retained full control of public and private lives throughout the process of dismantling existing society and establishing the new system of communes.

Attempts to enact communism have fallen during the transitional stages, with this failure resulting from the impossible idealism of the complete “absence of politics” (Polan, 1984, cited in Held, 2006, p. 122). Marx and Engels’ influence on modern democracy was, however, to reintroduce notions of the public good and participatory decision making into a discursive field dominated by liberalist thought, with its emphasis on individual freedom in terms of an enlarged private sphere.

**The central principles of democratic discourse**

Throughout the discourses of classical democracy, republicanism, liberalism and the communist state, the principles of liberty, equality, and justice remain central in their formations of the subject and the processes of participation in their society. The subject therefore emerges as a citizen in these societies in differing ways, with differing public and private rights and responsibilities. These principles of liberty, equality and justice, and their historical articulations, are central to understanding modern democratic discourses and their constructions of parental participation in schools.
Liberty

Liberty represents notions of individual freedom within a particular formation of democracy. Ancient Athenian democracy and early republican liberty referred to a freedom from the rule of others, and corresponding freedom to in the citizen in having equal input into the management of their society. This input was framed within notions of civic virtue, being the placing of the public good ahead of private interest and desire, and therefore formed in the context of little or no private sphere. In modern forms of democracy, this freedom to is conceptualised in terms of the individual’s freedom to pursue their own desires and interests. The degree of this individualistic construction of freedom is contested by welfare liberal notions of a more equitable sharing of the benefits of community. Communism restricts private ownership, with a return to a highly public citizenry.

Modern democratic societies construct freedom in terms of political participation in the construction of society, and as individual sovereignty in the management of private lives. The current dominance of democratic governance in the nations of the world gives democracy an apparent fundamentality (Fukuyama, 1992); however, the widespread acceptance of democracy is a recent phenomenon in world politics. According to the definition of democratic freedom developed by the American democratic advocacy organisation Freedom House, “a free country is one where there is broad scope for open political competition, a climate of respect for civil liberties, significant independent civic life, and independent media” (Puddington, 2008, p. 3). Using this definition, Freedom House categorised the world’s nations and states as:

**Free** – “where there is broad scope for open political competition, a climate of respect for civil liberties, significant independent civic life, and independent media”;

**Partly free** – “in which there is limited respect for political rights and civil liberties. Partly free states frequently suffer from an environment of corruption, weak rule of law, ethnic and religious strife, and often a setting in which a single political party enjoys dominance despite the façade of limited pluralism”;

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Not Free – “where basic political rights are absent, and basic civil liberties are widely and systematically denied”

(Puddington, 2008, p. 3).

Applying these definitions, in 2007, 78% of the world’s 193 separate political states were classified as free or partly free, representing 64% of the world’s estimated population (UNDP, 2002, p. v). The remaining 43 countries (22% of the world’s polities) were deemed not free, meaning that in 2007, 36% of the world’s people were ruled by non-democratic governance structures, although nearly half of these people lived in China (Puddington, 2008, p. 3). However, by these definitions of freedom, there were no fully democratic countries prior to 1900 (Freedom House, 2008).

According to Fukuyama (1992), at the beginning of the twentieth century only approximately 20% of the world’s population was governed by democratic rule (Fukuyama, 1992). Fukuyama’s analysis included only the 62 countries with over one million citizens as at 1990. Although these figures vary as an artefact of the discourses deployed in defining democracy, they confirm that the current dominance of democratic discourse in the governance of the world’s peoples is unique to the current political context.

Equality
In early forms of democratic and republican governance, each citizen was treated equally before the law and had an equal say in the establishment of the law. Communism proposes a similar aim of equality of citizens, including additional restrictions on private wealth. In classical democracy, citizens are equals in their participation, having a single vote in all matters of governance. In republican models, citizens are equal in terms of their participation in the selection of representatives and are active in the development of laws. Liberalism returns power to the people in an enlarged sphere of private sovereignty, this time in a form that asserts equality of liberty – an equal right to pursue one’s desires and choose between options.
In modern democratic societies, all members of the society are constructed as being equal before the law, with citizens having equal entitlement to vote for their representatives in government and to participate in the political processes of advocacy, dissension, and standing for office in elections. Constitutional democracies involve all citizens in the establishment or alteration of the laws that transfer specific powers and obligations to governors.

**Justice**

In Athenian democracy, justice in terms of the participation of citizens was served by their numerical equality, each having equal rights, an equal vote, and equality before the law. Republicanism attempted a similar form of justice in ensuring equality of participation in the formation of legislation and the selection of representatives. In both classical democracy and republican rule, justice in decision making was formed as the prioritisation of the public interest, or civic virtue. All citizens were therefore equally free and equally protected. In communism justice is provided by the more equal distribution of resources and wealth, and the provision for participation as equals in its system of communes. In classical liberalism justice is represented in the free market, with citizens equally free to pursue and advance their own interests, or the equal right of all citizens to enjoy a good life as they construct it. Republicanism extended the notion of justice to include the provision of basic services to all citizens by the society, and placed limitations on private accumulation of wealth. Thus, the notions of equality and justice intersected in an early articulation of equity and social justice. Welfare liberalism’s rearticulation of equality as including the principle of justice produces notions of equity and social justice that are influential in modern social democratic discourse.

These three principles, articulated in different ways in the differing formations of democratic discourse, constitute citizens with differing roles in relation to their own lives, the lives of others in the community, and in relation to the state. Modern democratic discourse is formed by these historical constructions of the individual and the state, constructing the ways in which the citizen participates as a member of society. These different constructions of the individual and the state are also
constitutive of the ways in which parent participation in the decision-making processes of schools and in school councils are constructed. These differing constructions of school councils and their formation within particular articulations of these three principles are discussed in the following two chapters, which identify these discursive formations of parent participation in their children’s schools.

**Modern constructions of democratic discourse**

Democratic discourses, then, construct individuals as active members of their society, and enable the participation of these citizens in the governance of their own lives (liberty), establish the equal right of these citizens to represent their needs and interests in decision-making processes (equality), and provide mechanisms of accountability to citizens for the conduct of government in their attendance to the will, needs and interests of the society (justice). The differing articulations of these notions produce differing subjectivities of citizens, and differing constructs that mobilise and control behaviours within these constructions of true ways of being in that context. These constructions are themselves the result of their discursive histories, outlined in this chapter.

Rizvi (1994) described three forms of democratic discourse that have been dominant in Western societies during the latter decades of the twentieth century:

1. **Social democracy** – a participatory form in which individuals are participants in decisions that relate directly to their own lives, and where the community is involved in decisions in broader community or societal decisions. Highly active consultation and collaboration form the basis of decision making in socially democratic organisations. Unlike the occasional participation of citizens in representative forms of democracy, social democracy is also marked by ongoing engagement of citizens in many of the affairs of society.

2. **Representative democracy** – where elected or appointed spokespersons become part of decision-making processes, often as governors, councillors or committee members, and

3. **Market democracy** – where the management of society is effected through the combined weight of individual purchases in markets (the creation of demand)
and the supply of goods and services to meet this demand through the private sector.

In recent times, market-based democracy has emerged as neoliberalism, or advanced liberalism (Rose, 1996). This advanced form of market-based democracy and its formation of parental participation in school councils is addressed in Chapter 8. As constructs emerging from notions of participatory democracy, the social democratic and representative democratic forms of democracy, and their constructions of school councils, are addressed in the following chapter.

**Conclusion**

Modern forms of democracy have emerged from their ancient and modern discursive histories. These include ancient formations of democracy and the republic and more recent notions of liberalism. Within these discourses, the central principles of liberty, equality and justice are articulated with different meanings, constructing differing subjectivities for citizens and differing roles of the state. Modern forms of social, representative and market (or neoliberal) democracy represent the results of their formation within the differing notions of these central principles.

These modern formations of democracy, and their articulations of the notions of liberty, equality and justice, are explored in the following two chapters. The ways school councils are constructed within these discourses, and the differing subjectivities made available to parents as participants, are identified through an analysis of the research and policy literature and the data gathered in interviews with the research participants. These chapters also consider existing research evidence in relation to these constructions of parent participation and school councils, introducing the critical approach of this thesis discussed in Chapter 4 and applied here in Chapter 5. Together, these two chapters apply the methods of genealogical investigation, identifying these modern discursive formations of school councils, and re-initiating the processes of contestation through the reintroduction of the voices of academia (research) and discourses of equity and social justice. The two chapters that follow thus build on the genealogy provided in this chapter in addressing the social
democratic, representative and neoliberal constructions of parental participation in school councils.
Chapter 7
Democratic constructions of parent participation in school councils

Parents are entitled to be consulted and allowed to participate in decisions concerning their own children.

(DEST, 2004a, p. 8)

Introduction

In modern democracies, the formations of social, representative and market democracy have been the dominant constructions for the participation of citizens in the decision-making processes of society, with each being dominant at differing times in recent decades (Rizvi, 1994). Within each of these democratic formations, notions of liberty, equality and justice are articulated in varying ways, producing differing constructions of the citizen-subject and ways for these citizens to participate in the decision-making processes of society. As a technology that enables parents to participate in the decision-making processes of schools, school councils are constructed in differing ways within these democratic (discursive) contexts.

This chapter introduces the participatory forms of social and representative democracy, and their constructions of parent participation in school councils. Using the critical approach introduced in Chapter 4, and applied in Chapter 5, these two discursive constructions of school councils are considered in relation to the research literature, the experiences of the research participants, and the marginalisations and exclusions exposed. In this way, this chapter continues the Foucaultian informed approach of this thesis in refusing to accept as inevitable any particular construction of school councils, investigating the ways in which these particular formations have come to be (curiosity), and in doing so initiating the processes of reconceptualisation (innovation).
Modern formations of participatory democracy

Participatory democracy, as was the case in ancient Athenian and republic societies, is based on the notion that all citizens are free, and equal in their right to participate in the decision-making processes of their society (Held, 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Olssen et al., 2004). Citizens are free to make decisions in their private lives and to participate in public-domain decisions. They are also therefore free from the arbitrary rule of others. The modern formation of participatory democracy, or social democracy, extends these freedoms to all adult members of society rather than restricting citizenship to particular classes of people in the community, as was the case in ancient Athens or in early forms of the republic (see Chapter 6).

Although not a form of participatory democracy as defined above, representative democracy supports similar constructions of the individual’s freedom to make decisions in their private lives and to participate in the decisions that form their society. Although all members of a representative democracy may participate in the formation of the constitution, for example, and in selecting their representative in government to represent the interests of others in the fulfilment of these constitutionally established responsibilities, individuals in a representative democracy have few participatory rights in terms of the implementation and achievement of these expectations of government. Instead, representatives are delegated the authority to make decisions on behalf of the public in these constitutionally established areas of jurisdiction.

Modern formations of participatory democracy, therefore, form two broad categories: individual participatory or social democratic forms, where “citizens are directly involved … [in] … decision-making about public affairs” (Held, 2006, p. 4), and representative forms, wherein citizens are elected “to ‘represent’ the interests and/or views of citizens within the framework of ‘the rule of law’” (Held, 1996, p. 6). The construction of these processes reflects the differing articulations of the central principles of liberty, equality, and justice in the particular context in which the particular formation of democracy has emerged. Within schools, these constructs determine the ways school councils are constructed and the subjectivities made
available for parents as they participate in decision making in their children’s schools. These two participation-based formations of social democracy and representative democracy and their constructions of parent participation in school councils are now considered.

**Democratic constructions of parent participation in school councils**

In supporting the participation of parents in school decision-making processes, theorists have argued that “parental involvement in governance is crucial to the democratic process” (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003, p. 50). In Australia, early advocacy of parent participation in school decision-making processes, through the formation of school councils, was part of this movement towards “democratising school governance” (Kirner, 1982). Apple and Beane (1999, p. 7) asserted that one of the roles of social institutions, such as schools in democratic societies is “to promote and extend the democratic way of life”. Vincent (2001a, 2001b) and Vincent and Martin (2000) similarly argue that one of the significant roles of schools in democratic societies is, “… the renewal (or establishment) of active and participative modes of citizenship” (Vincent, 2001a, p. 347). To fulfil this role, it was argued that democratic values and processes should be consistently practised at all levels of the organisation (Apple, 2001, p. 207).

It is argued, therefore, that schools should be democratically organised for two reasons. First, as publicly owned services in a democratic society, schools should be managed democratically as a matter of philosophical consistency, and second, by employing democratic processes, the behaviours of successful and responsible participation in society are modelled for students. The democratic construction of participation in schools in the form of school councils allows citizens to exercise their democratic participatory rights. As a public institution, schools can therefore model and build the skills required for participation in democracy. School councils thus serve a political purpose in “promot[ing] and extend[ing] the democratic way of life” (Apple & Beane, 1999, p. 7; see also Mills & Gale, 2004). In poststructural terms, the discourse of democracy produces and reproduces itself, speaking into being democratic structures and democratic subjectivities, and in the process
producing structures that are congruent with these constructs, and reproducing the truths of democratic discourse.

Social democracy and representative democracy are two formations that facilitate the participation of citizens in decisions that affect their lives. In schools, these formations represent a consistent structure within the dominant discourses of the wider society in which they exist, and prepare students for democratic life. School councils are therefore constructed within these discourses as a participatory truth, enabling representative democratic process to be enacted in schools and facilitating the participation of the school community in this public institution. The two constructions of democracy, social democratic and representative democracy, and their formations in school councils, are considered in the following discussion.

**Social democratic discourse**

Social democracy supports individual sovereignty through public participation, producing an enlarged public as well as an enhanced private sphere. The emphasis in social democratic discourse is on the securing of “the greatest happiness” across the “greatest number” of citizens (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 116), through high individual participation in the formation of their society similar to notions of classical democracy and republicanism, while supporting individual freedom in a private sphere. Social democracy also provides support for citizens in accessing the basic provisions of society in a process informed by welfare liberal discourse and its notions of justice as equity (see Chapter 6). By working for the extension of these rights and privileges across society, social democracy applies the republican notion of the social contract, ensuring the provision of these same privileges to individual citizens. Thus individual participation in social democratic societies is not an act of assertion of self-interest in an environment of minimal governmental intervention (as in classical liberalism), nor an act based on a nonexistent private sphere (as in classical democracy and classical republican discourse), but an expression of one’s own interests within the framework of the promotion of the interests of others. Participation, the right “to participate in making decisions that affect their lives”
Social democratic participation is similar to Arnstein’s conception of partnership, in which there is “distributed power” involving “negotiation between citizens and power holders” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 220), to support rights to individuality. Power is shared “through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 220). The individual social democratic subject is, therefore, both a private and a public subject. The social democratic citizen is active in the decision-making processes of society in relation to the formation of the society, and in decisions of government relating to their own lives.

Demands for community participation in the management of government and in public institutions (re)emerged in Western societies as part of the social revolution of the 1970s, which spoke of increased individual sovereignty and liberty and of devolution of government powers, particularly in public service provision, while maintaining the role of the state in supporting individual access to these freedoms through welfare, service and infrastructure support. As a dominant discourse during the 1970s (Lingard et al., 1999; Rizvi, 1994), social democracy was influential in the second wave of decentralisation in the management of Australian education that advocated increased community input into the decision-making processes of public institutions during that decade (Gamage, 1993 p. 136). The first wave of reform had, according to Gamage (1993), occurred earlier in response to management needs, resulting from the rapid growth of school systems during the post-war baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s. The third wave of reform began in response to the emerging market discourses of the 1990s and 2000s (Gamage, 1993) and forms the basis of the neoliberal discourse addressed in Chapter 8.

**Social democratic constructions of parent participation**

Social democratic discourse forms education as a public good, serving the interests of society (for “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” (Olssen et al., 2004,
p. 116)), as well as recognising its value as a private good to individuals in their pursuit of their own personal or private happiness. In schools, social democratic discourse positions parents as active public citizen participants in the formation of schooling (policies, curriculum, outcomes, etc.) and as active private citizens in decisions relating to their particular children’s education. That is, parental participation as democratic subjects is formed as an active role in school decision-making processes.

In Australian society, social democratic discourse was at its peak during the period of the (Australian Labour Party) Whitlam government (Lingard et al., 1999). Social democratic discourse was strongly reflected in the 1973 Karmel Report (Report of the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission, Schools in Australia) which was influential in informing the Whitlam government’s education reforms (Lingard et al., 1999). In schools, social democratic notions of individual freedoms, participatory rights, and the role of community input in addressing issues of equity and social justice were reflected in the Karmel Report’s recommendations of increased parental involvement in schools and community participation in the governance of schools (Karmel, 1973).

In the opening speech to the roundtable conference convened in the development of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework, the Federal Minister for Education, Dr. Brendan Nelson, affirmed this democratic positioning of parents in stating that parents should be allowed to participate in these decisions “because they want to” (Nelson, 2004b, n.p.), indicating this participation as a right of parents in modern (democratic) society. The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework Issues paper (McConchie, 2004) defined parental participation in their children’s schooling as a term that “implies some role in decision-making” (p. 3). Drawing on the description of Australian researcher Bastiani (1993, cited in DEST, 2004a, p. 14), the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) emphasised this socially democratic notion of participation in advocating:

- A sharing of power, responsibility and ownership, with each party having different roles;
A degree of mutuality, that begins with the process of listening to each other and which incorporates responsive dialogue and “give and take” on both sides;

Shared aims and goals based on a common understanding of the educational needs of children; and

A commitment to joint action in which parents, students and teachers work together.

(DEST, 2004a, p. 14)

This description of the family-school partnership positions parents as partners in the formation of the nature of schools (sharing of power, shared aims and goals) and as individuals in decisions relating to their own children’s interests. Dr Nelson also indicated this dual positioning of parents in asserting that parents “should have the opportunity to become involved in all aspects of schooling, from the setting of goals and the defining of schools values to the decision making of how to support the achievement of their individual child” (Nelson, 2004b, n.p.).

This dual positioning of the participation of parents, both as both public participants in the formation of schools in society and as private citizens in matters concerning the education of their own children, makes a dual subjectivity available for parents within the social democratic construction of school councils. In the only major Australian research into the experiences of school council members, the Victorian Council of School Organisation (Golby, 2005) also reflected this social-democratic dual construction of parent participation. Reasons given for joining their school’s council by the 413 parents in the VICCSO study revealed a mixture of private (personal or own child focus) and public citizenry motivations, as well as other rationales for their participation (Golby, 2005). Indicating public, private and dual-constructed subjectivities, parent school council members in the VICCSO research reported their motivations for joining their children’s school council as being (in order of highest to lowest number of responses):

- Out of interest, and to be involved and informed
- To contribute/provide support or help
Social democratic construction of school councils

Social democratic discourse thus advocates the participation of all parents in the decision-making processes of schools. This advocacy constructs the participation in both private and public terms. In schools, parental participation in decision making through school council membership provides a construct in which this participation is enabled, as both private and public citizens.

Constructions of parent participation in school councils as public citizens

As participants in the formation of society, citizens are involved in this development at the macro level in terms of the constitution and in the selection of governors. In relation to education, this implies participation in the formation of the purposes and practices of schools. In relation to individual schools, this is translated into the development of curriculum and policies by the community in meeting these agreed aims, and in the selection of local governors. In a socially democratic model, therefore, parents as public citizens work at Arnstein’s (1969) level of partnership where “power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and powerholders” (p. 220) in establishing the nature of the school at the institutional and management levels. An early policy document by the Queensland Department of Education, Focus on Schools, stated this clearly, declaring:

All members of a democratic society are entitled to participate in the education system. The public education system, therefore, needs to promote the right of school communities to participate and to provide
suitable consultative mechanisms and procedures to facilitate this process.

(Queensland Department of Education, 1990, p. 39)

The ACER literature review, commissioned by DEST to support the development of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a), and its preliminary Issues paper similarly identified parental participation in school decision-making processes “as a citizen’s right” (McConchie, 2004, p. 4). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (1997, p. 26) also identified democratic discourse as influential in the formation of parental participation, citing examples in legislation in France, Germany and Denmark. McConchie summarised this view as being “constructed around the right of the public to be involved in decisions about education that is publicly funded, at the school and school authority levels” (McConchie, 2004, p. 6).

The social democratic construction of parent participation and school councils represents a construct for the inclusion of the views of society in the formation of schools and school policies. Consequently, the pursuit of the common or public good is inherent in the construction of this input into schools. In relation to school councils in public schools, the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training (VIC DEET) noted “The roles and responsibilities relate to the good of the whole school not just one section of it” (VIC DEET, 2004, p. 12, emphasis in original).

This input at the societal (citizenry) level is intended in this discourse to ensure that schools meet the needs and aims of society, with the results being framed in terms of being for “the good of the whole school”.

Constructions of parent participation in school councils as public citizens
Several of the interview participants in this research positioned their participation as members of the school council as public citizens, expressing this subjectivity in terms of their aims and actions. Michael, with a strong background in corporate communication management, stated that he brought “a set of skills that can be of use
to the school”. Michael spoke of improving dialogue within the school and thus helping to avoid and more easily address misunderstandings and conflict: “It’s the modern way, isn’t it, I mean it’s about remaining engaged. Think of the problems with Indonesia, it is about maintaining dialogue to achieve a resolution rather than the old ways of breaking off ties, or worse.”

Barry saw his membership of his children’s (public school) school council in a similar way to Michael, as “supporting the principal in what she is trying to do in the school”. This participation was perceived by Barry as supporting the school in achieving its broader aims, particularly the principal’s interest in working to build a more inclusive school community. Although an improved school community would benefit Barry’s children it was also in the interests of all families, and Barry was “more than happy” to give time in supporting this process. Barry’s involvement in the school community was also an example for his children in showing them that community involvement was important. Although his children attended the school, Barry saw his participation “as a representative of the community, rather than as a parent rep per se”, indicating a positioning as a public citizen rather than as representing the particular interests of a constituency (such as parents) or as a private citizen.

Karen also constructed her participation as part of her broader personal commitment to social justice and thus as a public citizen. Karen spent a great deal of time and energy developing processes and gathering information to better understand the needs of the large group of families that remained silent in the school’s official processes, and whose needs and interests were therefore unknown. Karen saw this as part of a larger personal commitment towards a more inclusive and “socially just” society: “I’ve always had a commitment to social justice … and I think the school that my kids go to has a really diverse range of people”.

Barbara too saw her role on the school council in terms of offering skills and energy to the school community. Barbara was motivated to join the school council to become involved in community building activities, such as fundraising and social
events. This reflected Barbara’s view that the “school should be like a community”, so that children “like going to school and see it as a good place to be, where they learn and have fun and build the skills they will need to get on in life”. This role represents a community building focus (public benefit), but also a private benefit for Barbara’s own children in making them happier and more likely to enjoy school, indicating Barbara’s dual construction as both public and private citizen in her participation as a member of the school council.

Although there was an aim of long-term benefit for their children, Barry, Barbara, Karen and Michael were engaged in more than the pursuit of personal gain on behalf of their children. Instead, they were using the opportunity to contribute to a larger project in society while engaging in activities they saw as relevant to their own children’s lives. These individual positionings indicate these participants’ partial formation as public selves or citizens. For Barry, Barbara, Karen and Michael, their participation in the school council was, at least in large part, formed by a socially-democratic public citizenry role, from which they sought to add something to the world, as citizens, as well as in terms of the future world of their children. These participants also expressed their simultaneous constructions as private citizens in their recognition that, either their efforts were also inspired by some benefit for their own children through the improvement of the immediate school community atmosphere, or through modelling the values they wished transferred to their children.

Constructions of parent participation in school councils as private citizens
Based on the democratic notion that citizens are also constructed as participants “in making decisions that affect their lives” (Apple & Beane, 1999, pp. 10-11) parents, as decision makers for their children in democratic societies (see Chapter 5), also have a private participatory role in the decision-making processes within schools. The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) supported parent participation in decision making in schools by stating, “Parents are entitled to be consulted and allowed to participate in decisions concerning their own children” (p. 8). In advocating increased parental participation in school
management, Blackledge (1995, p. 309) stated the case more strongly, asserting that parents hold the right “to decide what is really necessary in the education of their children”.

In the opening speech to the Family-School Partnerships Framework roundtable, Dr Brendan Nelson also acknowledged the positioning of parents as private citizens in their participation in school decision making: “It is the parents who are of course most concerned in seeing their child develop to his or her potential” (Nelson, 2004b, n.p.). The Minister then goes on to state: “When we [parents] see school policies or activities that we dislike, we want to change them”. Thus, the participation of parents as citizens in school councils is strongly informed by two positions with different foci and different interpretations of the role of school councils and parent’s roles within these bodies. Karen, who was actively involved in activities for the good of the school and community in her role as a member of the school council, also recognised her positioning as a private citizen, stating: “Oh and of course, I know that your kids are likely to get more attention if your mum’s seen around the school”.

Barry and Michael also felt that the private benefits for their children that arose from their participation were secondary, though Barry acknowledged that these benefits were an important aspect of his involvement. Later in his interview, Michael also acknowledged that there were benefits for his own children, though they were minor and not commensurate with the sacrificed time required of the position. Anna was clear that her participation was primarily as a private citizen, being motivated by the opportunity to participate at the decision-making level in matters relating to her children’s schooling experience. “I’m doing it because I want them [her children] to be happy and supported at school and to value this experience and gain as much from it as possible – so ultimately it’s for them. And that impacts on me, of course, if they’re happy”. As part of a commitment to this role in supporting her children, Anna had also decided to reduce her days of part-time work in order to come to the school and help in the children’s classrooms. “Ultimately the real reason I’m doing it is for my children and of course everything else is peripheral”. Anna commented on this decision as an active taking on of the care-giving subjectivity in negotiating this
role with her husband and balancing the family’s financial and family commitments: “It took us some time to come to that understanding.”

Anna had initially been motivated to join her school council because it appeared to her that there was a small group of parents who were “there to push their own agendas” and “stir the pot”, and that the dominance of these parents was disadvantaging classes which were not represented on the council. However, Anna found that, although she was a professional, her presence on the council had been ineffectual as she met hostility and:

personal attacks that I just wasn’t prepared for. I found I couldn’t sleep after meetings and it was affecting my time with the children preparing for meetings and getting the strength to face the meetings.

Anna resigned her membership of the council after only one term (12 months) of office.

The dual subjectivities, as participant in the public interest and as a private citizen, caused interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict for some parents. Anna and Barbara reported conflicts with members of their councils who constructed themselves predominately as private citizens and who pursued, in their observations, decisions that would benefit their children’s classes more than the whole community, with these private subjectivities conflicting with Anna and Barbara’s constructions of school council membership as public citizens. Another parent, experiencing frustration at being positioned as a public rather than private citizen on the council, was reported by Anna as stating, “words to the effect that you can’t invite parents onto a council to be involved in their children’s schooling and then not let them raise concerns about their children’s classes”.

Michael experienced this conflict between subjectivities, relating an incident where a decision on the allocation of money, gained as a grant to support a particular child, caused him to have to rationalise its allocation for resources for the child’s exclusive use, when other resources could have benefited the child and the other children, including his child, in that class. Michael was ultimately able to take on a public
subjectivity in supporting the allocation. Michael expressed this resolution of these conflicting identity positions: “I have decided I am not there as [children’s names] dad. I am there to represent the school”.

Both Michael and Anna also experienced the conflict of the time away from their families required in serving public interests, while other parents were “able to be at home relaxing and reading to their children or helping them with their homework” (Michael). Anna described the effect of her public participation conflicting with her private role as a parent, in that it disrupted and “took time away from her main focus”, which was on her family.

**Challenges to social democratic constructions of school councils**

The dual formation of participation in school councils means that the construct offers different, at times contradictory, subject positions which parents are invited to take on as their own. The construction of parents as both public and private participants in schools, therefore, positions them with conflicting subjectivities in their roles as decision makers. Although some of the participants in this research could separate these roles in their performance of particular tasks as members of their school’s council, these differing subject positions were also formative of conflict between and within individual subjects. The national trial of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) identified a need for a clarification of these different “attitudes and beliefs about who is responsible for what in the raising of children” (Saulwick Muller, 2006, p. 15).

Although it could be argued that being a “well-rounded human being” with “respect for others” and having the “skills and knowledge to allow them to build a future economically and socially”, as indicated in the Muller and Saulwick (1998) research, represents socially democratic values in terms of the development of a more inclusive society, the VICCSO (Golby, 2005) research indicated a greater focus by parents on the private construction of this participation. That is not to say that public social-democratic attitudes and skills were not regarded as important by parents; however, they did not feature prominently in their immediate expectations of schools.
or in their school council membership. The addressing of disadvantage and the building of a capacity for equity and social justice did not feature directly in either the Muller and Saulwick (1998) expectations of schooling or in the VICCSO research on parental motivations in joining the school council in their children’s schools (Golby, 2005).

A range of barriers also prevent particular parents from participating in the decision-making processes of schools. Although this construction of parent participation is formed by social democratic discourses of public and private participation, there remain in Western societies a range of formal and informal barriers to democratic participation for women and those from minority socio-cultural backgrounds (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p. 35). Even when highly socially democratic processes are used in school councils, many barriers prevent the participation of some parents. The trial of the Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework noted that these:

barriers exist in the areas of communication, culture and personal feelings and have many origins – historical, institutional, attitudinal, emotional, social, economic, cultural, and practical. Parents have many competing demands – work commitments, meeting the needs of all their children, childcare difficulties and a lack of time generally.

(Saulwick Muller, 2006, p. 8)

These barriers affect families from particular and already disadvantaged backgrounds, including families from marginalised, minority and low socio-economic backgrounds, further excluding their participation in the school. School councils also restrict membership, with the result that empowered participation in either of these positionings, as private or public subject, is restricted to a small number of members of the council. Even where councils are highly consultative with their communities, the restricted number of positions of voting privilege limits true participation by the community.
Further, parents appear more likely to become involved for personal rather than public service. The Saulwick Muller (2006) evaluation of the trial of the draft Family-School Partnerships Framework concluded that “parents react best when they can see there is a connection between their involvement in the school and their own child’s education” (Saulwick Muller, 2006, p. 18). In the Victorian Council of School Organisation (VICCSO) research introduced earlier in this chapter, two of the top four reasons for becoming a member of a school council reported by parents included aspects of personal interest, “to be involved and informed” being the most common, and “for my children’s interests” being fourth of eleven reasons (Golby, 2005, p. 5).

This private construction of the parental identity in schools is further illustrated in parents’ constructions of the role of schools. In Australia, the Muller and Saulwick (1998) investigation of “what parents want from their children’s education” identified parents’ expectations of schools as more private in nature, with expectations that schools would:

- nurture their child with care;
- allow their child to develop as a well-rounded human being;
- imbue their child with and reinforce the values and culture of the home;
- instil in their child self-discipline and respect for others;
- teach their child how to learn; and
- give their child enough skills and knowledge to … build a future economically and socially (Muller & Saulwick, 1998, n.p.).

The large numbers of parents and other citizens in the school community also present logistical challenges to the social democratic, participatory construction of school councils. The availability of parents and school staff to meet, and the time requirements for all parents and interested citizens to participate in decisions, carry echoes of a problem that was addressed in ancient Athenian democracy through the formation of a smaller executive body to oversee the more regular and day-to-day administration of the society. Republics too recognised that their participatory designs were more suited to smaller communities (see Chapter 6). John Stuart Mill
recognised this limitation that “all cannot, in a community exceeding a single small town, participate personally in any but some very minor portions of the public business” (Mill, 1991/1861, p. 256). However, Mill also argued, “the only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate” (p. 256). Having discounted the possibility of a stable system of rule based on a “good despot” or “despotic monarchy” in ensuring the freedom of the individual and their participation in society, Mill argued that “the ideal type of a perfect government must be representative” (p. 350).

In Australian schools, fully participatory (socially democratic) partnerships are “a rare event” (McConchie, 2004, n.p.), with the participation of parents at the decision-making level “most commonly constructed in the democratic formation of school councils” (McConchie, 2004, n.p.; see also DEST, 2004a, p. 11), with views represented through “parent leaders” (DEST, 2004a, p. 11). That is, in the representative formation of democratic discourse.

**Representative democratic discourse**

Representative democracy offers a more efficient decision-making process than direct participatory models by involving a smaller number of participants “mediating the individual voices of the community” (Rizvi, 1994, p. 19). Early forms of representation of the community in decision making began in England and in Sweden in the middle ages

in the assemblies summoned by monarchs, or sometimes the nobles themselves, to deal with important matters of state: revenues, wars, royal succession, and the like. In the typical pattern, those summoned were drawn from and were intended to represent the various estates, with the representatives from each estate meeting separately.

(Dahl, 1989, p. 29)

Modern liberal representative democracies apply similar processes of representation, with “estates” being geographical (or sociological) constituencies. Rather than invited appointees, representatives are selected, after contesting for election, by a
majority of votes from their community. Importantly, in modern representative forms of governance, the source of power and accountability remains with the people (rather than the monarch or nobles). It is the people who decide their representative through regular election, and the people who grant powers to government through the constitution, itself a product of the people.

Representative forms of democratic governance are deployed in societies informed by both classical and welfare liberal discourses, and consequently participation of individual subjects in public and private spheres is constructed in different ways. The formations of liberty, equality and justice in representative democracies therefore differ, depending on the dominant form of liberalism. Early forms of representative democracy, for example, continued the practice of excluding particular people (women and those of specific socio-cultural backgrounds, for example) from participation as citizens. Representative mechanisms are also applied in modern republican societies, making modern democratic and modern republican societies similar in their articulations of liberty, equality and justice (Held, 2006).

**Representative constructions of parent participation**

Representative forms of democracy were a dominant discourse of devolution in Western nations during the 1980s (Rizvi, 1994). This discourse fitted with the “managerialist” discourse of the time (Lingard et al., 1999), which reconstituted the individual citizen (e.g., hospital patients, welfare recipients and parents in schools) as a client of these public services. Intersecting with the democratic principle that “when you are going to be affected, directly or indirectly, by a decision, you should stand in some relationship to the decision-making process” (Sarason, 1995, p. 7), the client became a stakeholder with democratic rights of participation. In representative democratic societies, this participation became constructed as the right of clients as a stakeholder group to have representation in the management of these services, introducing increased democratic governance of publicly owned service providers (Deem, 1994).
Representative constructions of school councils

Whereas social democratic discourses had formed the school council as enabling parents and citizens to participate in the formation of schooling in the public interest, representative democracy forms school councils as empowering stakeholder groups as advocates of their particular viewpoints in decision making. The New South Wales Inquiry into the Management of New South Wales Schools (Carrick, 1989; Scott, 1990) recognised this increased public demand for participation in the processes of school management, and recommended increased participation by parents in school decision-making processes. Michael reflected this increased awareness and “demand”:

Yes – and how you do it is interesting – I don’t think teachers as a whole are necessarily very comfortable with that [having parents involved in decision-making roles in schools] – I don’t know that the profession has come to terms with the fact that you have highly educated parents who are not prepared just to hand over their children and say good-bye, which is what my parents might have done. (Michael)

Tracey also saw her role as a member of the council in terms of seeking to ensure that the voices of all members of the school community were represented in the decision-making process. Tracey used her professional skills in facilitating focus groups amongst different groups within the school community, and in designing and analysing feedback surveys to identify the range of ideas and concerns in the school community that the school council might consider in prioritising its efforts. Barbara’s attempts to generate activities that built community might also be seen as representing the interests of others in the school community, encouraging a more inclusive school environment, potentially opening the school to better engage with the different interests of its families.

The representative construction of school councils, then, endeavours to include the needs, interests and views of all families in the school community through the inclusion of representatives selected by the community. These positions, however,
are not necessarily filled by members who are representative of the range of these interests across the parent population. That is, the members may not be drawn from families from minority or marginalised backgrounds, or may represent only one view of these families, or one public interest, that may not be shared across their community. Further, those who are elected may represent not the public but rather their private interests in participating in decisions that affect their children’s education. These challenges are represented in the findings of research, and were identified by some of the research participants as they negotiated their own role and their interactions with other members of their school council.

**Challenges to school councils as representative constructs**

Liberal theorist John Stuart Mill described two major challenges to the democratic outcomes of representative methods of governance:

- danger of a low grade of intelligence in the representative body, and in the popular opinion which controls it; and
- danger of class legislation on the part of the numerical majority, these being all composed of the same class.

(Mill, 1991/1861, p. 302)

These challenges highlight the need for representatives to be able to make informed, considered and forward-thinking decisions, and the need for true representation of the different needs and interests in society. That is, individual members need to be representative of the different communities of people in the population, to represent those public interests and to have the ability to govern. These three notions of representativeness, representation and ability, present particular challenges for parents as members of school councils.

Representativeness

The inclusion of representatives of different constituencies in decision-making bodies is designed to ensure that decisions are informed by the interests of all members of society, in a similar way to that proposed by Rousseau (1968/1762) in republican rule. Mill’s (1991/1861) second concern about the effectiveness of
representative forms of democracy related to the dominance of particular classes in
the membership of governing bodies, and the consequent marginalisation of minority
interests either by exclusion from membership of the council, or through a lack of
voting numbers to ensure representation. Although the process of election is intended
to provide representation through competitive merit-based appointment, these
processes are dependent on the representativeness of nominees, and the
demographics of those who vote in the election. Even when all citizens are obliged
by law to vote, majority cultures maintain an advantage. Where voting is voluntary,
as in school councils, the election process may be biased by the socio-cultural
characteristics of those who vote. That is, Mill identified the possibility of the
membership of such councils not being inclusive of and thus representative of all
populations within the community.

Concerns have been expressed that interest in participating in school councils, and in
the voting process, is limited (Golby, 2005) and restricted mainly to those from
middle-class backgrounds (Chan & Chui, 1997; Golby, 2005; McConchie, 2004;
Olivos, 2004; Vincent, 2001a, 2001b; Vincent & Martin, 2000). In a survey of 780
school council members across Victorian public schools, Golby (2005) concluded
that: “based on gender, age group and cultural background, we can’t always assume
that school councils are representative of their community” (p. 5). This restricted
participation, the result of socio-cultural and structural barriers, results in a restricted
participation like that in Athenian democracy, and justifies the concern expressed by
Mill (1991/1861, p. 302) that such structures risk being dominated by those from
“the same class.” Although class alone is insufficient in explaining the multivariate
and intersecting relations of disadvantage (Pakulski & Waters, 1996), its significant
advantages cannot be ignored when considering the differences in educational
outcomes of students (Ball & Vincent, 2001).

In a survey of 2004 school governors across the United Kingdom involving 2004
school governors, Ranson et al. (2005b) concluded that parent school governors were
overwhelmingly from “white, middle aged, middle class, middle income”
backgrounds (p. 360). Ranson et al. (2005b), found that of 626 parent members of
school board and governance councils in five UK schooling areas, 86% of parent volunteers were from middle-class professional or managerial classes. Ranson et al. (2005b) concluded, “school governance in many respects remains significantly unrepresentative of some of its significant parent constituencies” (p. 368).

One way to ensure the representation of a broader range of interests in society is to allocate membership through the achievement of a quota of votes, such as is used in Australia in electing members of the legislative body in government. By use of this quota the number of positions on these bodies may vary, depending on the voting pattern; however, the achievement of a quota ensures representation of interests that have a minimum level of support in the community. This system has not been applied in any of the school councils discussed in the literature.

A further method of ensuring that particular groups (such as minority groups or “stakeholder” groups) are represented on councils is to allocate specific numbers of positions to these groups. This has the added benefit of establishing the dominance of particular groups. School councils may have numerical or proportional minima or maxima for staff, parents, community members and students. For example, in Britain, parent representation is set as a minimum of one third of the available positions. In the Chicago school reforms a majority of places were required to be held by parents (Bryk, 1998). Positions may also be established in school councils to ensure the representation of different stakeholders in the community. However, these are often restricted to the broad categories of parent, teacher, student or community member rather than attempting to provide representation of all of the multiple stakeholder groups in the school’s community. In New South Wales public schools, for example, positions have been established for a community representative and a student representative (NSW DET, 1998). Allocating a small number of positions to particular groups, however, also risks tokenistic roles for these representatives, and homogenisation of the views of minority groups.

The ACER literature review identified the inclusion of “parents from all racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups” (McKeand, 2003, p. 5) as a challenge for parent
participation in decision making in schools. The review of UK school councils found that “school governance, in many respects remains significantly unrepresentative of some of its most significant parent constituencies” (Ranson, et al., 2005b, p. 357). The barriers to participation cited earlier in this chapter, are also relevant here. Further, Vincent (2001a), drawing on Giddens (1991), argued that due to their familiarity with official and professional systems, middle-class parents are more able to access and manipulate these systems to achieve their own goals. The Victorian Council of School Organisations review recommended that the “representativeness of councillors … should be analysed” (Golby, 2005, p. 10).

Although this dominance of middle-class parents in these positions is also an artefact of the more familiar discourses that dominate the development of these techniques of governance, there is also evidence of deliberate manipulation of these structures to gain control of schools’ educational agendas, thus forming school councils with restricted representation. Birenbaum-Carmeli’s (1999) case study, for example, illustrated how these processes can work against the aims of schools. Birenbaum-Carmeli documented the takeover of a school’s governance body, with powers over policy and curriculum, by a group of middle-class professional parents, and the resulting shift away from the addressing of issues of equity and social justice, in a school in Israel. The end result was a campaign to remove teachers who resisted this shift, and a reorganisation of the school to provide and resource a middle-class curriculum, where the needs of disadvantaged students were marginalised under rhetoric of “civil participation” and “social integration” (p. 63).

John Stuart Mill identified inclusive processes as critical to the formation of “true” rather than “false” formations of representative democracy (Mill, 1991/1861, p. 302). This distinction did not necessarily refer to the unabated pursuit of personal interest that led to Marsilius declaring the existence of “temperate” and “diseased” forms of democratically based systems of rule (Marsilius, 1324 cited in Held, 2006). Mill’s “false” forms of democracy included forms where minority views remained unrepresented through electoral processes that legitimised their exclusion through the dominance of the majority in selection of representatives, thus “blotting out the
smaller number altogether” (Mill, 1991/1861, p. 303). True forms of representative democracy, on the other hand, ensure that all “all interests or classes of any importance” (p. 323) are represented in the decision-making body, thus:

the whole people, or some numerous portion of them, exercise through deputies periodically elected by themselves the ultimate controlling power, which, in every constitution, must reside somewhere.

(Mill, 1991/1861, p. 97)

Lutz (1997, p. 133) similarly reported “concerned citizens groups” mobilising in American states to successfully derail curriculum reforms and initiatives that they objected to in schools. In another highly publicised case in Dover (Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District), over a period of time a single interest group captured dominance of the school council, radically altering the curriculum to introduce the particular theory of “intelligent design” into the school’s science programs. In the case of Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District, court action was required to reintroduce a more pluralistic curriculum (United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, Case No. 04cv2688). These cases illustrate not only how members of the school council may not be fully representative of the different interests within the community, but also how representatives may construct themselves not in the representative role, but rather as advocates of particular interests. This highlights the second challenge to representative forms of democratic governance, that of representation.

Representation

Representation involves individuals ensuring that the views of others, their constituencies or stakeholder group, are included in the decision-making process. Representation in democratic forms of governance has been constructed as involving the “representation of all … [rather than] … representation of the majority only” (Mill, 1991/1861, p. 302), in a similar capacity to individual civic virtue in earlier forms of governance. Further, this representation then positions members of
decision-making groups as advocates for the interests of the overall (public) good of all in the organisation.

A different interpretation of representation articulates this participation as being to represent the interests of the particular constituency the member has been appointed to represent. Although in this second interpretation the individual member is appointed to represent these more specific interests, they remain part of the larger community of representatives, who overall have been given the task of governing for the good of the whole. In either case of representation, the role of the individual is not conceptualised as being to pursue their own personal interests ahead of those of their constituency or the whole. However, as Foucault warned, “[personal] interest perpetually outflanks the scope of the act of self-imposed limitation which constitutes the subject of law” (Gordon, 1991, p. 21). The representative, the decision-making group, and the organisational structures, therefore, need to guard against this tendency.

When school councils are dominated by a restricted section of the community (middle-class or special interest group parents, for example), the interests of other constituencies, particularly of families from minority backgrounds, present a further challenge to the democratic outcomes of school councils. Birenbaum-Carmeli’s (1999) case study cited earlier offered insight into how these middle-class values can dominate decisions of the council, marginalising minority interests, and in that particular case sidelining the democratic aims of the school in addressing issues of disadvantage, equity and social justice. Vincent and Martin’s (2000) conducted case studies of two discussion-based parents’ forums at two secondary schools. They identified a small elite group of mostly middle-class women in these two schools who employed parent forums as a way of ensuring the inclusion of their particular personal interests in school decision making.

Where individuals are elected to governance positions in school councils, the competing public and private constructions of their participation also present challenges to the representation of the interests of the school community. Apelt and
Lingard (1993, p. 61), for example, pointed out that in decision making, parents are often primarily concerned about the immediate benefits for their own children rather than the broader fundamental value of an education for the common good. Where this occurs, representation of the interests of others in the community, or the organisation as a whole, is at risk of becoming secondary to this construction. This challenge was acknowledged in the draft Australian family schools partnerships framework ACER literature review, which suggested the need for the “provision of training to parent leaders to act as representatives for other families” (McKeand, 2003, p. 5).

Thus, representation of the interests of the community in school councils is challenged by the ways in which participants are selected or are prevented from participating. The construction of the individual as both private and public citizen also challenges this role in decision making. Representative democracy, therefore, presents challenges to notions of participatory decision-making processes. Referring to the representative form of democratic participation, Rousseau (1968/1762) wrote, “The English people believe itself to be free; it is gravely mistaken; it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament, as soon as the members are elected, the people is enslaved” (p. 141).

Expertise
The third challenge identified by Mill (1991/1861) is that of the expertise of representatives in meaningfully participating in the decision-making process. Without adequate training or experience in the areas of responsibility of participants, lack of ability, in terms of lack of professional knowledges and understandings, challenges all formations of parental participation in school decision-making processes. School councils have a range of responsibilities reflecting their different constructions, with some clearly limited to advisory roles in schools, such as in New South Wales (Boylan, 2005), whereas others have a range of empowered areas of responsibility, including administrative powers, policy and curriculum development, employment and management of staff, as in Victorian schools (Golby, 2005). In Britain, for example, the Education Reform Acts of 1986 and 1988 mandated the
formation of school councils (approximately one quarter of members being parent representatives) with responsibilities for “staffing, finance, curriculum, admissions, discipline, attendance, buildings and reporting to parents” (Blackledge, 1995, p. 310).

In some schooling systems, such as in fully self-managing schools, the school council is responsible for the school as an independent organisation, in a similar way to the board of a company. In schooling systems where membership of school councils is open to all parents, positions are open to all, regardless of their qualifications or expertise in these areas of professional skill. Ability, in terms of educational and organisational expertise, is required to meet school council responsibilities, and has been identified as a major challenge for parents in taking roles and for the success of school councils (Moore & Merritt, 2002; Golby, 2005; McKibben, 1995).

In addressing the need for capable leaders and decision makers, Mill (1991/1861) asserted that the process of election, based on public candidacy, was the best way of selecting members of government with the skills, abilities and public support to govern. This presupposes a number of candidates competing for governance positions. In schools, competitive candidacy for positions as members of school councils is not prevalent. The Family-Schools Partnerships Framework Issues paper identified that participation was usually restricted to “a small number of parents” (McConchie, 2004, p. 3). Research into Victorian school councils found that only 11% (86 of the 780 members) had been selected through election, with the remaining members appointed unopposed (54%) or by invitation (Golby, 2005, p. 5).

Parents have also reported difficulty in participation in decisions which require expertise and experience in a professional capacity. In the Australian study of school councils involving 780 members of school councils across Victoria, parents reported withdrawing from participation in decisions requiring such knowledge and expertise (Golby, 2005). Golby found that parents were, however, highly involved in managing the more traditional roles of “fundraising, buildings and grounds” (p. 9), or
else what Arnstein (1969) referred to as non-participation occurred, due to parents being assigned non-decision-making roles in substantive areas in relation to the school or their children’s education.

When school council members lack professional educational knowledge, a withdrawal from substantive participation has been identified, with a return to focus on traditional and familiar roles of fundraising, maintenance and event organisation (Golby, 2005; McKibben, 1995). Some time after John’s interview for this thesis, John reported his school’s council had disbanded, as it was “too much unnecessary duplication” with the work members did in the school’s Parents and Citizens organisation, many members of which were “the same parents doing the work on both”. The council had, as described above, reverted to the traditional fundraising and community organisation roles.

Reports have also indicated little overall parental interest in this form of participation. The New South Wales-based Vinson inquiry into the provision of public education (2002) reported little reference from parents to this form of participation, despite school councils being “one of the main structures intended to facilitate such participation” (Vinson, 2002, p. 132). These reports confirmed the New South Wales Department of Education observation of a “waning interest” in school councils as a form of parental participation (NSW DET, 2002). The low participation rate of parents means that appointments are less likely to be made through competitive election based on merit, with members standing unopposed or appointed by invitation to fill vacancies (see for example Golby, 2005). The participants in this research were either invited to join their school council or stood for the position unopposed. This reported lack of interest, and its reflection in the low number of appointments by election to school council membership, challenge assumptions of appointment of school council members by ability through electoral processes.

Training of school council members is suggested as one way of addressing the skills needs of parents for effective participation in school council membership (Moore &
Merritt, 2002; Golby, 2005; McKeand, 2003; McKibben, 1995). The availability of such training and the time required for those without backgrounds in the areas of knowledge required in the management of schools to develop the professional skills, combined with the ongoing appointment of new representatives to these positions, presents a major challenge to this proposal. This is particularly so where councils are responsible for managing the whole school. Anna, Barbara and Michael identified the need for training in the role as being needed for parents from non-teaching backgrounds, particularly in terms of the differences between the role of membership of the school’s official governance council and the role of a parent of a child in the school.

Although sufficient training could potentially address the need for particular skills and educational understanding for school council members, Minson (1993) also proposed that there is a need for participants’ development of the “ethical competence” required in school decision making (p. 202). This need was also identified by the participants in the research for this thesis, in their accounts of incidents the roles of parent and council member have conflicted in council meetings. Barbara reported stating at one meeting, in response to one of these discussions, “with respect, we can’t have some people saying things against other people or bringing children into this at this level.” Barbara also reported that this “wasn’t looked at well … probably I was upsetting the pecking order. I didn’t see that at the time.” Anna resigned from membership of her school council due to similar conflicts between parents around expressions of personal interest.

In schools, this lack of expertise, and the openness of school council membership to minimally contested nomination and election, leave schools open to factionalism (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Lutz, 1997), a problem also identified by Mill (1991/1861). Factionalism neither guarantees expertise (nor representativeness or representation) of the interests of the school community. Barbara also asserted that there was a need for management skills in terms of decision-making processes in organisations, and in appraising the work of the council each year and setting goals for the future action. Here Barbara drew on her professional knowledge of managing
small units in hospitals and in working with community groups in the field of community health. Barbara described the processes of consultation and reflection that were needed, but not evident, in the council in which she was a member.

Blackmore (1999a), in a study of South Australian schools which were self-managed by school councils, found that this lack of professional understandings also led to non-progressive decision making as parents relied on their experiences as children in schools to make decisions, or focused on the competitive image of the school. In the competitive choice-based market, school councils in Victorian schools were also reported as focusing on values of competitive self-maximisation, and moving away from the values of equity and social justice, as they attempted to maintain their marketability, and thus financial stability (Blackmore, 1999a, 1999c). In representative democracy the re-election process is proposed as a form of accountability to ensure competent and just leadership that truly represents the interests of the community.

Accountability
Accountability is the mechanism that is designed to address problems of representation and poor decision making. Along with rules and laws associated with the conduct of governors of an organisation, in representative democracy, accountability to the, public or to members’ constituencies is facilitated through reappointment or non-reappointment by regular election. This accountability, however, is directed towards achieving the majority support of the community, rather than to the achievement of a set of values.

In the government of large organisations such as states or nations, loss of position can have significance, as careers and livelihoods are invested in these appointments. In schools, where election is often unopposed, and where loss of position has far less significant effect, this form of accountability is less effective. Gains achieved from the advocacy of personal interest may well outweigh the risk of not being returned to office. Further, this form of accountability, where the school community selects its own representatives in a free and open election, does not move to address the lack of
representation of minority groups, or the consequent capture of decisions by dominant social groups in the school, the challenge indicated by Mill (1991/1861).

The potential (and reality) of the non-representativeness of school council members, and the limited accountability for the representation by these members of the interests of the needs of other groups in the school community, result in reduced input into decisions of the school by non-dominant groups and by non-member individual parents in the community. This lack of real empowerment for parents to have a true say in the decisions of school councils challenges the representative construction of school councils in the achievement of equitable and socially just participation of the school community in decision making, in that the freedoms and equality of all members of the school community are not supported by the construct of school councils.

With parents constructed as both public and private decision makers, and school councils being the only formal structure for parental participation in the decision-making processes of schools, accountability is central to the successful achievement of the aims of school councils in maintaining the role of schools in the betterment of the individual and the betterment of the society in equitable and socially just outcomes (McKibben & Cooper, 1995). McKibben (1995) found that this accountability was present for staff in their professional roles and as employees of the State, but there was “a lack of similar responsibilities for parents” (n.p.). Birenbaum-Carmeli (1999), recognising that parents are more likely to become involved to support their own children’s education, identified accountability in the processes of school governance and school councils as important in maintaining the focus of schools on the public good. The need to address issues of accountability in the formation of family-school partnerships has been recognised as a continuing major and important challenge (Saulwick Muller, 2006, p. 23).

Conclusion
According to Dewey, schools are chartered with the responsibility of promoting democratic ideals with the aim of improving the lives of all in society. School
councils, however, offer limited opportunities for the participation of parents in the school community. Although a small number of parents (and other members) may hold delegated powers on behalf of the organisation and its members, the aims of enabling families to form partnerships with schools and participate in the decisions that affect their children are not facilitated through the participatory or representative construction of school councils as they currently exist in schools. This chapter has explored the participatory (social) and representative democratic constructions of school councils. The constructions of parental participation in school councils have been identified and considered. In its critical considerations, this chapter has also identified how democratic principles are not always served by those structures we have come to accept as representing democracy.

The representative democratic construction of the individual as a client and stakeholder in the 1980s also introduced other corporate principles into the management of public organisations. This was particularly strong in education, with the repositioning of learning and knowledge as a private and competitive good. Representative democratic discourse therefore lay as a precursor to a construction of parent participation that focused on managerial rather than collaborative partnership, and a new construction of school councils as a form of governance.

Based in classical liberal discourse and rearticulated in the modern global economy as neoliberalism or advanced liberalism (Rose, 1996), market-based democracy has had a significant influence in the modern construction of society and in the construction of parent participation and school councils in recent decades. As a currently dominant discourse in society, which is strongly evident in recent constructions of family-school partnerships, advanced (neo)liberal discourse and its construction of parental participation in school councils, are explored in depth in the next chapter.
Chapter 8

Advanced liberal constructions of parent participation in school councils

We have entered a period of reaction in education. Our educational institutions are seen as failures ... Return to a “common culture”, make schools more efficient, make them more responsive to the private sector: do this and our problems will be solved ... “too much democracy” – culturally and politically – is seen as one of the major causes of “our” declining economy and culture.

(Apple, 2000, p. 57-58)

Introduction

Informed by classical liberal constructions of freedom, advanced liberalism (Rose, 1996) applies advanced liberal economic rationalist principles of free market economics in the management of society, in the belief that these arrangements will “enhance the quality, effectiveness and responsiveness” (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000, p. 139) of processes of production and supply, ultimately meeting all needs in society (Bourdieu, 1998; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997). Advanced liberalism combines these deregulatory principles of market-based democracy with the re-regulation (Ball, 2003) of authoritarian managerialism (Apple, 2001) that centralises power with government while devolving responsibility to individual actors in the governance of society (Apple, 2001; Ball, 2003). In managing public sector organisations, these techniques of governance, or governmentality (Foucault, 2000/1978) apply private sector managerial techniques and technologies in a process referred to as new managerialism (Apple, 2001; Clarke & Newman, 1997; Marginson, 1997a, 1997b; Peters, Marshall & Fitzsimons, 2000; Rose, 1996). Advanced liberalism has become a dominant discourse in the management of contemporary Western society, and has influenced educational reforms across the 1990s and 2000s (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000; Apple, 2001, 2005, 2006; Bourdieu, 1998; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). Parental participation in
school decision making, and the formation of school councils, as an advanced liberal construct, become part of these deregulatory (market) and re-regulatory (new managerialist) technologies of governmentality, introducing processes of accountability to the market and centralised government in public sector organisations, with the aim of increasing the efficacy of public services in meeting the needs of the community and society. This chapter explores the advanced liberal construction of parent participation in school councils both as an historical construction and in the contemporary experiences of the research participants.

The first part of this chapter introduces advanced (or neo) liberalism, elaborating on its constructions of society and the individual, particularly in relation to education. This is followed by a more specific discussion of the advanced liberal construction of parent participation in their children’s education, and its formation in school councils. Like the previous chapter, the final section of the chapter draws on policy and research literature and the experiences of the research participants in relation to this particular discursive formation of parent participation, in reintroducing the discourses of social justice and equity, that is, in its critical work of reopening the field to the voices of contestation and innovation.

Although it is apparent from policy and political documentation that advanced liberal thought is a dominant discourse in current constructions of school councils, the participants in this research mostly experienced it as an alternative discourse to their own subjectivities as school council members. For this reason, in applying its critical work, this chapter relies more heavily on the reintroduction of current research literature (the voices of academia), than on the voices of the participants, though their construction as advanced liberal subjects is also included in these discussions. In doing so, this chapter continues the Foucaultian processes of this thesis, of refusal to accept what presents as natural, of curiosity as a challenge to what is, and of innovation in opening the possibilities for reconceptualisation in the construction of parent involvement and participation in their children’s schooling.
The rise of advanced liberalism

The relatively recent dominance of advanced liberal discourse in Western democracies can be primarily traced to changes in the discursive environment during the financial downturns of the 1970s and 1980s, when the prosperity of Western countries was threatened by high interest rates, high unemployment, reduced company profits, and recession (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Lingard, 2000a). These pressures opened the then dominant social democratic and welfare-liberal approaches and regulatory and social democratic forms of governance (Rizvi, 1994) to contestation, with market-based advanced liberalism rearticulating these constructs as the causes of inefficiencies, distortions and failure in the economy (Beckman & Cooper, 2004; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). In the context of increasing international competition in the globalising markets of the late 20th century, the improvements promised by advanced liberal theory became essential to national prosperity (Lingard, 2000a; Whitty, 2003). With the perceived failure of social democratic notions, the truths of advanced liberalism became “instantiated as the only possible option” to ensure economic viability in the emerging new world order (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p. 2).

Instead of government welfare and protections (such as in industrial relations, tariff controls, public services and welfare provisions), advanced liberalism advocates free market economics with reduced government intervention through the privatisation of public services, decentralisation of management, minimal welfare and free markets, in order to promote productivity, efficiency and quality improvement in the economy, and allowing the natural balance of the market to address both the economic and social needs of the population (Apple, 2001). This order is maintained by managerialist technologies through which organisations and professionals become responsible for the implementation and achievement of (central) governmental aims. Thus, advanced liberalism represents the application of advanced liberal market forces within a more controlled policy context.

In Western nations these reforms of the economy and government service provision were predominantly introduced in waves during the late 1980s, 1990s and 2000s,
particularly in the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada and Australia (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000). Thus, utilities and services previously held under public ownership and managed by government were privatised, and public support services (such as welfare, health and education) were devolved, deregulated and opened to the forces of the market through the introduction of competition.

In Australia these reforms of the economy have continued in manifestations such as the (previous Federal Government’s) Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Bill 2005, which reduced industrial regulations covering the workforce, and current moves in New South Wales to privatise the state owned electricity supply (Steward, 2008). In schools, market forces have been introduced through deregulation in school of enrolment (de-zoning) (for example the New South Wales State Government (1990) New South Wales Education Reform Act, 1990, part 6, section 34), and the facilitation of increased private sector provision of schooling (see for example, the reforms of funding in Australian schools under the then Federal Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs (Kemp, 2000)).

The pressures of economic downturn, globalisation and the increasing uncertainties of postmodernity have also been associated with a reassertion of the conservative discourses of the new right (Apple, 1993, 2001; Apple & Oliver, 1996). These discourses of conservative restoration (Apple, 1997) seek a return to more secure (and predictable) times, focusing on a return to traditional values such as hard work, self-reliance and self-responsibility, and other conservative values associated with these earlier better times (Apple, 2006). In schools, this desire for a return to traditional values has been evident in a renewed nationalism, such as in the reintroduction in Australia of national curriculum guidelines including the Statements of learning for civics and citizenship (Curriculum Corporation, 2006) and National framework for values education in Australian schools (DEST, 2005a). The politics of conservative restoration are evident in the (previous Federal Liberal Government’s) mandatory installation of flagpoles in Australian schools (Commonwealth Government of Australia, Schools Assistance (Learning Together through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004 as amended (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006), and the
(funding-linked) reintroduction of traditional forms of student reports (Nelson, 2004c). Similarly, in the United States, Federal funding for the Reading First program was linked to the introduction of a phonics-based approach to literacy instruction (Strauss, 2002).

This conservative discourse of the new right (Apple, 2006), along with advanced liberalism’s free market and new managerial approaches to the formation and governance of society, has formed a “hegemonic bloc” (Apple, 2001, p. 63) that “has built an intellectual infrastructure that now almost completely dominates public policy debates” (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p. 8) in modern Western democratic nations. Like all constructs, advanced liberal discourse does not represent “a coherent and elaborated political rationality” (Rose, 1989, p. 3), but instead represents the momentary crystallisation of historical and contextual influences (descent) in the specific site of its formation (emergence). The precise configurations of these discursive constructions are dependent on these influences; thus, differing or vernacular versions (Lingard, 2000a) of constructs come into being in different localities. It is for these reasons that the constructions, processes, modes of appointment, areas of responsibility and the status of school councils differ from site to site. Advanced liberalism does, however, have particular truths (power/knowledges) which it speaks into differing spaces, forming constructs around these principles, and rearticulating existing knowledges within these settings.

**The principles of advanced liberalism**

As in Hobbes’ classical liberal understanding of our being, in advanced liberalism the individual is “presumed to do all things in order to his own benefit” (Hobbes, 1968, p. 213), in “the pursuit of the gratification of … desires and appetites … by the faculty of reason” (Olssen, Codd & O’Neil, 2004, p. 75), that is, by the principle of rational self interest (Smith, 1970/1776). The combined expressions of this rational self-interest creates demand for particular goods and services, with potential suppliers responding to this consumer demand in their endeavours to generate profit. These processes of demand and supply promote a balance, in that where there is
sufficient (and profitable) demand, the market will respond, meeting these needs and desires.

Where there is only one supplier, there is little incentive for product or price structure improvement, and thus little incentive to improve processes of production, beyond attempts to produce higher profits. However, where producers must compete with other suppliers, more efficient processes of production and higher quality products are required to maintain competitiveness in the market and maintain viability. Consumer choice between competing options becomes the driver for improvement. This mechanism of accountability is referred to as the invisible hand of the market (Smith, 1970/1776) and provides objective feedback which drives producers to achieve the most efficient processes of production and use of resources. These market economic concepts are applied in advanced liberalism to the production processes in meeting material and social needs in society.

Advanced liberalism proposes that if allowed to permeate across all aspects of society, the hidden hand of the market will lead to a balance where all needs and interests are addressed, and resulting in a “better quality of life for all citizens” (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p. 9). These forces in the market, the combined effect of individual choices by citizens, therefore provide an effective and precise form of accountability, rewarding efficient producers and punishing those less effective. As Bourdieu (1998, n.p.) explained:

As the dominant discourse would have it, the economic world is a pure and perfect order, implacably unrolling the logic of its predictable consequences, and prompt to repress all violations by the sanctions that it inflicts.

(Bourdieu, 1998, n.p.)

Consequently, the individual choice-making, self-maximising subject is the basic unit that drives society towards the satisfaction of the needs and desires of its citizens through their self-centred pursuit of their own individual interests. Self-focus and self-interested action thus becomes valorised (Ailwood, 2006) as foundational to the
functioning of the market, producing an efficient and productive society in which all needs can be met. Rather than the civic virtue of other forms of liberal democratic discourses, advanced liberalism reconstitutes citizenship in the Virtue of selfishness (Rand, 1964), rearticulating the central democratic principles of liberty, equality and justice.

Liberty
Advanced liberalism’s individualistic focus asserts the liberty of citizens, emphasising their freedom to pursue their own needs and interests by choosing between options in the market (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. 15), and their freedom from dependence on (and being bound by) the decisions of others (beyond legal restrictions protecting the rights of all citizens). Individuals have the freedom to choose for themselves the best options in meeting their needs and interests. The market too is free of government regulation and intervention such as subsidies and welfare support, interventions which are articulated as distorting natural balances, creating inefficiencies within markets and society.

This freedom of individual consumers and producers, and the free market, is represented in the notion of the level playing field, where all compete on their own merits, without the biases of governmental support or tariff protections. In advanced liberalism, the notions of equality and justice, or equity, are also rearticulated in terms of this free-market level playing field, in order to preserve, and in consistency with this particular notion of liberty.

Equality
The notion of a level playing field represents a rearticulation of notions of equality, with the market making choices equally available to all. Equality is based on the equal availability of options (freedom of choice) with the individual responsible for their choices from these provisions of the market. Alternative notions of equality as equity, that are focused on the individual’s opportunity and ability to access these options, or accessibility, are no longer possible as they may rely on government intervention and support (for example, through welfare provision).
Justice

The proposition of a pure and perfect order (Bourdieu, 1998), providing a better quality of life for all citizens (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p. 9) and achieved through the work of the invisible hand of the market (Smith, 1970/1776), makes a virtue of self-maximising, self-focused effort: “the collective good [can] be realised properly in most cases only by private individuals acting in competitive isolation and pursuing their sectoral aims with minimal state interference” (Held, 2006, p. 201). Justice, therefore, cannot be achieved by the introduction of distortionary and inefficient welfare protections, but only through the (self-focused) actions of (self-maximising) individuals in the free and competitive market. Critics point out that advanced liberalism has continued to search for this idealised balanced market, where efficiency and effectiveness produce an abundance of provision, “no matter how much social damage this causes” (Martinez & Garcia, 2000, n.p.).

The diverse needs and interests of various members of the community are, in advanced liberal terms, addressed by differentiation in the market, where suppliers meet niche demand in their efforts to generate profit. In education, the differing needs of students and their families create a demand for differing types of educational provision. By freeing the market, schools that address the particular needs and interests of these diverse groups become more profitable, attracting a greater portion of the market. Thus, in advanced liberal thought, there is an increased possibility of schools addressing the needs of these markets, including particular needs in local communities. In Australia, for example, Karmel (1973) proposed that the localisation of decision making to individual schools would allow schools to better address equity issues in their locality. South Australia’s Partnerships 21 envisaged that parental (market) participation would “maximize the local” and “improve fairness and equity” (South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment, 1999, p. 20).

The current Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) similarly proposed that the inclusion of families in school decision-making processes “ensures that parents’ values and interests are heard and respected” (DEST, 2004a, p.
8). Thus, markets are conceptualised as addressing diversity and equity by responding to local demands.

**Public support in advanced liberal societies**

In a new world order where governmental assistance is minimised, freedom becomes an individual right and personal obligation, rather than a community responsibility. Thus, when governments do provide services, such as in health and education, these provisions are constructed as a private rather than public good. In advanced liberal society, these organisations are opened to the forces of the market in order to produce the efficient and effective supply of these provisions. Individuals become responsible for their access to these services (for example for ensuring adequate health insurance or enrolling their children in a suitable school), with private providers competing for consumer business. Government funding, if available, is linked to the achievement of service performance benchmarks and to the patronage of the market.

Advanced liberalism thus changes our role from the democratic participation of social democratic discourse, represented by Arnstein as citizen power through partnership, to an individualistic form of Arnstein’s (1969) citizen control based on market activity through self-maximising individual choice. This formation of citizen power (Arnstein, 1969) moves participation beyond Arnstein’s citizen control, where citizens “obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power” (p. 18), to a completely isolated, individualistic self-focused choice making. With its emphasis on competition and self-maximisation, the classical liberal participation of citizens in the formation of their society, conceptualised in terms of civic virtue, is rearticulated in a “recharged and militant liberalism” (Dean, 1999, p. 41), or “democracy with the gloves off” (McLaren & Farahmanpur, 2000, p. 26).

Advanced liberalism thus rearticulates the notions of liberty, equality and justice in market-based terms, emphasising the role of demand and supply and the individual’s assertion of their own interests in ensuring that their needs and desires are addressed. With the forces of the market positioned as “pure and perfect” (Bourdieu, 1998, n.p.) it becomes the role and responsibility of individuals to actively pursue their own
interests in order to form the markets that drive our prosperity and ultimately address
the welfare of all citizens. Our subjectivity is thus formed in the self-maximising
expression of choice in the processes of production and consumption in the market.

**Participation of parents as advanced liberal subjects**

With the focus on the individual rather than the collective, our subjectivities are
(re)constructed in ways that produce and are produced by these market articulations
of our being. The advanced liberal subject is therefore characterised by
“responsibility, initiative, competitiveness and risk-taking, and industrious effort”
(Dean, 1999, p. 162), a “self maximising entrepreneur” (Rose, 1996, 1999). The
formation of the subject as an entrepreneurial self removes the bonds of civic virtue
and the common interest as being central to our survival, instead forming the
assertive pursuit of self-interest as an expression of human integrity.

In the formation of our subjectivities, Foucault identified four technologies or
“techniques that human beings use to understand themselves” (Foucault, 1988e, p.
18): “(1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or
manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs,
meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the
conduct of others and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivising of
the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their
own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own
bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves
in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or
immortality”. The problematic of governance or governmentality, being “a form of
activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons”
(Gordon, 1991, p. 2) was located by Foucault (1988e) at the intersection between the
technologies of domination of others and the technologies of governing the self. This
is achieved by the application of “technologies imbued with aspirations for the
shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting
certain undesired ones” (Rose, 1999, p. 52). In governance or governmentality, the
freedom of individuals becomes “a resource for, and not merely a hindrance to government” (Barry, Osborne & Rose, 1996, p. 8).

**Advanced liberal governmentality**

Governmentality thus involves “understanding and acting upon human beings as subjects of freedom” (Rose, 1999, p. 84) in order to achieve government policy goals (Apple, 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). In governing public sector organisations, advanced liberal technologies involve the introduction of market-based commercial processes of private-sector management into the provision of public services (Beckmann & Cooper, 2004) with the aim of gaining the same improvements in economy, efficiency and effectiveness that result in the commercial sector and arising from market competition (Beckmann & Cooper, 2004).

To achieve this management in public sector organisations such as schools, advanced liberal governments combine highly centralised governmental power in policy setting (technologies of domination), particularly “surrounding issues of knowledge, values and the body” (Apple, 2000, p. 67), with highly dispersed responsibility for self-management (technologies of self) by individuals in achieving these goals (Peters, Marshall & Fitzsimons, 2000), in an advanced form of Kickert’s (1991) notion of steering at a distance, and referred to as new managerialism (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Peters, Marshall & Fitzsimons, 2000). New managerialism aims for “the smooth and efficient implementation of aims set elsewhere within constraints also set elsewhere” (Gewirtz et al., 1995) and represents a “cultural transformation that shifts professional identities in order to make them more responsive to client demand and external judgement” (Apple, 2001, p. 83). Organisations and individuals become responsible and accountable to the market through the introduction of competition, and to centralised government through policy and funding requirements. In this way, governments steer schools and other public service organisations, while remaining detached from the work of the organisation.
Centralised power

Centralised power is maintained in advanced liberal governmentality through the retention of policy control, with funding of public sector services linked to the implementation and achievement of government aims monitored through mechanisms of performance measurement and reporting, linking the achievement of policy goals and requirements to certification and, where applicable, government funding. In Australia, the Federal Government’s Schools Assistance (Learning Together through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004, for example, made it “a condition of Australian Government general funding to schools … that all schools have a functioning flagpole flying the Australian flag” (Commonwealth of Australia (2006). To support this goal, the Federal Government offered “up to $1,500 per school to install, replace or repair a flagpole” (DEST, 2004b).

In another example, the Australian Federal Government, declaring it was “time for transparency in school performance” (Nelson, 2004c, n.p.), also made it “a condition of funding that national numeracy and literacy tests are reported to parents against national benchmarks” (Howard & Nelson, 2004, n.p.), and that schools agree to implement comparative student reports, requiring that school performance is clearly made available to all parents and that school reports are written in plain language — A, B, C, D and E — and that we are also told where our children come in the class compared to other children.

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2006, n.p.)

Australia’s new (Rudd Labor) (2007-present) government has similarly indicated its willingness to withhold Disadvantaged schools funding from states that do not provide the Federal Government with detailed results of (state implemented) national basic skills testing (Peating, 2008).

The intention of the Australian (Howard) government’s introduction of traditional comparative style reports was “so that parents can make informed decisions and poorly performing schools can be identified and targeted for action” (Nelson, 2004d, n.p.). By establishing the criteria and form of reporting, governments establish the
availability of particular types of information, thus engaging the market in making its judgements based on these (centrally established) outcomes. With schools being judged by the market on these terms, advanced liberal governments effectively harness the forces of the market in support of these policy objectives, and thus maintain centralised control of the educational agenda. That is, in order that schools become more accountable to both the market (parents) and to centralised government. This standardised and comparison-based reporting thus allows governments to maintain control of schools and their expected performance through their linking of funding and other action. Non-performing (or non-compliant) schools are “targeted for action” (Nelson, 2004d, n.p.) in Australia, taken over by an administrator in Chicago schools, or have their operations opened to competitive tender for “the replacement of failing schools, for the first time providing a straightforward route to bring new providers into the system” (Blair, 2005, p. 10) in the United Kingdom.

**Devolved responsibility**

Advanced liberal governments establish the what of schooling, while devolving responsibility for the achievement of the specified goals to the organisation. The focus is therefore directed towards the measurable outcomes of the organisation rather than on the inputs. Thus, organisations are required to speak themselves into being in relation to these centrally prescribed measures. In schools in Australia, the Howard government proposed that such measures would include “academic outcomes and improvements on the previous years, what vocational education training options are offered to students, school leaver destinations, the professional qualifications and professional development undertaken by teacher, absentee rates” (Nelson, 2004d, n.p.) as well as staff retention and absentee rates (Nelson, 2004c).

These measures of performance, mandated in their form and derivation against governmentally imposed policy benchmarks, are also applied in the market in providing measures of the quality of the organisation in its field. With reputation and viability attached, these particular types of performance thus become formative of the work of the organisation, introducing the processes of performativity, a further
technology of advanced liberal new managerialism. In schools, these measures attached to viability become formative of the foci in the school, guiding the work of school staff and managers in the provision (and management) of schooling.

**Performativity and self-surveillance**

The notion of performativity (Ball, 2000, 2003) refers to the ways in which we speak ourselves into being through the processes and measures of performance required in the new managerialism of advanced liberal governmentality. Performativity therefore represents “a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)” (Ball, 2003, p. 216), “whereby our being is formed through these repeated physical and epistemological acts” (Butler, 1993, p. 2). These “performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement” (Ball, 2003, p. 216). These processes of performativity in schools therefore ensure that schools and the students they produce are oriented towards the needs of the advanced liberal economy (Ball, 1998). Performativity thus represents “that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler, 1993, p. 2).

With measures of performance of public sector organisations such as schools being observed by both government (through reporting of achievement of policy goals) and the market (though the publication of comparative results), these organisations are under constant surveillance in a panopticon-like gaze (Foucault, 1977). This constant surveillance induces self-surveillance (see Chapter 3), whereby those under constant surveillance ensure that they at all times meet the expected behaviours. The technologies of centralised control and devolved responsibility are therefore formative of the nature of schooling and are formative of “work practices, organisational methods and social relationships … [and] … also for values of schooling” (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000, p. 253).
Advanced liberal constructions of education

When individuals respond to market needs rather than political idealism, preparation for democratic participation in the formative processes of society becomes irrelevant (Apple, 2006; Barton, 1998; Lingard & Blackmore, 1997; Marginson, 1997a, 1997b; Morrow, Blackburn & Gill, 1998). Instead, education, like other social practices in advanced liberal society, is reduced to “outcome-oriented technical procedures” (Grundy, 1992, p. 157) focused on maintaining a skilled workforce and in supporting flexibility and innovation in the market. Education then becomes a producer of human capital for the economy (Marginson, 1997a, 1997b; Morrow, Blackburn & Gill, 1998), and is thus conceptualised as part of economic policy as well as a personal (private or positional) good for enhanced self-maximisation. For example, in introducing the Howard government’s policy Skilling Australia: New directions for vocational education and training (DEST, 2005b), Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, Science and Training emphasised the role of education for Australia “to compete even more successfully in the global market” (DEST, 2005b, p. 4). This repositioning of education as being primarily an economic good reconstitutes education across the three message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Bernstein, 1971), as well as its processes of production (management), in order to develop high levels of competency in the specific skills required for successful competition and self-maximisation in society.

Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in advanced liberal education

With the purposes of education rearticulated in utilitarian and economic terms, education becomes focused on the building (and provision to the market) of individuals who have highly developed skills for exchange in the competitive market place (Hultqvist, 2004). The curriculum thus becomes focused on skills-based content and oriented towards methods that produce measurable and comparable data, such as included in national basic skills testing and benchmark testing. Assessment too becomes focused on summative processes in order to achieve these benchmark performances. This reconceptualisation of educational development reorients the processes of teaching (pedagogy) so that they are directed towards achievement of higher scores in the types of content and skills on which such comparisons are made.
Teaching is therefore altered from being a profession with “people who labour for the common good” (Apple, 2001, p. 71) to a process of knowledge and skills transfer, and a technical process aimed at providing capital for individual advantage as self-maximisers in the market of advanced liberal society. Thus, “in standardised reform teachers are treated and developed not as high-skill, high capacity knowledge workers, but as compliant and closely monitored producers of standardised performances” (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p. 16). The relationships between schools in advanced liberal society are also altered from notions of a combined and collaborative effort to improve individuals and their society in the Dewian sense, to one of competition between alternatives, and schools become individual enterprises where self-maximisation takes a presence (Angus, 1996; McInerney, 2002).

Systems of management are therefore required and formed to maintain the performances required by this advanced liberal articulation of education. Advanced liberalism thus applies market economic principles with the governance structures of centralised power (with government), devolved responsibility (to local actors), and the techniques of new managerialism drawn from the private sector. In Australia and other Western nations, these techniques have produced forms of site-based management, with local school councils managing individual school sites (Davis, Weller & Lewis, 1989; Porter, Lingard & Knight, 1993; Lingard, 2000a, 2000b). This rearticulation of the goals, content and processes of education is “reflected in the structures of its production and delivery” (Lingard, 2000a, p. 84), that is, in its content, pedagogies and management. School councils, as advanced liberal constructs, form part of this site-based management, offering the opportunity for parents and the school community to participate in the production processes of education in their children’s schools.

New managerialism and parent participation in school councils
Advanced liberal new managerialism also constructs school councils as part of, or responsible for, the management of the organisation, in similar ways to those of managers in private industry, where management is made responsible to business owners or boards. In self-managing schools, council members become partially or
fully responsible for ensuring the school’s achievements in terms of government policy (and funding) requirements and in ensuring the position of the school in the market place (in order to maintain and attract enrolments). As members of the school council, parents are thus positioned in roles of accountability for the performance of the school (to government) and to the market through the election process. The degree of responsibility (and power) attached to school councils differs depending on their specific formation (as discussed in Chapter 1). However, in advanced liberal constructions of school councils, the intention is, according to England’s Prime Minister Tony Blair, to “enabl[e] every school to become self-managing” (Blair, 2005, p. 23) as an “independent non-fee paying state school” (p. 6).

In fully self-managing schools, the school council becomes part of the governance of the organisation, with contractual powers and other roles and responsibilities. For example, in Victorian schools, the school council has a range of contractual powers in relation to the cleaning and maintenance of the school, food services, employment of ancillary staff, hire of school premises, and provision of child care and after school activities. School councils’ other responsibilities include the employment and appraisal of the principal, “determining the general educational policy, goals and priorities of the school”, “developing the school charter”, monitoring and evaluating the performance of the school against these goals, budgeting, setting student code of conduct and uniforms policies, and “generally stimulating interest in the school” (Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, 2001, p. 19). Many of these roles are managerial in nature, administrative rather than forming a deep engagement of the community with the school or in their own children’s education. In self-managing Victorian state schools, the Victorian Council of School Organisation’s research project identified Victorian parent school council members as constructing their roles “in terms of financial oversight, school promotion and fundraising and use of resources” (Golby, 2005, p. 10), that is, in managerial and compliance terms.
New managerialism in this research

In this current research Mark identified his construction in managerialist terms in seeing the school as “a business, and has to be run like a business on business lines”. Michael also felt that the administration of schools was not an area where “teachers can lay any claims to expertise” and that parents could offer these skills. John’s positioning as a member of the school councils was that he was “there to sort the accountability stuff out”, seeing school performance on a range of academic and social issues as needing to be addressed. School councils offered a position from which some of these issues might be raised with “more clout than just another complaining parent”. The contestations experienced by Anna and the parent referred to by Michael (cited earlier) also illustrate the construction of other council members in managerialist terms. In Karen’s school, the appointment of a new principal led to the refocusing of the council on policy documentation, with less emphasis on community building, also repositioning the council in more managerialist terms.

When school income and resources are dependent on the management of the school’s performance against particular (centrally prescribed) outcomes benchmarks and against the performance of other schools, as well as on other aspects related to the school’s public image, the focus of school councils can become concentrated on the administrative requirements and presentation of the school in the market. This image seeks to position the school as a viable choice in the education market as a producer of high quality outcomes in the areas of market demand.

These pressures to remain competitive in terms of image in the market have been identified as causing a reallocation of effort and resources within schools towards managing performance and image, with equity, diversity and catering to the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with disabilities “not as marketable as academic excellence and exclusiveness … and promoting equity as core business was downright dangerous and put a school’s survival at risk” (Blackmore, 2000, p. 22). Consequently, schools have been reported as diverting school council attention and school resources to issues of image building, marketing and attracting enrolments, and away from policy, curriculum, and learning support. In their efforts
to build image and marketability, schools have diverted resources “away from pupils in most need of extra attention” (Plewis, 2000, p. 91; also Apple, 1999). Schools also seek to attract students who are likely to perform well, resulting in a shift “from student needs to student performance and from what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school” (Apple, 1999, p. 5). As Apple noted, in a competitive market, “‘special needs’ students are not only expensive, but deflate test scores on those all important league tables” (p. 5). In Australia, Blackmore et al. (1996, n.p.) reported that rather than catering for diverse student needs and interests, in “self-managing schools, there was a shift away from social justice, tolerance, empathy, compassion, inclusiveness and respect for difference towards philosophies of individualism, competition, and self-maximising behaviour”. Gewirtz et al. (1995) also noted this shift away from addressing equity in the provision of schooling towards self-maximisation in self-managing schools in the United Kingdom.

It has been suggested that this diversion of school councils towards issues of image and marketability is in part due to the lack of familiarity of non-educational professional members with the complexities of education as a profession (Edwards & Knight, 1997; McKibben, 1995) in areas of educational (policy and curriculum) management (Peters, Marshall & Fitzsimons, 2000). This lack of educational expertise also raises contestations from the discourse of expertise and professionalism, which questions the management of organisations by untrained lay people.

**School councils as advanced liberal constructs**

Gold, Simon and Brown (2002, p. 31) wrote that “the unique role of community organising in education reform is to build community capacity and link that to school improvement through public accountability”. The Australian draft Family-School Partnerships Framework (DEST, 2004a) advocated the inclusion of “stakeholders” in the management processes of schools to assist in “the development of educational policies that are consistent with parental and community thinking” (McConchie, 2004, p. 12). School councils thus become a mechanism (technology) to “make[s] the school more accountable to its community” (DEST, 2004a, p. 8).
Darling-Hammond (1989) identified five main processes of accountability in the management of public organisations in modern democratic societies:

- **political accountability** – which applies the processes of representative democracy in appointing and appraising leaders;
- **legal accountability** – where legislation and legal processes ensure that leaders fulfil their roles;
- **bureaucratic accountability** – referring to the hierarchical processes of management whereby organisations manage their affairs through internal chains of accountability;
- **professional accountability** – where professional bodies are delegated responsibility for the management of professionals, with codes of conduct and expertise guiding professional decision making;
- **market accountability** – based on the advanced liberal conceptions of choice and self-maximisation,

(based on Darling-Hammond, 1989, p. 61).

By involving parents and community members as members of school councils, the advanced liberal formation of site-based management introduces into the operations of the school council two of these forms of accountability. The advanced liberal formation of school councils, in which parents and community members influence or dominate decision making, represents the introduction of market-based accountability into the processes of production of education at the local site, in addition to their market-accountability roles in the processes of consumption (through choice of school). The devolution of responsibilities to school councils for particular, or all, areas of school management produces school councils as a form of bureaucratic accountability, with internal accountabilities of staff to the council, and external accountabilities for policy implementation and achievement. These dual constructions produce differing subjectivities for parent participants.

The inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making processes introduces a form of market-based accountability by incorporating local needs, interests and desires into the decision-making (formative production) processes of the education provided in
the school. In this market-based conceptualisation, school councils offer parents the opportunity to “participate in decisions concerning their own children” (DEST, 2004a, p. 8), or place parents in the “driving seat for change in all-ability schools” (Blair, 2005, p. 1). Thus, parents are invited to take on the self-maximising subjectivity of the market, bringing these market forces to bear in the formation of the school’s education, through their participation.

As members of the decision-making body in self-managing schools, parents also become managers, accountable for their management of the organisation (bureaucratic accountability), with responsibilities including the formation of school budgets, employment matters, the setting and reporting of progress, school maintenance, and in fully self-managing schools, administrative and curriculum issues. School councils that do not perform are dismissed by one method or another (see previous discussion of non-performing schools).

The simultaneous introduction of market-based self-maximisation and the formation of school councils as part of a new managerial form of governance in schools places parents in sometimes contesting subject positions, and raises issues relating to the functioning of school councils as an advanced liberal construct in schools. These challenges are discussed in the remainder of this chapter, which reintroduces the voices of academia and the discourse of social justice and equity into the consideration of the formation of parent participation and school councils as advanced liberal constructs (see Chapters 3 and 4). This second part of the chapter therefore promotes the processes of contestation and initiates processes of innovation in this field.

**Challenges to school councils as advanced liberal constructs**

The introduction of a small number of parents and community representatives into decision-making positions in school councils presents challenges in relation to existing formations of schooling. These issues relate to the foci and quality of educational decision making and to the constructions of the purposes of education in democratic society, as expressed in Dewian thought, in schooling system statements
of ethics (for example the New South Wales Board of Studies Statement of equity principles (NSW BOS, 2007), and in national statements such as Australia’s Adelaide declaration on national goals for schooling in the twenty-first century (MCEETYA, 1999), which have emphasised the role of education in addressing issues of disadvantage and discrimination and issues of equity and social justice in the provision of schooling.

**Self-maximisation and parent participation in school councils**

With school councils offering parents the opportunity to “participate in decisions concerning their own children” (DEST, 2004a, p. 8), these organisations provide parents, as members of the market, a formative role in the processes of production of education in their children’s schools. In their advanced liberal construction as advocates for their own children’s (self) interest, parents choose the school their children attend, and in their children’s interests, advocate their interests in seeking to provide them with the positional goods (skills and qualifications) necessary for their own self-maximisation in the competitive advanced liberal market society. As advanced liberal constructs, school councils thus offer an opportunity for parents to express and assert self-interest on behalf of their children, as part of the introduction of market forces into the provision of schooling.

This focus on self-interest has been identified in a number of studies. Vincent and Martin (2000), in a case study of two school “parent forums” in the United Kingdom, noted that when the forum was focused on issues of fundraising and community building, the group worked in deliberative democratic style, forming a conversation between parents, as well as between parents and schools, in pursuing what was in the interests of the children in the school. However, when the forum was more focused on issues around school curriculum, parents “seem[ed] to attend the forum meetings only for their own self-serving ends … [and appeared] … as classic examples of middle class parents exploiting their knowledge and skills, their positional advantages, in pursuit of selfish, self-serving, self interested ends” (Vincent & Martin, 2000, p. 476).
Similarly, in Birenbaum-Carmeli’s (1999) case study of a self-managing public school in Israel, the school council, dominated by a group of parents from professional classes new to the area, reconfigured the educational provisions of the school, including curriculum, staffing and resources, to meet their needs and interests. In this case, the pursuit of personal interests was part of the shared socio-economic backgrounds of these families, which was “a hegemonic sector of middle class Ashkenazi natives of Israel, who took for granted their right and competence to participate in the shaping of their children’s education” (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999, p. 68).

Self-maximisation in this research
In the research of this thesis, some participants spoke of their realisation that other groups of parent members were “there to stir the pot” and “push their own agendas” (Anna), or were aware of members who were clearly using their position on the council to pursue their own (children’s) interests (Anna; Barbara). Barbara, for example, spoke of the ways in which a particular parent on her school’s council used business connections, economic advantage, and active role in the school community to influence decisions in ways that reflected that person’s own values or direct resources towards their own children’s interests. Barbara also reported an example where several council members wanted to purchase site licences for the use of an electronic online encyclopaedia, so that all students could access up-to-date information. In this case, the dominant parent was able to use their power to persuade the remainder of the council that a printed version was more important, in order that children experience the use of books, and a single version was purchased. Barbara also reported the decision of the council to put its efforts into a (parent oriented) fundraising event rather than a more child centred community event, based on the resources which that same parent was willing to bring to the fund raising activity.

Anna also reported that there were parents who were clearly there to “stir the pot” in advocating their own particular issues, and that had prompted her to join the council, though the tensions ultimately also led her to resign. Anna had hoped to advocate a more school-wide community focus, but it became clear to her that this particular
(subject) position was not recognised in the council. Anna felt patronised when she raised community-based activities for students or expressed an opinion as a parent, that is, where her subjectivity did not meet either the self-maximising assertions of council members or were not considered areas of the council’s more managerially focused business. Anna self-censured herself by not participating at that level, and ultimately resigned, feeling that a small group of members (parents and staff) were “too powerful to have my voice heard” (Anna). Anna moved her attentions to activities that were more compatible with her subjectivity as a parent and community-minded school citizen (including activities at home with her own children, and in supporting the classroom teacher and fundraising committee).

Michael similarly identified contestations between members focused on their own interests in matters where some advantage could be derived, or where particular values were being brought to bear in decision of the council. He stated,

I’ve actually decided that I’m not there [as a member of the school council] as a parent or as a representative of other parents – I’m there as part of the organisation. I actually think there’s a flaw in our structures – I don’t believe that there is a way for parents to be heard in the school as parents.

Michael discussed his role in resisting others’ attempts to discuss areas that were outside the managerial construction of the school council, describing his role as “feel[ing] like the leader of the opposition on council”.

From a similar new managerial subjectivity, Barry, a member of his children’s school’s council and previously a Department of Education management professional, saw his role in some ways as resisting parental incursions into areas of departmental or professional responsibility. Barry stated he would “always support those [Department of Education] decisions” but provided “information as to the reasoning behind some of those decisions”. Barry also spoke of controlling the boundaries of discussions “bring it back and say well this is in the parameters within which we’ve got to work, and sort of pull it back that way”.

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Michael also reported an incident where another member of the council had raised issues that related specifically to the activities in her child’s classroom, and had been requested to take those matters up with the school principal. The other council member had in frustration declared that the school could not expect parents to join the council and not discuss matters that concerned their children’s education. In this instance the other council member clearly expressed a self-maximising subjectivity, attempting to bring these issues into discussion in her position as a school council member, and found this contested by other (more dominant) discourses in the council.

The self-maximising subjectivity of advanced liberal citizens, although present in differing ways in these participants’ experiences of school councils, was not evident as dominant in these parents’ subjectivities, as has been discussed in the previous two chapters. In research where this formation is dominant, the empowerment of small numbers of parents, or groups of parents with similar interests or issues, raises concerns around equity and social justice in schools. In the case of Birenbaum-Carmeli (1999), these dominant parents were able to readjust the school’s curriculum and staffing, and redirect resources that were directed towards disadvantaged students or students with special needs towards activities which their own families valued or benefited from. These dominant parents used their “civil participation” to “legitimise the prioritisation of their own children’s interests, while oppressing less powerful parents, teachers and parents” (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999, p. 63).

Contesting subjectivities
The differing subject positions also presented contestation within individual subjects as they took on their role as school councillors. Barry reported having to sometimes resist making decisions based on how his children might benefit, or be disadvantaged, particularly when issues of policy direction or equity were relevant. Michael also felt that the managerial construction of the role of parent school council member conflicted with his role as a parent, as he found that his work on the council was taking time from specific and direct support of his children.
Barry, Michael and Karen all spoke of wide consultation with the community, seeing their roles as representatives of others, of the wider community, rather than in pursuit of self-interest, though all three identified times where the interest of their own children (and thus the construction of parent as self-maximising subject) caused them to be aware of these competing forces (contesting discourses). In one example, Michael elaborated on having to rationalise the allocation of resources (a grant-supported computer and specific educational software) for a specific child’s use at all times in the classroom, when he knew that “my daughter could also benefit by having access to these resources too”. This had forced Michael to decide he was “not there as (child’s name’s) father, or as a representative of the parents from a particular class [grade], but as a representative of the school”. That is, Michael chose to retain his managerial subjectivity.

As well as in the individual assertions of self-interest, as advanced liberal subjects, self-interest can also be expressed through group action, either as a deliberate tactic or through the domination of councils by parents and community members from similar (dominant or powerful) backgrounds. Firstly, school councils as advanced liberal constructs also facilitate the reproduction of class advantage, through the domination of membership by parents from similar backgrounds (see the discussion of representativeness and representation in previous chapter). Socio-economic advantage is expressed through class advantage and privilege which facilitate the participation of those from middle and managerial class backgrounds, whereas barriers disproportionately restrict parents from non-dominant social groups in the community. Further, parents from middle class and managerial backgrounds can dominate more forcefully, due to their familiarity with management, meetings and professionals (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977; Mills & Gale, 2004). When this occurs, the decisions of the school council, and the ways in which education is produced in these schools, becomes representative of self-interest based on class advantage (see Bourdieu, 1977, 1997; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977; Mills & Gale, 2004, for discussions of class advantage). In Foucaultian terms, this dominance of members from similar discursive backgrounds marginalises the truths of other discourses, with this marginalisation legitimised in terms of the dominant discourses.
Contesting subjects

Although the operations of class advantage are entrenched in society as representative of dominant discourses, other groups of parents and school community members have used the availability of influence in school decision making as part of their tactics (to win) in schools. Sometimes referred to as “concerned citizens groups” (CCGs) (Lutz, 1997), such organisations pursue their values and beliefs in schools through school council membership, seeking to produce education in particular ways. One United States organisation, for example, has declared its intention of “electing Christians to all 12,000 school boards across the country” (Lutz, 1997, p. 134). In the United States, CCGs have promoted local management of schools, and have used their dominance of these local school councils to “derail[ing] school restructuring efforts that focus on goals, standards and assessments” (Lutz, 1997, p. 133). In Educating the “right” way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality, Apple (2001) reported on this prominent influence of the new right in North American schooling.

In another more prominent example, a group of parents from a religious group organised the election of its representatives to the board of a school in Pennsylvania and introduced the alternative theory of intelligent design into the school’s science curriculum. This decision of the board was later overturned as unconstitutional, in a highly publicised court case (Kitzmiller, et al. v. Dover Area School District, et al., Case No. 04cv2688).

These contestations have, in a few instances, resulted in councils becoming dysfunctional in their operations and management of their school. When these individualistic expressions are at odds, councils are at risk of becoming dysfunctional. In a large review of local school councils in Chicago after more than a decade of local school management, 12% of schools were identified by two or more council members as having “sustained conflict” (Moore & Merritt, 2002, p. 8). In this review, when these contestations became too heated, or resulted in individuals not being recognised as valid subjects within the council, these parents withdrew from council membership in order to pursue elsewhere their identity positions as
parents, citizens, or self-maximising individuals. The concern in this situation is that
the withdrawal of parents who are formed as marginalised subjects further reduces
the representation of the needs and interests of children from non-dominant
backgrounds on these councils, and thus in the formation of education in these
schools.

By aligning students’ schooling experiences with their parents’ ability to be heard in
school councils, to “participate in decisions concerning their own children” (DEST,
2004a, p. 8), or to place themselves in the “driving seat for change in all-ability
schools” (Blair, 2005, p. 1), the educational experience of students is linked to the
discursively produced power of their parents. Further, this participation is restricted
in school councils to a small number of parents. In the advanced liberal construction
of self-maximisation, school policies, curriculum, and other decisions are at risk of
reflecting the needs, interests, and aspirations of families from dominant or
advantaged backgrounds and their own (socio-economic and cultural) communities.

**Self-maximisation, equity and social justice**

The restricted access of families from non-dominant or socio-culturally
disadvantaged backgrounds further raises concerns of advantaging the already
advantaged, with parents from middle class and professional backgrounds more
highly represented in these councils. The possibility for further disadvantage that
appears in some research, and is indicated by some of the experiences of the
participants in this research, runs counter to the goals of education expressed in
documents such as Australia’s Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA, 1999) which
declares that “students’ outcomes from schooling … [should be] … free from …
differences arising from students’ socio-economic background [or geographic
location]” (MCEETYA, 1999, n.p.). The potential inequities of disproportionate
representation and participatory opportunities for some parents also runs counter to
the New South Wales government’s Board of Studies commitment for schools to
“promote a fair and just society” and “value diversity” (NSW BOS, 2008, n.p.) in the
provision of education.
The New South Wales Board of Studies’ Statement of equity principles (BOS NSW, 2008, n.p.) identified particular groups which “are disadvantaged in gaining access to the curriculum and participating fully in its aspects:

- students from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- students learning English as a second language
- students of non-English speaking background
- students who live in isolated rural communities
- students who have a physical or intellectual disability.”

Families from these backgrounds have also been identified as underrepresented in parent involvement and participation activities in schools (see barriers research, Chapter 7). The marginalisation and exclusion of these families from processes that encourage self-maximisation in the production of their children’s schooling risks the reproduction and entrenchment of existing exclusions, and the corresponding privileging of the families and their children who are enabled to take advantage of these opportunities.

Diversity in the provision of education

The introduction of local parental participation in school decision making processes, in terms of markets, is intended to allow schools to meet diverse needs and interests, through responding to localised demand or specialising in areas of niche market demand (see previous discussion). However, as schools are competing in similar markets, with the majority of the market being dominated by middle class and professional families, rather than producing diversity in educational offerings, self-managing schools have instead “tailor[ed] their programs and images in highly standardised and uniform ways rather than developing programs that met the diverse needs of students” (Blackmore, 2000, p. 22). This has resulted in a narrowing of curriculum (Blackmore, 1998; Edwards & Knight, 1997; Grundy, 1992) as education becomes focused on particular and marketable skills development (Apple, 2001; Lingard et al., 1999; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006).
These concerns around the advanced liberal application of advanced liberal market-based and self-maximising discourses in the production of school councils as a construct for parents to advocate their own children’s needs, interests and desires for their children contest this formation’s applicability in the context of schools. Its advantaging of a small number of students, together with its potential for the reproduction of class advantage and disadvantage, challenge the more socially democratic notions of schooling embedded in policy documents (MCEETYA, 1999; NSW BOS, 2007), and the Dewian construction of the purposes of education in democratic societies. Advanced liberalism, however, also positions parents in these roles as part of the new managerialism of advanced liberal governmentality. This positioning also raises concerns about the operations and outcomes of schooling, and in relation to the equity and social justice outcomes of schooling.

Accountability and parent participation in school councils

Accountability of school councils to their community is suggested as addressing the concerns about the advanced liberal refocus away from the issues of equity in educational provision. This accountability of members is formed in advanced liberal terms as a market-based form, where poorly managed schools lose enrolments and face closure, and poorly performing school council members are not returned to their managerial positions at election time.

Market ideologies of choice and exit as strategies to address the inequitable expression of voice (Tooley, 1995) do not allow for the lack of mobility experienced by many people. Further, exit, where parents withdraw their children from the school, assumes that this is a viable option empowering all parents with market power. In small towns, and where mobility is limited, exit may not be an option, and enrolment in a new school may not address the issues of marginalisation or disadvantage that were problematic in the original school. Further, exit does not address the dominance of others on school councils. When members are not returned to their positions, the accountability measure effectively removes them from this privileged position in schools.
Although members who pursue their own interests may not be returned to office, their decisions may have affected many students and their families within the school and may also have provided their own children with a period of advantage with little accountability. Election processes also offer limited opportunity for redress, as those who stand for school council membership are predominantly from the same socio-economic backgrounds that dominate councils, and barriers to participation are not addressed through electoral processes. Further, this accountability is limited in comparison to the possibilities of disadvantage for other less empowered families in the school population, and the effects on their children’s educational experiences. This accountability is also limited to that of staff in schools in their performance as school council members, who have professional requirements and ethics guiding their behaviour and who have career and employment considerations that do not apply to parent members.

The restriction of this participation to a small often elite group of parents (see discussion of representativeness and representation in previous chapter) provides a privileging of certain voices, while barriers to parental participation marginalise and exclude the voices of others in the school community. This advantage applies particularly in areas where the council has responsibilities for areas that impact directly on the educational experiences of students, such as curriculum or allocation of resources, where these small groups of parents or community members may assert their self-interest. This construction of decision making therefore presents challenges in terms of equity and social justice and the ways in which schools address the needs and interests of the broader school population in the delivery of education.

Conclusion
Modern advanced liberalism represents a form of governance that is characterised by free market economics and the application of the managerial methods of private industry in the management of public sector organisations. In this discourse, the subject is formed as a self-maximising choice-making consumer in a competitive market of options, who drives processes of efficiency and effectiveness towards a market where the needs of all citizens can be met. In managing public sector
services, advanced liberal governments introduce market competition in order to drive improvements in efficiency and effectiveness, while also establishing policy requirements for the performance of the organisation. Those in management positions and all employees thus become responsible for the viability of the organisation in the market, and for the achievement of the policy benchmarks of performance.

As an advanced liberal construct, school councils offer parent members an opportunity to participate in decision making in the formative processes of education in their children’s schools, simultaneously introducing parental expression of self-maximisation and forming a new managerialist construct. The inclusion of families in school decision-making processes is intended to ensure “that parents’ values and interests are heard and respected” (DEST, 2004a, p. 8) by enabling parents to “participate in decisions concerning their own children” (DEST, 2004a, p. 8). As part of advanced liberal new managerialism in schools, school councils are also constructed as part of the governance processes in schools, involving parents in the management tasks of compliance and performance (viability) of schools. Further, by making individual parents responsible for their selection of schools for their children, and through their participation (or non-participation) in the processes of decision making and production in the school, parents and schools, rather than governmental resourcing, are positioned as responsible for the educational outcomes of their children (Apple, 2001, p. 39).

As advanced liberal technologies in schools, these two formations of the roles of members of school councils raise issues in relation to the delivery of equitable and socially just education to students, challenging the formation of schooling expressed in departmental policy documents (see for example MCEETYA, 1999; NSW BOS, 2007) and in Dewian thought. The limitation of membership to a small number of parents, and the exclusion of families from non-dominant backgrounds further challenges this construction of school councils in the context of education in democratic societies. While a small number of parents are enabled to participate at the level of decision making, and schools simultaneously become focused on issues

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of compliance and public image (marketability), students and their families from non-dominant, marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds may be further disadvantaged, with this inequity being silenced by the dominant discursive constructions in schools, including the formation of school councils as a form of parent participation in their children’s education. The identification of these issues, and the contestations between and within parent participants in school councils discussed in this chapter and experienced by the participants in this research, thus challenge the advanced liberal construction of school councils as a form of parental participation in schools.

This section of the thesis, Part III, has investigated three particular formations of school councils as pedagogical, democratic and advanced liberal constructs. These constructions result from the dominant discourses in society in recent times, and come together in the contexts of schools. The precise nature of the formation of school councils is dependent on the dominance of discourses in the situation of the school or schooling system. Thus, these different constructions represent the results of the Foucaultian process of curiosity and the application of Foucault’s methods of genealogical investigation applied in the research of this thesis.

As Foucault would have it, genealogical investigations are purely descriptive, providing an understanding of the past up to this point. The future, however, is also subject to the same processes of formation, with new constructs being produced as the result of historical discursive action. That is, each new construct is the result of its descent in the context of its emergence. For this reason, Foucault did not apply methods that draw conclusions about the future, or identify points towards which we should work, but instead sought an initiation of the processes of contestation, through the reintroduction of marginalised and excluded knowledges into the current discursive context. The resulting constructs that might emerge as the result of these (re)contestations, however, remain unpredictable, subject to what Foucault referred to as the principle of discontinuity, including human error, illusion, accidents and struggles for power (Foucault, 1998/1971) (see Chapter 3), where the events of
history are viewed not as a progression, or linked in a linear manner, but as subject to the specific forces of the context.

The following chapter, the conclusion, therefore resists the temptations to provide final answers, but instead explores the implications of the findings of the thesis, and the subjugated, marginalised and excluded discourses identified, for the processes of reconstruction. Again, these final explorations are informed by the postcritical framing of this thesis, and its concern with equitable and socially just education in schools. The final chapter, therefore, represents the initiation of the process of innovation.
Chapter 9  Discussion and conclusion: A way forward
Chapter 9

Summary and conclusion: A way forward

People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what
they do; but what they don’t know is what they do does.

(Foucault cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 187)

Introduction

Drawing on research and policy literature and the experiences of a number of parent school council members, this thesis has provided a genealogy of school councils, identifying pedagogical and political constructions of this form of parental participation in their children’s schooling. In addition, a postcritical analysis of these productions of school councils has identified inequities that arise from and are held in place by these discursive formations. In this concluding chapter the implications of this research are considered for school council policy and for the field of parent participation, in the context of family-school partnerships. The chapter also provides reflections on the limitations of this research and makes recommendations for future research in this field.

As a genealogy, a critical historical investigation, this thesis has presented the data and findings of the research and discussed these findings in relation to each specific formation of school councils. These discussions represent the work of separate chapters in a more traditionally constructed thesis. This final chapter similarly addresses some of the traditionally separate elements of a more traditional thesis, drawing the findings and discussions of these earlier chapters together in a reflection on the overall implications of the research.

For Foucault, the role of genealogical research was to identify the discursive construction of the object or phenomenon being investigated, in order to expose the inclusions and exclusions that form existing understandings and practices. As future constructs are dependent on the context of their emergence as well as their discursive histories, Foucault did not pursue recommendations from research in terms of
prescriptions of specific answers to these problems of marginalisation. The purpose of genealogical research was instead to create an opening, an initiating move, for the possibilities of addressing the discursive causes of these identified and still to be identified injustices in the processes of reconceptualisation. It was this opening of these possibilities for renewal that Foucault saw as the aim, and therefore the intended results of, such investigations. The identification of the discursive construction of the object of study was therefore the purpose of these investigations.

Genealogy was, however, also intended by Foucault as a critical methodology in this process of (re)exposing the constructed nature of the formations under investigation. Foucault proposed that these investigations should not only “define what conditions and in view of which analyses… [these constructs]… are legitimated” but also “must indicate which of them can never be accepted in any circumstances” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 25-26) (see Chapters 3 and 4). Therefore, by exposing the marginalisations and injustices held in place by these constructs, it is also the role of a genealogical investigation to re-expose these discursive arrangements to the (discursively produced) contestations of current and future contexts. The genealogical process therefore takes an active rather than passive stance towards this future. This chapter draws on the genealogical descriptions developed within the chapters of this thesis, and the discussions of their marginalising and exclusionary effects, to identify the implications of these constructions for the field of parent participation and family-school partnerships.

**Review of the research**

Beginning with a simple statement of refusal, inquiring how the construct of school councils has come into being as a taken-for-granted truth in the field of parent involvement in schools (Chapter 1), this research expanded to include a critical consideration of the elements within, and the context of, the field of family-school partnerships within which school councils are situated in modern educational policy and practice (Chapters 1 and 2). The chapters within this thesis then outlined the ways in which Foucault’s theoretical (moral) stance to the world was applied in addressing the research aims, identified in Chapter 1, of investigating:
1. The discursive arrangements that have produced school councils as a form of parent participation in their children’s education;
2. The experience of these constructions of school councils in the project of schooling in modern Western societies;
3. The implications of these investigations for the process of reconceptualisation in the field of family-school partnerships.

In addition, this thesis reopens these constructions of parent participation to the processes of future reconsideration, recontestation and reconceptualisation. This concluding chapter, along with the identification of the constructed nature of school councils within the thesis, is intended to speak into these spaces of (future) reconceptualisation. The implications of these considerations are presented below as reflections on what it is that this thesis has identified, and how these findings might be applied in future considerations in this field. The following discussion, then, addresses the contributions and implications of this thesis in the areas of its empirical, critical, theoretical, practical and discursive work referred to in Chapter 1.

**Unique contributions of this research**
In its contribution to the field of educational knowledge, this research has contributed in its empirical findings, its postcritical analysis, the theorisation of parent participation and the field of family-school partnerships, and as a practical and discursive work. The original contributions of this thesis are identified in each of these areas below.

**The empirical work of this thesis**
In its empirical work, this research has identified dominant ways in which school councils are constructed, and specific characteristics of these constructions in education. The research has also provided unique methodological (poststructural) analysis of this field of policy and practice in schools.

**Constructions of school councils**
This research has identified parental participation in school councils in modern
(Western) educational systems as being produced by pedagogical and three dominant political (democratic) discourses. The pedagogical construction of parent participation focuses on the construction of parents as central to, and primarily responsible for, supporting their children’s development and education (Chapter 5). In these roles, parental participation is focused on supporting their own children. Thus parental participation is framed by notions of working with schools to develop the most appropriate education for their children. The aims of this participation are child focused, through the improvement of their schooling experience and outcomes.

As a political construct, school councils may be formed as participatory structures, either as an open venue for decision making (socially democratic construct) (Chapter 6) or with a smaller group of members of the school community representing the interests of their stakeholder groups (representative democratic construction) (Chapter 7). A third political formation of this participation, constructed around the market democratic -based neoliberal discourse, is also strongly represented in contemporary constructions of school councils (Chapter 8).

The political constructions of parental participation in school councils are formed around different articulations of the central liberal-democratic notions of liberty, equality and justice (Chapter 6). These politically-based discursive constructions of school councils represent their emergence within the dominant discourses of recent times (Chapter 7). Each political formation of school councils constructs parents as active participants (as citizens of the community) in the formative processes of their children’s education. These political constructions of the participation of parents as socially democratic, representative or neoliberal subjects represent the differing positionings of parents as citizens within these discourses.

In the social democratic construction, parents participate as members of a community, representing citizens’ freedom and equal right to have a say in decisions that affect their interests in society. In this discourse, justice is constructed in terms of notions of the facilitation of individual participation within the group, and within notions of the social contract (Chapters 6 and 7). In representative democratic
discourse, parents participate as representatives of the interests of stakeholder groups, for example as a representative of families from a particular class/grade level in the school, or as representatives of the broader parent community. The representative formation offers a more efficient way to enact notions of the equal right to have a say in the decision-making processes of society than the full participation of all citizens. Justice is constructed as the representation of various stakeholder groups, and again within notions of the good of the community (Chapters 6 and 7).

In neoliberal discourse, parental participation is more individualistic, based on notions of self-maximisation and the consumption of educational services in a marketplace of providers (Chapter 8). As individual consumers, parents are constructed as having an equal right to a say in how their children are educated, within notions of individualism rather than the public good of the social contract. Justice in this discourse is constructed as the availability of opportunities for individual choice and competition in the production and consumption process (Chapter 8). In this construction of parental participation, school councils are formed as vehicles for the introduction of market forces in the production processes, taking effect through increased accountability and consumer demand (Chapter 8).

Along with the pedagogical construction of parental participation, these social democratic, representative and advanced liberal discourses, identified as dominant in the construction of school councils in the analyses of this research, represent the subjectivities made available to parents in this form of parental participation. Although it is possible to construct parental participation in alternative political terms, such as in terms of the parental role within religion-based constructions, or the collectivism of communism for example, these discourses were not evident within the data of this research, and thus represent marginalised discourses within these constructs.

These different constructions of parental participation are represented simultaneously within the school construct. Thus, as a multi-discursive construction, these different
possibilities made available within the construct school councils results in participants experiencing differing, contradictory and sometimes conflicting subjectivities in their roles as school council members. That is, parents find themselves being constructed in sometimes contradictory ways, and being positioned as recognisable or marginalised as not legitimate in these subject positions.

**School councils as sites of contestation**

Thus there is no single definition of the purposes and responsibilities of school councils. The availability of differing subjectivities within school councils produces these constructs as sites of discursive contestation. Participants experience these contestations corporally, within and on their own bodies, as they negotiate these differing subjectivities. The parents in this research identified these contestations as occurring both as intrapersonal conflict, within their own identities as participants, and as interpersonal conflict, as their subjectivities came into contestation with parents who had taken on others.

Intrapersonally, these contestations were experienced by participants in this research around parents’ constructions as private and as public citizens. In particular, parents in this research reported experiencing these conflicts when council decisions meant putting aside the interests of their own children (Chapter 7). While some found this a matter of taking on a professional or representative subjectivity, others struggled with this internal contestation. In cases of ongoing intrapersonal contestation, parents might be described as inhabiting “irreconcilable subjectivities” (Beckmann & Cooper, 2004, n. p.).

Interpersonal contestations were reported by these parents as resulting in experiences of conflict within councils. These contestations resulted in parents experiencing the injustices of marginalisation and exclusion, as their subjectivities were positioned as illegitimate and unrecognisable in the school council context, or as other (Chapter 7). In the neoliberal positioning of parents, these interpersonal conflicts are produced as part of the competition to maximise one’s individual position in competition with other consumers (parents) in the market (Chapter 8). For parents in this research
these experiences of intrapersonal conflict and interpersonal conflict, marginalisation and exclusion ultimately resulted in a withdrawal by all but one of these parents from participation in these councils (see Barry in Chapters 7 and 8).

**School councils as an exclusionary construct**

As well as participants experiencing marginalisation within the council, school councils are mobilised and colonised in ways that marginalise the participation of families from non-dominant socio-cultural backgrounds (see the contestations of Chapters 5, 7 and 8). Research drawn on as data in this thesis identified a reduced accessibility in these councils for parents from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds, and a corresponding over-representation of socially advantaged and middle-class families (e.g. Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Golby, 2005; Ranson et al., 2005b; Vincent & Martin, 2000). The findings of this thesis identify the processes of production that embed these injustices of marginalisation and exclusion in the discursive constructions of school councils.

The understanding of discursive ways particular people are marginalised in the differing constructions of school councils offers an alternative understanding of how the exclusion from participation of families from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds is produced and sustained in the school council construct. This analysis raises the critical issues of equity and social justice in the delivery of school education in relation to school councils. These exclusionary processes, embedded within existing constructions of parent participation in the form of school councils, indicate the need for a reconceptualisation of parent participation that is more inclusive of all families within the school community, and thus underline the importance of the critical work of this thesis.

**Limitations of the construction of school councils as a form of parent participation**

Although discourses in the adjacent social democratic, neoliberal and pedagogical discourses are also activated in support of this particular formation in schools, school councils are primarily a representative democratic formation. As the most common
formation of parent participation in schools, school councils, formed as representative decision-making bodies, are the focus of discursive constructions of these bodies in schools. That is, parents are voted into positions on the school council by the school community, and as members they are held accountable to the community through regular election.

As a political construct, school councils offer only one possible formation for parental participation in school decision-making processes. In addition, the limitations on membership numbers, and the challenges of representativeness and representation described in Chapter 5, mean that school councils do not offer a broad-based form of participation for parents in decisions that affect their children’s education (Chapters 5, 7 and 8). Further, the critical considerations within this thesis identify challenges to the efficacy and equitable nature of these dominant constructions of school councils.

**Methodological innovation**
The application of Foucault’s archaeological methods in developing this genealogy of school councils has offered a unique approach to understanding parent participation in their children’s education. Drawing on data gathered from analysis of policy documentation, research evidence and the experiences of the research participants, the thesis provides a unique postcritically inspired analysis of these constructions of school councils. This approach has involved the reintroduction of the voices of academia (research) and of equity and social justice in consideration of these formations in schools. In doing so, significant challenges to these constructions of school councils and to existing theoretical understandings in this field of family-school partnerships have been identified.

**The critical work of this thesis**
Foucault’s intention in developing this form of genealogical research was always critical. By exposing the constructed nature of the object of truth under consideration, Foucault intended also to expose its exclusions, and thus the marginalisations and injustices produced and held in place by these existing and
accepted constructs (Chapters 3 and 4). Consequently, genealogical research provides an initiation of the processes of (re)contestation. The critical work of Foucaultian research was therefore conceptualised as residing in its reopening of existing constructs to the possibilities of reconceptualisation. By identifying the constructed nature of school councils, and the differing ways in which parental participation is constructed within these organisations, this thesis identifies the discourses of inclusion and re-exposes them to the processes of contestation by those marginalised or excluded in the existing construct.

Foucault, however, also indicated a more active stance for genealogy in these processes of recontestation and reconceptualisation. Rather than being solely an archaeological documentation of the discursive inclusions and exclusions in existing constructs, emphasised the role of identifying which of these exclusionary effects “can never be accepted in any circumstances” (1972a, p. 25-26). Although this is an apparent contradiction of Foucault’s stance of diagnostic distance and historical objectivity, this stance also acknowledges the current context within which the research is undertaken, and the ongoing nature of our changing awareness (constructions) of such exclusions as we practise the stances of refusal, curiosity and innovation towards all constructions in our worlds.

This identification of unacceptable exclusions allows us to address the discursive arrangements that produce these injustices as they become apparent in the challenging of existing constructs. Foucault therefore left the identification of which exclusions were acceptable (just) and which could not be accepted (unjust) to the power/knowledges of the specific contexts of challenge (discursive analysis) and reconceptualisation, that is, to the moment of emergence of these processes. In the context of schooling in modern society, unacceptable exclusions are currently constructed in policy and some theoretical frameworks, in terms of their discriminatory and marginalising effects on the provision of the opportunities of schooling to students (Dewey, 1916; Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1962; MCEETYA, 1999, 2008; NSW BOS, 2007; NSW DET, 2007a; New London Group, 2000).
These issues of inequity and injustice that have been marginalised in the field of education in recent times (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Lingard, 2000b), have informed the Foucaultian inspired approach of this research (Chapters 3 and 4). These postcritical notions of equity and social justice have been applied within the considerations of each discursive construction in this thesis. These two processes, the opening of constructs to the possibilities of recontestation and reconceptualisation and the identification of the production of injustice within existing constructions of school councils, represent the critical work of this thesis.

The results of these critical considerations challenge these formations of school councils as a construct representing pedagogical, social democratic, representative and neoliberal articulations of liberty, equality and justice in the participation of parents in schools. As a pedagogical construction, parent participation in school councils lacks research support, and offers numerically and socially restricted opportunities to parents to participate at this level (Chapter 5). Any potential advantages of this participation are therefore limited to the families of parents in these positions of school council membership. Further, with evidence that other forms of parental involvement are effective in supporting student development and achievement, this formation may produce additional injustices for participants in directing parental efforts to a less effective form of family-school partnerships.

Representative formations of school councils also raise equity and social justice concerns similar to those raised by the pedagogical formation of school councils. By virtue of the limited (numerical) access to these positions, and the socio-cultural barriers to the participation of many families within the school community (Chapter 5), school councils may be restricted in their representation of the diverse needs and interests within the broader school community. The neoliberal construction of parent participation allows individuals to exploit these existing barriers to the participation of other families in their pursuit of their own self-maximisation. Chapter 8 offers an exploration of the equity and social justice challenges to this form of parent participation and the construction of school councils.
The identification of the discursive construction of school councils, and these challenges to their formation as pedagogical, social democratic, representative and neoliberal forms of parent participation represent the critical work of this thesis. This critical work is also represented in the challenges of these conclusions to existing theoretical understandings in this field of practice. The findings of this research therefore also provide an initiation of the re-theorisation of school councils, parent participation, and the field of family-school partnerships in schools in modern democratic societies.

The theoretical work of this thesis

This investigation has identified the dominant ways in which parental participation is constructed in schools and in the formation of school councils. These findings have implications for the ways in which parents are positioned in their roles as participants in their children’s education. The ways in which this participation is theorised provide a foundation that informs research and policy development. The challenges to these dominant constructions of parent participation in school councils identified in this research also challenge these existing theoretical foundations of these practices in schools.

Conceptualised as a form of citizen power (Arnstein, 1969), parent participation engages families in the decision-making processes of the school, at the individual level of the child (level 6, partnership), as representatives of the school community (level 7, delegated control) or at the level of full community control of the organisation (level 8, citizen control). The limitations on membership and the challenges of representativeness and representation (see Chapter 7) mean that school councils offer restricted participation to families in these decision-making processes in schools (Chapters 5, 7 and 8). In addition, the considerations within each of these three chapters identify the ways in which this participation can influence the education of others in the school community, the notion of field of influence. These notions are applied in the discussions which follow, offering an initiation of the processes of re-theorisation based around the findings of this research.
Re-theorising parental participation in school decision making

Aligning the findings of this research with the main theories of parent involvement (Epstein, 1995) and citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969), and drawing on the notions of field of influence and the roles and focus of parental action in these different forms of parental participation, Table 9-1 illustrates in the final (far right) column how the findings of this research might inform the processes of re-theorisation in this field of policy and practice in schools. The purpose of this theorisation is to situate the findings of this research in the context of the field of parental participation in schools, rather than to present a definitive list of identified or validated forms of this participation. The intention, however, is also to scaffold the initial stages of innovation that is the purpose of a genealogical project. Following this table, each of these suggested categories is discussed.

Delegated managerial decision making

This category of parental participation is based on a representative democratic formation of power, delegated by the educational authority. In this formation, the focus is on the parent as a democratic citizen, and the field of influence is broad, in that the decisions of these groups of delegates may influence the educational experiences and outcomes for others in the school community. Power is delegated in specific areas of responsibility, and as a delegated power, this delegation can be withdrawn by the governing authority. Accountability for these groups may be in the forms of annual election; however, the governing authority also maintains responsibility for overseeing the work of these committees. School councils are formed in this and the following forms of delegated power.

Delegated community-based decision making

School councils can also be formed by the delegation of responsibilities by the community. Ancient Athenian democracy used this formation to address the needs of ongoing management and to facilitate more efficient decision making in specific areas. Like the delegated managerial form of decision-making, power is delegated by the community, and may be rescinded. Accountability for those in these delegated
(representative) roles lies with the community rather than with government or other educational authority.

Table 9-1. Considerations of parental participation in school councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epstein (1995)</th>
<th>Arnstein (1995) (Citizen power)</th>
<th>Parent participation in school councils (The findings of this research)</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Influence on other families</th>
<th>Parental role in participation</th>
<th>Suggested category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>Pedagogical participation (Chapter 5)</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Parent as individual (advocate and caregiver)</td>
<td>Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Delegated power</td>
<td>Representative democratic (Chapter 7)</td>
<td>Parent as citizen</td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Parent as representative of other families (power delegated by the State)</td>
<td>Delegated managerial decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen control</td>
<td>Political constructions of parent participation</td>
<td>Social democratic (Chapter 7)</td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Parent as representative of other families (power delegated by the community)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Delegated community-based decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neoliberal (Chapter 8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Parent as a part of the collective</td>
<td></td>
<td>Collective decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Parent as Individual (consumer)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Market-based decision making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collective decision making
Collective decision making represents the formations of community-based groups, where each member has an equal say in the decision of the group. As a form of governance, this is similar to the notions of Athenian democracy (Chapter 6). Although a collective formation, it also constructs each individual as a participant. Again in schools the focus of this formation is on the parent as citizen. In this formation, participation is open to all families, the field of influence is also all families, as decisions by consensus or vote are binding on all. The discussions of Athenian democracy and social democratic discourse in Chapters 6 and 7 elaborate on and provide critique of this form of participation by parents in school decision-making processes.

Market-based decision making
In this construction of participation by parents, the role is focused on the individual as a consumer of services. Though decisions are made by parents in the pursuit of the child’s interests, the tailoring of educational decisions to the demands of the market mean that the field of influence of this form of participation is broad. The role of school councils in this construction is to both introduce and meet the demands of the market. With funding and resources attached to enrolments, education in this formation is tailored towards meeting these niche markets.

Re-theorising school councils
Table 9-1 categorises the formations of school councils as delegated, community or market organisations. Although one construction of parental participation in school councils identified in this research was as a pedagogical formation, this construction is challenged by the critical considerations of Chapter 5. In addition, the focus of the pedagogical formation of parent participation differs from the other forms in its focus on the child rather than the parent and in its field of influence. For this reason, school councils are categorised in this table as social democratic, managerial or community delegated representative, or market based constructs, that is, as a specific formation of parent participation.
Social democratic participation represents school councils where all families in the school community have an equal say in the decisions of the school. Managerial and community delegated representative school councils are formed around a committee structure, with decision making restricted to a small number of members, though in consultation with the broader community. Market-based school councils are constructed as being responsible for responding to market demands. These councils are also constructed in policy as providing representation of the market in these decision-making processes, and thus are also a form of delegated power (see Chapter 8).

In addition, school councils represent differing formations of membership around their construction as professional, administrative or community structures, and maintain different areas of responsibility and different delegated powers. This research has identified the ways in which parents as participants are constructed in their decision-making roles in school organisations as pedagogical, social democratic, representative and neoliberal citizens. These differing subjectivities may not all be available in the professional and administrative formations of school councils. Thus this research is limited in its findings to forms of school councils where parent participation is constructed as members of the school community, and not the administrative or professional models.

Implications for our understanding of democracy
In its critical considerations, this thesis also identifies significant challenges to the achievement of outcomes in current democratic constructions of school councils. The gap between democratic process and the achievement of democratic outcomes in terms of liberty, equality and justice has been referred to as a form of democratic deficit (Hindess, 2002; Thody, 1989). With the aims of schooling constructed around the achievement of these outcomes (see Chapter 1), a tension therefore exists between politically based demands for the participation of parents as citizens, and pedagogical demands for effective and equitable processes and outcomes in schools.
This thesis and its research are situated within the space of this tension. The results of this investigation identify how these tensions are formed in the field of parental participation and family-school partnerships. The results also indicate how different discourses speak into this space, and how families and schools experience these different constructions in contemporary democratic society. They also indicate a need for the formation in society of a more inclusive form of democracy, a similar conclusion to that of Apple and Beane (1999), who also advocated the development of a “thick democracy” (p. 7) that is more participatory and less exclusionary than existing forms.

**The practical work of this thesis**

Thus this research represents a deliberate disruption of the current balances of discourses (Foucaultian discourse analysis), speaking from a critically inspired (Dewian) positioning which aims to reintroduce currently subjugated discourses into the context of the construction of school councils’ “insurrection of subjugated knowledges”. As the thesis speaks into the space of recontestation, its practical work lies not only in opening the possibilities of action but also in its speaking into this space. In doing so, the thesis identifies significant challenges to the constructions of school councils as a form of parental participation in their children’s education, to existing theoretical understandings in this field of family-school partnerships, and to our understandings of participating as citizens in modern democratic societies.

The thesis has identified the effects of existing constructions of school councils, considering and making more explicit, as Foucault suggested, what what we do does (Foucault cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 187). It has also identified possible ways of addressing those unacceptable results of the actions of current constructions of parent participation in school councils. However, the practical work of the thesis is limited in its offering of possibilities for the reconstruction process, and its initiation of these possibilities for those who are made aware of these suggestions. The real practical work of the thesis is, therefore, in its initiating impulse, based on the specific findings of this analysis, its discursive work.
The discursive work of this thesis

In speaking into the space of (re)contestation, the findings of this thesis speak into the future. Thus this research is discursive in itself, in presenting a particular genealogy of school councils as a form of parental participation, and in its findings in terms of its specific critical considerations of this construct within the pedagogical (school) setting. It is important therefore to identify the limitations of this research, in that its findings represent only one set of understandings of the construction of parental participation in school councils. The consideration of these findings in terms of a body of literature, itself the product of particular discursive constructions of the world, means also that these findings are contestable. It is the initiation of these contestations that represents the discursive work of this thesis.

Limitations

As well as being limited to a study of the constructions of parental participation in school decision-making processes, and in particular around the formation of this participation in the context of school councils, this research is also limited by a number of parameters. As a history of the present, this thesis is limited by the availability of artefacts of discursive action, and its temporality in this moment in time. It is also limited by the process of its analysis in the awareness of the researcher of the discourses represented. Consequently, this thesis represents an analysis, at this moment and by this researcher. Alternative readings of the same artefacts and differing techniques of artefact identification may therefore produce an alternative analysis to that presented here.

The postcritical approach of this thesis in introducing the discourses of academia (research) and equity and social justice are also normative. The introduction of alternative discourses might reveal further exclusions from these dominant discursive constructions of school councils as parental participation in schools. In its opening of the construct to the processes of contestation, part of the work of this thesis has been to offer an opening, into which these other discourses might speak. This analysis, from a Foucaultian inspired postcritical perspective, therefore offers an opening of possibilities rather than a normative providing of definitive (closing) answers.
More practical and procedural limitations to the findings of this research include the limited number of participants, and their representation of predominantly Western born (second and subsequent generation) Australian parents, and their representation of mostly middle class families. Further, in this self-selecting group of participants a potential bias in the experiences presented emerged, as in follow up all but one of the participants had resigned their positions as members of their school council within a year of their interview.

This research is also limited by its broad focus, including participants and research from a number of educational systems. Consequently, the findings represent broad indications of the ways in which school councils are constructed across these systems. Although these were similar, it cannot be concluded that they represent all possible constructions of school councils. Conversely, the construction of these school councils within a similar cultural environment, and in the context of a national framework for family-school partnerships, may also limit these findings to a specific policy environment.

Alternative methodological approaches might reveal different aspects of the construction and operation of school councils as a form of parent participation. In Foucaultian terms, however, these approaches too would be seen as introducing their own discursive constructions about truth into the context. Thus, from the methodological stance of this research, such alternatives which search for essences (phenomenology), structures of experience (qualitative approaches), particular relationships between variables within the context (quantitative methods), or to identify specific answers to be applied in the future, would offer findings that represent a different discursive construction of the world than applied in postcritical research. This research, then, offers only one set of findings and identifies only one set of possibilities for the future. The hope of Foucaultian research, however, is that these possibilities will be more cognisant of the exclusions of the past and of the possibilities of injustice in the processes of reconceptualisation.
**Future directions**

In identifying the implications of this research, this thesis offers guidelines for consideration in future theorisation and research of school councils and in the fields of parental participation in school decision-making processes and family-school partnerships. The recommendations for future research in this field, based on the findings of this research as identified in the discussions in this chapter and throughout this thesis, are now summarised.

Final recommendations for future research

1. Rather than a single formation, school councils in contemporary Western schooling systems are constructed in different (discursive) formations which position parents as pedagogical, socially and representative democratic and neoliberal subjects. These different formations of school councils involve parents in different ways in their children’s education, and research is required to identify the specific outcomes of this participation for the individual’s family and for the outcomes of schooling in general.

2. Each construction of parental participation in the form of school councils is associated with particular issues of marginalisation, and thus there is a need for research to investigate the equity and social justice implications of each formation in schools.

3. School councils represent one formation of parental participation in their children’s schooling. This thesis has drawn on research and the voices of the participants to identify challenges to the efficacy of each formation in terms of improving student outcomes and in terms of the potential inequities that result from (are constructed within) each formation of these councils. Further research is therefore recommended to identify forms of participation that are more effective and equitable in their application in schools.

4. This research has also identified a need for a more carefully considered theorisation of the field of family-school partnerships in order to develop more informed and effective policies in schools.
5. The investigations of this thesis identify a need for this theorisation to include further problematisation of the concepts of parent involvement and parent participation in terms of educational practice.

6. There is a pressing need for the development of a metalanguage in this field of practice that reflects the nuanced variations of different forms of parent involvement, parent participation and, in this particular case, school councils, in order to provide the foundations for research and this process of theorisation in this field.

**Final thoughts**

Foucault defined a critique as “a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest” (1988f, p. 154). Based in this approach, the findings of this thesis have offered a unique challenge to the theoretical foundations of research, policy and practice in this area of the field of family-school partnerships. By identifying the constructed nature of school councils, this thesis has challenged the taken-for-granted acceptance of this construct as a form of parent participation and family-school partnerships in schools. In doing so, the differing ways in which this participation is constructed have been identified and considered in the context of their naturalisation in schools. In its postcritical approach, this thesis has identified areas of marginalisation and injustice within existing constructions of school councils, and has raised issues of equity and social justice in this field of practice. These findings indicate an urgent need for a reconceptualisation of school councils based in a more rigorously developed theorisation of parent involvement, parent participation and family-school partnerships. This research represents an initiation of these processes with the hope of more inclusive family practices in children’s education.
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Appendices
Appendix A

University of Western Sydney Human Ethics Committee approval

UWS HEC 03/053 and modified in April, 2004
Appendix B

Invitation to be part of a research project

Letterhead
University of Western Sydney

Invitation to be part of a research project

Entitled
School Councils as Parent Involvement: Perceptions of Parent Participants

Date to be inserted

Dear _____________.

School Councils aim to increase the responsiveness and accountability of schools to their community through involvement in the management processes of their local school. As a parent with experience as a member of School Council you would have participated in discussions and decision-making involving a variety of interests within your school community. This research attempts to find out more about these experiences and your thoughts can provide us with an insight into this topic. You are, therefore, warmly invited to participate as an interviewee in this supervised research project, being undertaken by Mr Graham Daniel as part of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree through the University of Western Sydney.

This research project has the approval of the sponsoring organisation (University of Western Sydney). A copy of this approval is included with this letter, along with some information about participation in this project.

Who can participate?

Participants for this particular research must have a minimum of twelve months previous or current experience as a member of a School Council in a Primary or Secondary School.

Your involvement

Your participation in this project would involve an interview/discussion about your experiences in the focus area of this research. This discussion should take about one hour and would be arranged to suit your convenience. No particular preparation is necessary for this interview, though it would be useful to think about your experiences in relation to School Council participation.

With your consent, our discussion will be sound recorded for transcription by the researcher. If you feel uncomfortable about having our conversation recorded you can let me know so alternative arrangements may be made.
Soon after our discussion, you will be given a copy of the transcript to read and you are invited to then clarify or elaborate on anything from our discussion by notation on the transcript, or by requesting a follow-up interview. Similarly, the researcher may request a second interview to clarify or elaborate on the first discussion. Your participation would again be voluntary. Your maximum participation in this research would involve two interviews.

What will happen to the information from our interview?

Once the transcripts have been checked and returned, each transcript will be analysed for its content in relation to School Council member’s experiences of involvement in the focus areas. The data from your interview will then be coded and amalgamated with other data gathered during the project for further analysis.

A pseudonym will be used to provide you with anonymity during the research process. No data that could identify you, other individuals, any school or specific location will be released, and strict confidentiality is assured. You may withdraw from the research at any stage without any adverse consequences, and all materials relating to your participation will be separated from the analysis and returned to you.

What are the benefits of this research?

The results of this research project will provide insights into the experience of School Council participation from a parental perspective. These insights may promote further thought, inform policy appraisal and stimulate further research with the aim of improving current policies.

Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute new understandings in order to “…benefit and inform theoretical development, policy and practice that will support student success in school and beyond” (Jordan, Orozco and Averett, 2002).

Are there any risks in participating in the study?

You are assured of confidentiality and anonymity as part of the project. No information that could identify you or the participating school will be released. Should you feel you need to talk about issues of concern raised during participation in this project, the following contact numbers are supplied for counselling services available in the area, depending on the nature of the counselling sought.

- Local Area Health Service  
  (Details for Local Area Health Service)
- Private Counsellors (payment is required for these service providers)  
  (Contacts for Counsellors listed in local phone directory)

Where will the information used in this study come from?

Information for this research will be gathered from Policy Statements and interviews with participants who have experience as parent representatives on School Councils.
What do I do if I still have questions about the research?

My supervisors and I are happy to discuss any questions you may still have in relation to the research. Our contact details are listed below.

If I would like to participate in this study, what do I do now?

If you would like to be a part of this project please contact me by returning the Expression of Interest in the enclosed postage paid envelope. You will then be sent further information on the project including a Biographical Information Sheet and Consent Form. I will then contact you to answer any questions you may have and arrange a suitable time for us to talk.

Before commencing the interview we will answer any other questions you may have then review and sign the consent form (a copy of which is included in this letter). After signing the consent form you are still free to withdraw from the project at any time without any penalty or repercussions whatsoever, and all materials will then be returned to you and records of your involvement securely destroyed.

If you have special needs or require an interpreter to enable you to participate in this project you can contact me using the details below so suitable arrangements can be made.

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

[Researcher and supervisor contact details]
Appendix C

Expression of interest in participating in this research

Letterhead
University of Western Sydney
School Councils as Parent Involvement: Perceptions of Parent Participants

Expression of interest in participating in research project

To Mr Graham Daniel,

I have read the information about this research project, and I am interested in participating. I understand the following contact details will be used by The Researcher for contact purposes only and will be kept confidential.

Name ________________

Contact details

Phone ________________
Best Time for Contact ______________________
(to arrange an interview time)
email ________________
Postal Address ______________________

Current member of School Council? Yes / No
Previous experience as a member of School Council? Yes / No

Thank you for your interest in this research. We look forward to your participation, and will be in contact to arrange an interview time suitable to you on receipt of this form.
Appendix D

Participant consent form

Letterhead
University of Western Sydney

School Councils as Parent Involvement: Perceptions of Parent Participants

Participant Consent Form
(To be completed at Interview)

I............................................................... consent to participate in this research project, to be supervised by Dr Kerry Robinson of the University of Western Sydney and Dr Michael Bezzina (the Research Supervisors) and undertaken by Graham Daniel (the Researcher) entitled School Councils as Parent Involvement: Perceptions of Parent Participants

I have read both the 'Plain Language Statement' and this Consent Form, and am satisfied with the explanations of the project and my role in it. The research has been explained to me and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that

- I am consenting to an interview with the researcher in relation to my experiences as a member of a School Council.
- My involvement will involve an initial interview, with a maximum of two interviews, should either party request a second (voluntary) interview.
- The initial interview will take approximately one hour.
- A second interview may be requested by either party in order to clarify or elaborate on issues raised in the first interview.
- Our interview/s will be audio-recorded and/or notes will be taken to enable the researcher to review and transcribe the content.
- I will receive, read and confirm a transcript of our interview/s.
- I am also consenting to provide basic Participant Profile information, again with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

I also acknowledge that

- I am over eighteen years of age.
- I have been given a copy of The University of Western Sydney Ethics Committee approval for this research.
- I have a minimum of twelve months experience as a member of a Primary or Secondary School School Council either currently or previously.
- I enter into this agreement of my own free will.
- I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty or prejudice.
- Should I withdraw all material in relation to me will be returned to me for disposal and no copies or information on my participation will be kept by the researcher.
- I have been assured of both anonymity and confidentiality, and I am aware that individual results will not be released to anyone, unless required to do so by law.
I understand that my identity and the identity of other participants, places and events about which I speak will be protected by the use of code names and numbers.

I am aware that the results of my discussion will be aggregated with those from other participants and will be analysed as part of the research project.

I agree that the findings of this project may be disseminated as part of the thesis and through normal academic publishing in journals and conferences, provided my name or other information that might identify me or those associated with me or this school is not used.

I have been given contact numbers for counselling should I require it as a result of my participation in this project.

I am also aware that the Research Supervisors and the Researcher are available to discuss any concerns I may have on how the study has been conducted. Alternatively I can contact the University of Western Sydney’s Research Ethics Committee.

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Signed

Name ...........................

Signature...........................................Date....................
Appendix E

Participant biographical information sheet

(To be completed by the researcher at interview)

Code: __________________

Name: _____________

Contact Details:

- Postal Address ________________

- Phone ________________

- Email ________________

Employment: ________________________________

Qualifications: ________________________________

School Council Membership Public / Private School

State / Country

Current member of School Council? Yes / No

Previous member of School Council Yes / No


Children in Grades: (When on School Council) (In 2004 if previous Years)

Checklist: Package Received / Questions / Consent Form / Biographical Data

Interview Details:

Date_________________

Start Time_________________

Stop Time_________________

Cassette #______________
Appendix F
Interview guide

School Councils as Parent Involvement: Perceptions of Parent Participants

Interview Guide

The aim of this interview is to explore parent’s perceptions of their experience of School Council membership.

As a semi-structured interview, the following is presented as a guide only. Individual interviews will be influenced by the issues raised by individual participants, and may vary from this guide.

How did you become a member of the School Council?

What motivated you to become a member of the School Council?

What do you feel you have achieved for the school through your membership of a School Council?

Do/ did you consider yourself as a representative of the school membership or as an independent member of the School Council?

[Only if YES] How do you fulfil this role?

[BOTH] How do you perceive the role of parent School Council member?

In your role as a member of a School Council, have you ever observed or had to resolve a conflict of interest? If yes, how did you experience this, and how was the issue resolved?

Are there any ways you feel you could be supported in your role as a School Council member?

How could the role of parent School Council member be supported and improved?

Do you have any other thoughts on:

1. Your experiences as a member of a School Council?
2. The role of School Council members?
3. The role of School Councils in Schools?