Submission to the
Inquiry into Teacher Education

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training
Parliament of Australia

Dear Sir

My submission falls under 7(viii) of the *Terms of Reference* for the current <u>Inquiry into Teacher Education</u>:

> *"the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to: deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related government departments."*

The core of my submission is a paper (*"Preparing teachers to work in partnership with parents*" attached to this email) that I delivered at a conference focusing on teacher education at the University of New England in 2002. In this paper, developed from the responses of 35 of my fellow independent school principals, I draw conclusions about the readiness of beginning service teachers to work with parents, and by inference about the need for tertiary education training to do <u>much</u> more to prepare teachers for this important area.

Over the past few years I have made a point of studying the themes of papers presented in tertiary conferences, usually authored by teaching staff or higher degree students in education faculties across Australia. The absence of papers dealing with the teacher-parent partnership has been glaringly obvious. It is most apparent that there is practically no teaching focus in Australian education faculties on this partnership...and all the while the government refers to parents as *"primary educators"*.

For example, in 2000 I contributed a paper *"Creating schools which provide more substantial support for parents*" at a University of Technology conference. Of literally fifty papers presented at the conference, mine was the only one that discussed how schools and parents working in cooperation. One keynote speaker spoke about the "search for productive pedagogies", of the vital importance of "metalanguage" and "knowledge integration", and of need for us to grasp the "narratives" around us. Another presenter spoke of "post structuralist approaches to early childhood education". Another preferred the post-modernist view that school curriculum development should be understood as a power play between the various interest groups. Frankly, I walked away convinced that those who are delivering diploma and degree courses in education have alienated themselves from what is truly important in schools. There is a sorry vacuum in our teacher education institutions with respect to the preparation of teachers to work in partnership with parents.

As the Headmaster of a boys' school with much expertise in working closely with parents I believe I have useful experience to place at the service of the committee. Much of the in-service training that we provide for our own staff focuses on proactive communication with parents, and on reinforcement of parental priorities in the vital area of character and values education. I have written extensively in education magazines for teachers on the link between parents and teachers. I have presented at several national conferences on this theme, analyzing not only the current situation and possible solutions, but also delving into the historical roots for this lack of effective partnership in order to better understand what needs to be done. A parenting manual I have written, "Parenting for Character", will be published by Finch in August 2005, and is a tangible demonstration of how schools can develop a wonderfully fruitful partnership with parents.

I request the opportunity to address the committee personally. I would be grateful if you would bring this request to the attention of the chair of the committee, Dr Brendan Nelson MP.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Mullins
Headmaster
Redfield College
855 Old Northern Road
Dural NSW 2158

www.redfield.nsw.edu.au
9651 4066

Preparing teachers to work in partnership with parents

Andrew Mullins
Headmaster
Redfield College, Dural
855 Old Northern Road
Dural NSW 2158

Preparing teachers to work in partnership with parents

A. Mullins[1]

Redfield College, Dural

Abstract

This study looks at the preparedness of beginning teachers to work in partnership with the parents of the students whom they teach. Conclusions are based on the responses of 35 independent school principals across Australia, and are of relevance to the design of teacher education courses. Responses indicate that beginning teachers have a limited concept of "partnership with parents" which often does not descend to building individual relationships and is often not committed to fostering the individual child's esteem for his or her parents. Responses almost universally call for better preparation for beginning teachers so that they have better skills in handling parental concerns, so they be more effective in guiding parents to support the school in academic matters and so they give better support to parents in areas of character building. Respondents note the frequent apprehension that beginning teachers can experience in the face of parental contact and most are of the view that a significant proportion of beginning teachers minimise parental contact.

An integrated and holistic vision of teacher parent partnership is discussed. Some conclusions are drawn for the design of teacher education programs. In particular, a broader vision of the benefits of strong parent-teacher collaboration, and practical approaches for parent-teacher collaboration in both academic and character building areas, are required. On the premise that character education is more effective if the efforts of school and home are complementary and consistent, the predominant features of a character education in the classroom that reinforces the work of parents are proposed. Some practical strategies are also discussed.

Some observations are made concerning potential benefits were teacher training programs more effective in preparing teachers to work with parents.

1   Introduction

1.1   Questions about how effectively teacher education courses prepare teachers to work with parents.

The idea for this paper really arose in February 2000 when I attended the Change and Choice in the New Century Symposium conducted by the Change in Education Research Group at the University of Technology, Sydney. At that conference I presented a paper entitled, *Creating schools which provide more substantial support for parents.* I believe that of the some fifty presentations at the conference this was the only paper that focused on, or made serious mention of partnership between school

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[1] Headmaster of Redfield College.

and home. This suggested to me the possibility that there might be limited current research being conducted into this theme in at least some Australian teacher education faculties. And an implication of this was that those faculties, in their teacher education curricula, might be giving little emphasis to the advantages of forging strong bonds between home and school and to preparing teachers to work in partnership with parents.

I decided to study this issue, not by looking at the courses themselves, but by looking at the perceived effectiveness of teacher education courses in preparing teachers to work in partnership with parents. In a sense I was interested in the real outcomes of teacher education courses. I decided to gather data about how adequately beginning teachers were being prepared to work with parents by polling principals for an evaluation of the work of the beginning teachers on their staffs.

My paper two years ago focused on what <u>schools</u> themselves can do to be supportive of parents. This paper will draw tentative conclusions about what <u>teacher education courses</u> can do better with respect to preparing beginning teachers to support parents.

1.2   Contemporary Attitudes Towards the Parent-Teacher Partnership

1.2.1   *Within Australia*

At the level of public policy in Australia calls for more effective collaboration between parents and teachers have increased over the past decade. Considerable impulse has come from Federal ministers who are nevertheless, in a sense, out of the education loop. A milestone was the release in the mid 1990s by Ross Free[2] as Minister for Schools, Vocational Training and Education a booklet, *Parents as Partners in School Education at the National Level*, seeking to supply information to parents about current goals and trends in education in which he described parents as "the first educators [3]".

More recently David Kemp has released documents for both parents and teachers advocating "partnership" and advising very specific strategies for cooperation.[4]

During the nineties, the parent-teacher partnership was also been very much on the mind of educational administrators in both the private and government sector. For a decade or more, all government schools have been directed to increase their links with their local community and parent body, and most if not all now have mechanisms in place to permit greater parent involvement in decision making. The report of the ACSSO & the APC (1996)[5] wrote of the need for parents to be given opportunities to "to feel welcome and comfortable in their children's school" and "opportunities to... share their children's experience of school". A NSW Board of Studies presentation to

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[2] Department of Schools, Vocational Training and Education. 1995. *Parents as Partners in School Education at the National Level*. Canberra.

[3] These words are originally found in the papal document on the family: John Paul II. 1979. *Familiaris Consortio*.

[4] Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training. 2000. *Best Practice in Reporting on Student and School Achievement*. Canberra.

[5] Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. & Australian Parents' Council Inc. (1996). *Assessing and Reporting Student Achievement: A Report of the National Parent Consensus*. Canberra: Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. & Australian Parents' Council Inc...

the 1997 AGM of the Association of Independent Schools nominated "Links with parents" as third on the list of current educational trends in NSW.

Some academics have picked up the issue. Australian Parents' Council publications[6] contained extensive bibliography of research demonstrating the importance of parental involvement in improving the academic performance of their own children. The report of Prof. Peter Cuttence in 1999 demanded that schools take the initiative to communicate far more meaningfully with parents.   A constant recent theme of Prof. Don Edgar of RMIT has been what he regards as the urgent priority that schools work more closely with parents[7].

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[6] Spreadbury. 1995. *Collaborating for successful learning: The Parent Factor.* Australian Parents' Council*;* Cole. 1996 *Children's learning: The Parent Factor.* Australian Parents' Council
[7] For example, Prof Edgar's keynote address to 1999 Leadership in Boys' Education. University of Newcastle

1.2.2 Overseas

But most of the running has been done off shore.

In Europe, after Macbeth's 1984 ground-breaking study *The Child Between*[8] research into, and implementation of, school-home partnerships blossomed. Many publications have developed the theory over these past seventeen years[9]. Much research continues into the partnership theme. A noteworthy recent paper by Heywood-Everett looks critically at the concept of partnership and argues for an emphasis on individual relationships between teachers and parents[10]. The OECD has commissioned studies into the parent partnership[11]. Various departments of education have issued their guidelines for enhancing parent-teacher cooperation[12]. For example the Scottish Office of the Education and Industry Department stressed that schools need to "respect the responsibilities and rights of parents". The British Department of Education and Employment also picked up the partnership terminology, arguing "we all need to be involved: schools, teachers and parents are at the heart of the partnership". Tony Blair even came to power on an election platform that spoke of partnership between school and community.

Major parent bodies in Europe are also beating the same drum. The extensive Belgian based *European Parents Association*, representing some 100 million parents in parents' associations across Europe, places prominently in its constitutional aims:

> *"Recognition for parents of their central place as primary educators of their children, and of the need to involve them actively at all stages of the education of their children."* [13]

Europe in general is seeing a flowering of parent-school initiatives. *OIDEL* is an example of a European NGO which is taking a high profile in the drive to bring home and school closer together as a response the increasing alienation from the family and family values to which young persons are subjected. The *Fomento* movement of Spanish family schools, now numbering some 50 schools, is an example of the extension of the parent-school partnership concept to its practical conclusions. The schools of this organization retain their professional independence from parental meddling, but are founded on the need to reinforce parental values and to empower parents in the education of their own children.

The USA is also nationally committed to fostering strong partnerships between home and school. Many states taking advantage of federal funding for projects to build

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[8] Macbeth A.,1984 *The Child Between. Report on School-Family Relationships in the Counties of the European Economic Communities.* Education Series 13. Brussels. Commission of the European Communities.

[9] eg. Munn P.,1996 *Parents and schools.* London: Routledge.

[10] Gary Heywood-Everett. 1999 "The business of learning: parents as full, unwilling, or sleeping partners" in *International Studies in Sociology of Education* Vol 9, No 3.

[11] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 1997. *Parents as Partners in Schooling.* London. OECD/HMSO.

[12] The Scottish Office. 1998. *Parents as partners: enhancing the role of parents in school education.* Edinburgh. The Scottish Office, Education and Industry Department.

[13] http://www.epa.be/e/publication/index.html

strong school-home links with respect to character education.[14] Individual states are running extensive character education programs that are founded on strong family school cooperation.[15] The governors of Colorado, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Utah all have recently endorsed a Character Education Manifesto that declares

> *We strongly affirm parents as the primary moral educators of their children and believe schools should build a partnership with the home.[16]*

The current Teachers Guide to the US Department of Education has a section entitled "The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education"[17]. Numerous state education departments have issued directives for partnership building.[18] Major US publications have called for closer links between home and school. Across the country there are many academics advocating closer parent-school links in both for both the academic and character building benefits that flow on. Dr Thomas Lickona has established the Centre for the Fourth and Fifth R's in The University of New York. Lickona argues in his "12 Point Plan for Character Education", that one of the key whole school strategies must be "Parents and community as partners". His bestselling *Educating for Character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility* is founded on the principle that schools and families are essential partners. The influential Boston University *Institute for Character Development* includes in its charter, "Together with parents, teachers are responsible for character education, they must be selected, educated, and encouraged with this mission in mind." The former Director of the Institute, Kevin Ryan, and the present Director, Karen Bohlin have condensed much of their thinking into their excellently practical *Teaching character in schools.*

A most interesting trend in the US is for teacher education institutions to pick up on this research and public policy. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education has just announced that, in conjunction with Metropolitan Life Foundation, it will be creating the AACTE-Metropolitan Life Foundation Parental Engagement Institute. The purpose of the institute is to ensure that the nation's teacher education programs effectively prepare pre-service teachers to engage parents and families toward student learning. The Institute will promote best practices in teacher education programs. [19]

Survey of Principals

2.1 The Survey

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[14] Within the last five years the states have had federally funded projects: California, Connecticut, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah, Washington.

[15] eg the Building Good Citizens for Texas program conducted by the Texas Education Agency advocates "partnership", strong communication practices between home and school, and virtue based character building strategies.

[16] Information from the website of Boston University's Centre for the Advancement of Character and Ethics.

[17] http://www.ed.gov/pubs/TeacherGuide/pfie.html

[18] For example, Iowa and Illinois.

[19] http://www.aacte.org/Research/met_life_parental_engagement.htm

As a member of the Australian Heads of Independent Schools (AHISA), I have the benefit of immediate email contact with my colleagues in other independent schools across the nation. I used this network to conduct a simple poll, inviting my colleagues to offer what we could call "scale-of-agreement" feedback on ten statements about the quality of beginning teachers' interaction with parents (see survey page in Appendix 1). There were 35 respondents nationally, all principals of independent schools. In addition one principal also polled her beginning teachers on my behalf, data which I kept separate but which suggests a productive future line of investigation. The survey was emailed out during the last week of school on 6 December, 2001. That 35 responses came back in this most busy time of the year suggests that principals regard with importance the issue of how to better prepare teachers to work with parents.

For the respondent's convenience, and to thereby increase the number of responses, the survey was designed as ten statements requiring a simple tick on a ten point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "disagree". Statements gathered information about beginning teachers' understanding of the dimensions of the term "partnership with parents" (S5, 6, 8), teachers' attitudes to parental contact (S1, 2, 7) and competence in working with parents (S3, 9, 10). A statement was also included which asked whether parental expectations for communication from the school have increased (S4).

Comments on the Limitations of this Data Collection

Although the survey is limited in its extent, it is reasonable to conclude that the respondents, being independent of each other and spread across six states are a reasonably representative distribution of independent school principals. Furthermore, although the nature of the survey is subjective there are strong consistencies of responses emerging. Qualified conclusions may therefore be drawn concerning the general opinions of Australian independent school principals, and qualified conclusions about the effectiveness of teacher education programs in preparing their students for effective collaboration with parents may also be made.
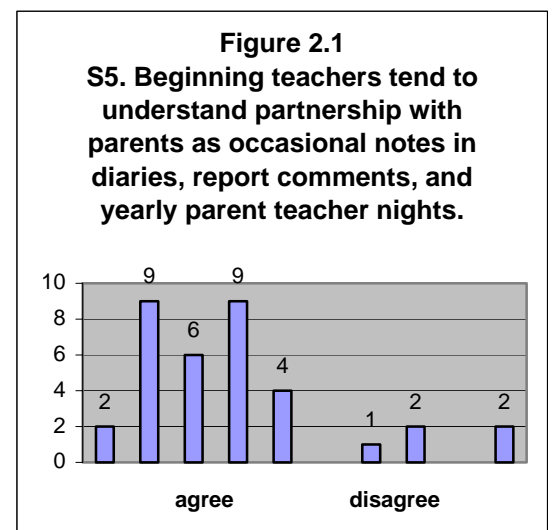
2.3   Analysis of the survey

2.3.1   *Principals' perceptions of beginning teachers' understanding of the dimensions of the term "partnership with parents": analysis of survey Statements 5, 6, and 8.*
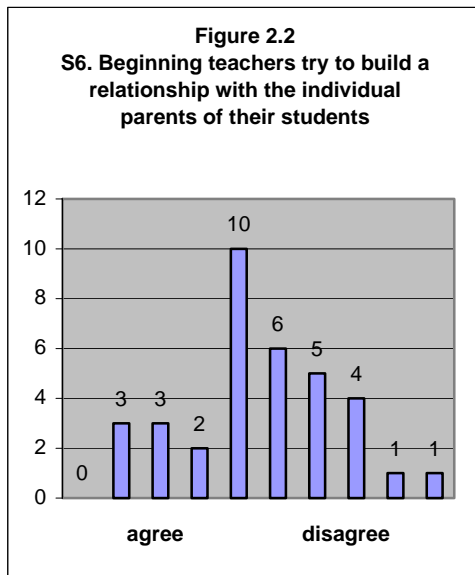
Statement 5.

The statement highlighted three "minimum benchmarks" for parental interaction… a limited vision of the potential for partnership with parents. Yet the opinion of the principals is that beginning teachers tend to see these minimums as encapsulating the essence of *partnership with parents*.

This table shows that 30/35 respondents are of the opinion that beginning teachers tend to have a limited vision of the dimensions and therefore of the potential for partnership with parents. About half of the

Figure 2.1
S5. Beginning teachers tend to understand partnership with parents as occasional notes in diaries, report comments, and yearly parent teacher nights.

respondents (17/35) gave their response in the first three categories, indicating various shades of strong agreement with the statement.

Figure 2.2
S6. Beginning teachers try to build a relationship with the individual parents of their students
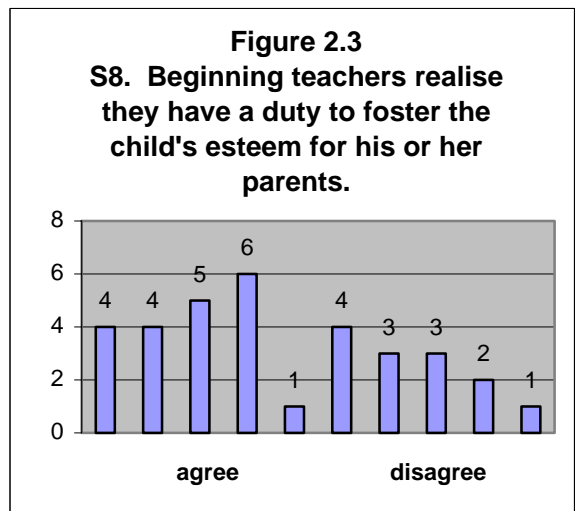

Statement 6

This chart shows a more or less equivocal response. A little over half the reponses agree with the statement but the difference is certainly statistically insignificant. What we can say, given the high percentage of responses in the middle categories, is that the majority of respondents were not confident that beginning teachers do try to build individual relationships with parents of the students they teach.

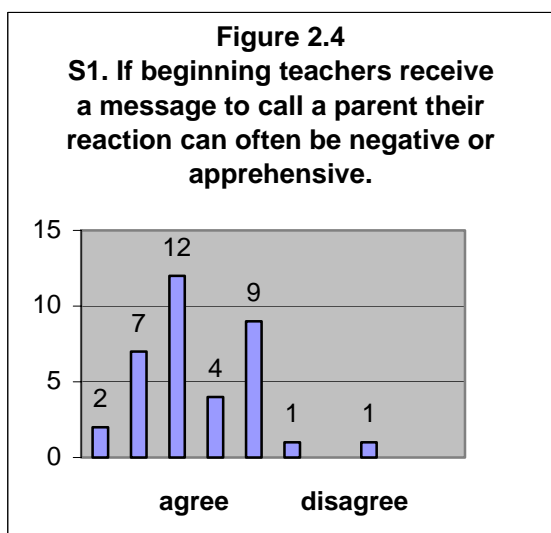Yet without a personal relationship, the term partnership is stripped of the core of its meaning. At best we have a commitment to the conventional but impersonal means of working with parents: notes occasionally in the diary, annual parent teacher meeting, and school reports. These responses are consistent with the responses to Statement 5.

Statement 8

As for Statement 6, the responses show little agreement. We can say that, in the opinion and experience of the respondents, up to half of beginning teachers do not see the need to foster a child's esteem for his or her parents. Yet we could say that such an attitude is at the core of any commitment to partnership.

Figure 2.3
S8. Beginning teachers realise they have a duty to foster the child's esteem for his or her parents.

2.3.2 *Principals' perceptions of beginning teachers' attitudes to parental contact : analysis of survey Statements 1,2 and 7.*

Figure 2.4
S1. If beginning teachers receive a message to call a parent their reaction can often be negative or apprehensive.

This second group of responses moves from principals' perceptions of how the beginning teachers see their role, to principals' perceptions of actual performance by beginning teachers in specific areas relating to the parent-teacher partnership.
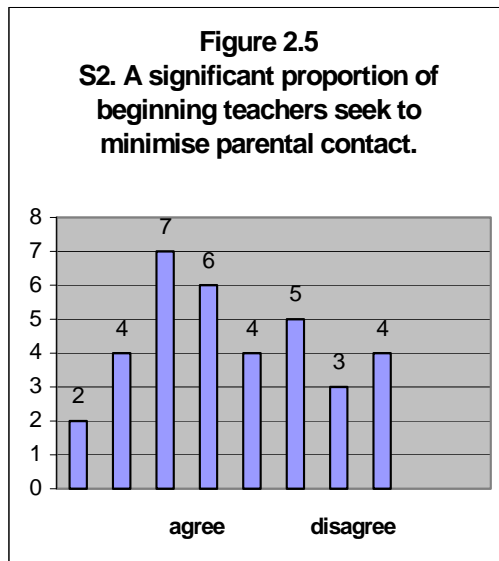
Statement 1.

This statement is included as an indicator of subliminal attitudes in the beginning teacher, revealed in those teachers' responses to parental messages left for them.

Principals show themselves firmly of the opinion that beginning teachers will often show pronounced negativity and apprehension when contacted. the statement refers to the request to return a call and responses suggest teachers can be unreasonably fearful of the intention of the parent, or of their own capacity to deal with the query without undue stress.
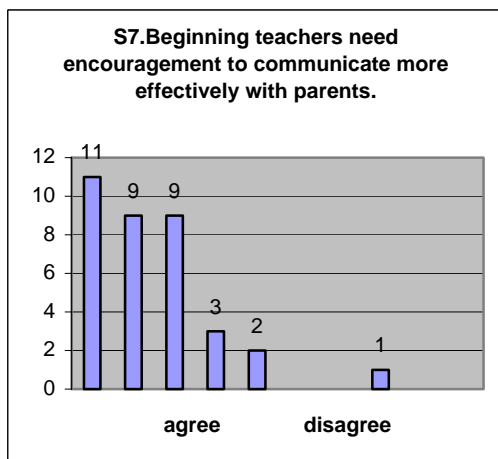
Statement 2.

Whilst the conclusive

towards the indicating principals true.
The strongly minimise

perhaps this moderated

Figure 2.5
S2. A significant proportion of beginning teachers seek to minimise parental contact.

feedback in this table is less the responses are considerably weighted left hand side of the table, that the greater part of consider the statement to be

statement itself is quite worded. An effort to parental contact can suggest unprofessional behaviour; is one reason for the responses.
Implications seem to be in line with those of Statement 1 above, that a proportion of beginning teachers respond with fear and negativity to parental approaches. This statement refers not only to parent initiated contact, but also to contact normally be initiated by a teacher, for example, telephone calls to parents.

Statement 7.

S7.Beginning teachers need encouragement to communicate more effectively with parents.

Again the responses are strongly biased to the left, revealing almost unanimous perception by principals that there is a certain reluctance amongst beginning teachers to communicate with parents. The statement also uses the word "effectively"; possibly some respondents focused more on the skills component of effective communication.

2.3.3   *Principals' perceptions of beginning teachers' competence in working with parents : analysis of survey Statements 3, 9, and 10.*

This is perhaps the most significant section of this study. The section analyses responses to the three statements which focus on the whether, in the principal's opinions, the beginning teachers have the necessary skills to work with parents. All three questions show a concordance of responses revealing deep concerns that the young teachers have not been well equipped to carry out core tasks in a partnership with parents.
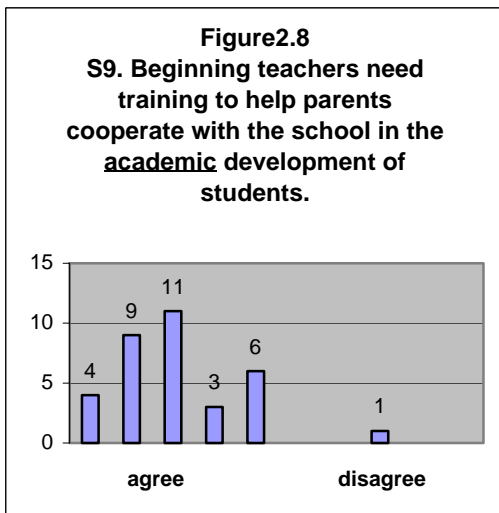
Statement 3.

Figure 2.7
S3. Beginning teachers need better skills to defuse parental concerns that do arise.
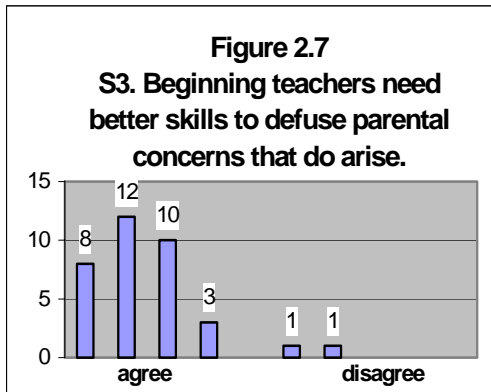
This table is very significant. Respondents are almost unanimous in their estimation that beginning teachers are ill equipped to deal with parental concerns; numerous implications must follow for redesign of teacher training, and for induction processes in schools themselves. The responses do not reveal whether principals see these skills acquired later on the job, nor the impact of the inevitable loss of confidence many beginning teachers must feel in the face of these situations for which they feel ill equipped, nor the damage to the teachers' attitudes with respect to building future partnerships with parents. The unanimity of the responses should not be underestimated. We are clearly identifying a problem which has implications for all efforts to create a culture of partnership.

Statement 9.

Figure2.8
S9. Beginning teachers need training to help parents cooperate with the school in the <u>academic</u> development of students.


Again there is almost a unanimous response revealing a concern by principals that beginning teachers have insufficient training to give effective guidance to parents in the major area of the home-school partnership… successful academics.

Note the change from "skills" in Statement 3, to "training" in Statements 9 and 10. In other words, Statement 3 is requesting perceptions about certain actual abilities of beginning teachers. Statements 9 and 10, whilst still concerned about effective skill development, are focussing on perceptions about training those teachers may have received.

Statement 10.

This is the companion table to the above. The wording is changed to suggest that in character development, it is the teachers who play the minor role to parents. Again the emphatic nature of the responses appear to suggest a considerable concern that beginning teachers have been prepared to reinforce the work of parents in character development. It is not clear whether this is because of lack of training, or because of some

Figure 2.9
S10. Beginning teachers need training to reinforce the work of parents in the <u>character</u> development of students.
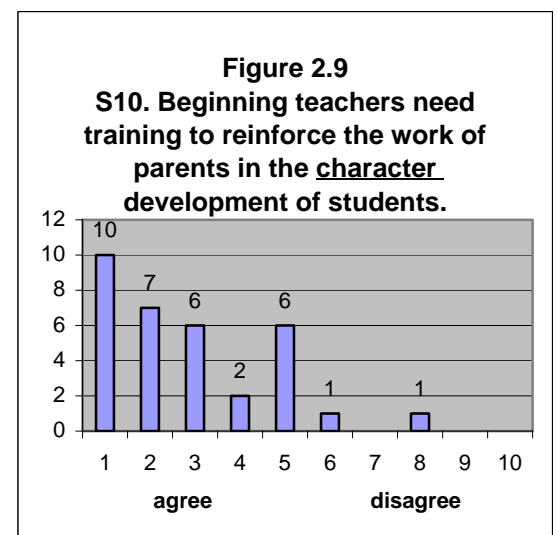
misconception they may hold about the subordinate role of teachers to parents in this area of character building. Whatever the reason, both possible deficiencies could be addressed by more effective training at the tertiary level.

2.3.4 *Principals' perceptions on whether parental expectations for communication from the school have increased: comments on Statement 4.*

The overwhelming response in agreement with this statement suggests the need for teacher training institutions to be aware of the trend and to react constructively with positive programs which better prepare teachers to communicate more effectively and to build partnership more effectively. We have seen that too often, beginning teacher's perceptions of parental communication seem to be coloured by anxiety and fear.
2.3.5 Conclusions from the Survey

A number of conclusions and inferences are suggested by the patterns of responses. Statements upon which the following conclusions and inferences are based are noted in brackets.

**Figure 2.10
S4. On the whole, parents are asking for more communication from school.**
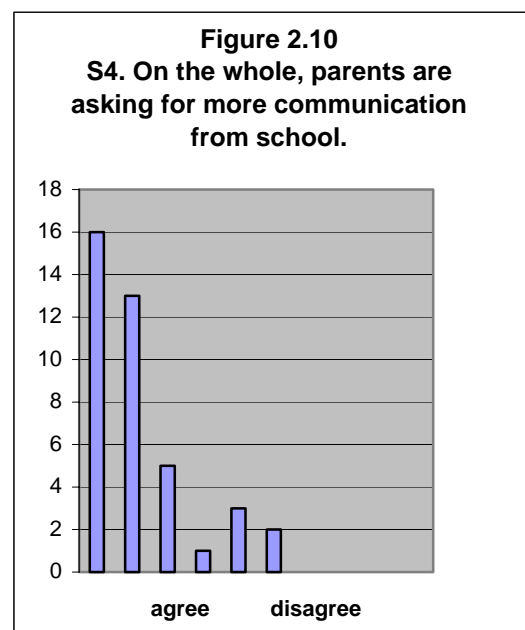
3. Inferences and Conclusions from the Survey. Implications for Teacher Educators.

3.1 Emphatic pattern of responses suggests the need for critical evaluation of aspects of tertiary teacher education curriculum.

The survey suggests that far more needs to be done at tertiary level to foster and support teachers' performance in the whole area of building effective partnerships with parents. The emphatic consensus of responses to most of the statements on the survey indicate a degree of concern on the part of the respondents, and suggest an urgency is required in at least some teacher training institutions to address more effectively this whole area of the parent-teacher partnership. (S1, S2, S3, S5, S7, S9, S10) Critical research seems required into the prevailing conventions of present curriculum in teacher training institutions.

3.2 Need to teach a broader concept of "partnership".
3.3 Teach that partnerships are inter-personal.

The survey indicates that beginning teachers have a narrow concept of the term "parental partnership", and a deficient view of the potential of a *personal* and well-developed parent-teacher relationship to enchance educational outcomes. Teacher training courses would do well to provide specific content on both these themes. (S5 and S6)

3.4   Teach that teachers have a duty to foster the prestige of parents in the eyes of children.

Many beginning teachers do not seem to have understood the need to foster in the eyes of children the esteem of the parents. This suggests a lack of vision, as noted in Goal 1, and perhaps also a need for the inclusion of sound parenting practices in teacher training courses so that training teachers are equipped with sensitivity to the key dynamics of the parent-child relationship. (S8) This deficiency seems linked to the emphatic observation that beginning teachers need enhanced skills to assist in the character development of children. (S10)

3.5   Foster the skills of proactive communication with parents.
3.6   Find ways to consolidate these skills during practicum experiences.

The survey indicates that beginning teachers can be reluctant to open communication and to respond to parental communication. It is therefore suggested that teacher training courses emphasise the skills of proactive communication with parents. It would be of benefit if these skills were modelled and fostered during practicum experiences. (S1, S2, and S7)

3.7   Teach the skills to work with concerned parents.
3.8   Teach ways to help parents assist in the academic progress of their child.
3.9   Teach ways to reinforce character development.

Specific skills at the core of working closely with parents seem to be deficient in beginning teachers. In particular, skills to work with and to orient concerned parents, skills to teach parents how best to cooperate with the school's educational initiatives, and skills to reinforce parental efforts to build character are all perceived as needed and should be included in teacher training curricula. (S3,S9 and S10)

3.10   Research suggested into implications of the increasing communication being demanded from schools.

The principals' perception that parents are now requiring more communication from the school than ever suggests that educational research is needed into the implications of this shift in parental attitudes. (S4)

4.   Reinforcing the work of parents in character education.

4.1   Predominant principles of a character education in schools that reinforces the work of parents.

The following are predominant features of a character education in the classroom that reinforces the work of parents. I have drawn heavily on our own experiences at Redfield College, in the north west of Sydney.

4.1.1   Foster <u>unity</u> with parents in every aspect of school life.

Ryan and Bohlin nominate pitfalls to avoid in character education in their book addressed to teachers. The first pitfall is "Don't keep parents in the dark-they are your number one allies. Their fourth commandment for parents is "Thou shalt be deeply involved in thy child's school life", explaining that

> *"Parents are the child's primary character educators, but teachers and the schools are also major players. It is important to know what is going on your child's school life, from the curriculum to the playground, from the classrooms to the bathrooms. Teachers, in particular need to know of your interest, and they need to feel your support for their work as character educators."*[20]

4.1.2 *Build the idea that <u>schools are a service</u> to parents[21]. Therefore we talk more about school supporting parents, than about parents supporting the school. Therefore school values should not challenge parental values.*

4.1.3 *<u>Shift the school culture</u> by an on-the-table rationale, practical strategies, and sensible timeframes.[22]*

4.1.4 *As schools have a line into most homes in this country, they can help to deliver <u>simple, sound, and ongoing parenting advice</u>.*

This will happen if it is part of the culture in the school, if teachers are equipped with the basic principles of sound parenting, and if teachers are professionally guided to have strong communication with parents. Appendix II contains a list of "Ten time-proven tips to promote effective parenting"[23], which is an example of simple principles that can be included in a parent support curriculum and workshopped with teachers to help them give parents meaningful input.

4.1.5 *Foster a <u>common language</u> of character education.*

Teach what is right and wrong. Show the reasons. There are two virtually identical moments in the Odyssey when it seems as if Homer is telling us what he sees as the key distinguishing feature between adolescence and adulthood. Odysseus' son Telemachus, proclaims to his mother, "I now know the difference between right and wrong. I am no longer a child." There are lessons we can take from this.

Teach that character is more about habits, virtues, and reasoned convictions rather than an arbitrary collection of attitudes, that may or may not be subjective. Be confident that virtue education, or the development of sound habits, is not one more theory of the way that human beings mature, but that for almost 2,500 years in most cultures it has been seen as the only effective way, at least until the past three decades. Aristotle proclaimed that "Good habits formed in childhood make all the difference.[24]" There is a window of opportunity for children to acquire habits that must not be lost.

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[20] Ryan, K., & Bohlin, K. 1999. *Building Character in Schools.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p244.
[21] An idea developed by Stenson J. 1996 *Lifeline*. New York: Scepter.
[22] Mullins A., 1999 "Practical approaches to virtue education in schools." In *The Educational Administrator*. 1999-3
[23] Mullins A., 2001 Values Education Column in *Education Review*. March 2001
[24] Aristotle 1103b

4.1.6. Develop <u>quality control and support systems</u> in schools.

It is possible to foster parenting expertise in schools, through teacher inservice courses specifically in parenting, or even through training of specialist support staff, such as school counselors or even of parenting coordinators. Parenting programs can be designed and delivered to all senior students. Furthermore, the extra time impositions on staff can be acknowledged by time allowances.

5.   Conclusions

Over the past fifteen years there has been an increasing trend in Europe and the United States for educational administrators, academics and teacher training institutions to study the implications of parent-teacher partnerships and put in place practical strategies to enhance the quality of the teacher-parent engagement. So far it would appear that this trend has not gathered self-sustaining momentum in Australia.

The survey at the core of this paper, a survey of thirty five independent school principals across Australia, has highlighted the need for better preparation for beginning teachers so they can better work with the parents of the students in their classes. The survey identified the importance of teaching a broader understanding of the term "partnership"; it identified the need to build specific skills of proactive communication and of dealing with emotional parents; and it identified the perception amongst principals that specific skills are needed to help parents work with the school in academics and also to train teachers effectively to reinforce the parents' efforts at character education. Some key features of a character education in schools that would effectively complement the work of parents in the home have been enumerated.

The bottom line is that it would appear that there are features of our preparation of pre-service teachers that are deficient, both on the actual perceptions of school administrators, and on the benchmarks of international research and practice.

APPENDIX 1
Survey and Frequency of Responses to Statements.

PREPARING TEACHERS TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS
Please tick the scale to answer the following questions:

Statement	Strongly agree							Disagree		
1 If beginning teachers receive a message to call a parent their reaction can often be negative or apprehensive.	2	7	12	4	9	1		1		
2 A significant proportion of beginning teachers seek to minimise parental contact.	2	4	7	6	4	5	3	4		
3 Beginning teachers need better skills to defuse parental concerns that do arise.	8	12	10	3		1	1			
4 On the whole, parents are asking for more communication from school.	16	13	5	1	3	2				
5 Beginning teachers tend to understand *partnership with parents* as occasional notes in diaries, report comments, and yearly parent teacher nights.	2	9	6	9	4		1	2		2
6 Beginning teachers try to build a relationship with the <u>individual</u> parents of their students.		3	3	2	10	6	5	4	1	1
7 Beginning teachers need <u>encouragement</u> to communicate more effectively with parents.	11	9	9	3	2			1		
8 Beginning teachers realise they have a duty to foster the child's esteem for his or her parents.	4	4	5	6	1	4	3	3	2	1
9 Beginning teachers need training to help parents cooperate with the school in the <u>academic</u> development of students.	4	9	11	3	6			1		
10 Beginning teachers need training to reinforce the work of parents in the <u>character</u> development of students.	10	7	6	2	6	1		1		

Data from this survey will be used for a paper at the
Challenging Futures Conference
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
3-7 February 2002
Only anonymous and collective data will be used. No respondent nor school will be identifiable.

Andrew Mullins
Headmaster
Redfield College
855 Old Northern Road
Dural 2158 NSW
02 9651 4066   FAX 02 9651 3789
email: andrew.mullins@redfield.pared.edu.au

Thank you. Please email or fax back to me by 25 December 2001.

APPENDIX II

For inclusion in a Parent Support Curriculum.
Ten time-proven tips to promote effective parenting

1. Unity between spouses makes parenting more likely to succeed.
   > *" the best thing a husband can do for his children is to love their mother"*
   > from Ray Guarendi *Back to the Family*

2. Give lots of time and affection.
   > "Every piece of research on effective childhood socialisation identifies two broad parameters, emotional support (affection) and limit setting…." Prof. Don Edgar RMIT Centre for Workplace Culture Change

3. Give unconditional love and encouragement.
   > *"I give them lots of love and tell them that we don't tolerate that behaviour here."*
   > Louisiana reform school headmistress interviewed on Sydney radio.

4. Have high but specific expectations.
   > *"First Corollary to the Law of Domestic Expectations: Mum shouldn't do anything anyone else can do, and if no one else can do it, then teach 'em how."*

5. Lead by example.
   > *"It's amazing how high some parents put the crossbar for their kids and how low they put it for themselves."* Jack Gibson. Rugby League Coach.

6. Manage the inputs.
   > *"Remove indecent pictures and speech from the stage and from the sight and hearing of the young."* Aristotle 384-322BC

7. Teach right and wrong.
   > *"My mother, I am no longer a child, I know the difference between right and wrong."*
   > Telemachus, in Homer's *Odyssey* c800BC

8. Build good habits from the start.
   > *"Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good... habits of mind, habits of heart, and habits of action."* Dr Thomas Lickona *Educating for Character*

9. Let your child wear his or her mistakes.
   > *"Children need to fail…. When we impulsively protect our children from failure, we deprive them of learning…"* Martin Seligman *The Optimistic Child*

10. Use initiative to create a bright and happy home life.
    > *"Why should children be happy with their lot when parents complain about theirs?"*
    > Barbara Holborow, Childrens' Court Magistrate.

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