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Parent-Teacher Interactions: Engaging with Parents and Carers

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Abstract: This study sought to identify factors that parents and teachers described as impacting on their interactions. Previous research indicated that student performance levels increase when parents and teachers work together; however, in practice, there are underlying tensions. The key findings revealed that the nature of parent-teacher interactions was either collaborative or non-collaborative; several activities underpinned these practices; and positive or less than satisfactory outcomes were afforded to students. Furthermore, parents and teachers had similar preferences on what practices made their interactions collaborative; however, they had different views (preferences) on what constituted non-collaborative practices. The findings from this research have implications not only for teachers and school leaders, but also for universities and pre-service teachers. This study recommends professional learning opportunities for teachers and pre-service teachers examining these collaborative and non-collaborative practices.

Introduction

The 2008 *Building the Educational Revolution in Our Schools* program (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) witnessed several projects aimed at encouraging greater levels of parental involvement in our Australian schools. This included establishing the *Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau* (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2008); The *Parent and Community Engagement* project (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2010); and the *Smarter Schools National Partnerships* program which incorporated the *Parent Engagement in Schooling in Low Socio-Economic Status Communities*. The then Federal Minister for Education viewed these initiatives as a way "to engage parents in the education of their children" (Garrett, 2010, p. 1).

Building on from what has gone before, the current Australian coalition government has developed the *Students First* reform detailing "teacher quality, school autonomy, strengthening the curriculum and engaging parents in education" (Department of Education and Training (DET), 2014) as the four pillars designed to lift current educational standards. The Education Minister, Mr Christopher Pyne cites that "parent engagement is associated with improvements across a range of indicators including: Better education outcomes, enhanced engagement with school work, more regular school attendance better behaviour and increased social skills" (Department of Education and Training (DET), 2014). Furthermore, the reigning Government has committed $4 million over the next four years into research supporting the 'parent engagement' agenda (Department of Education and Training (DET),

2014). Whilst the current research does not identify the indicators as stated above, the findings do support the Governments notion of 'engaging parents' in education to achieve 'better educational outcomes'.

In addition to the past and present government reforms, Australia's educational systems are supporting the National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2008). The Australian Institute for Teacher and School Leadership (AITSL) has developed the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* (2011). Targets were set across the Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement domains for teachers. In particular, key focus areas, which were stated in the Standards, can be linked to the findings obtained from this current research. Specifically, the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* requests teachers to:

- Engage parents/carers in the educative process

- Report on student achievement clearly, accurately and respectfully to students and parents/carers about student achievement, making use of accurate and reliable records

- Engage with the parents/carers.

(AITSL, 2011, Standards 3.7, 5.5 and 7.3).

Whilst these key focus areas were aimed at the school level, this paper also argues that universities, in their pre-service education courses for teachers, should present strategies that meet these 'Standards'. The findings obtained from this current study indicate several practices that pre service teachers could adopt to engage with their parents; thus supporting *Students First* - parent engagement agenda.

Aside from government policies and practices, empirical research has identified the positive influence parental involvement has on student achievement levels. Particular studies indicated that student performance was affected academically (Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005; Ertl, 2000; Hughes & Kwok, 2007), behaviourally (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson & Mann, 2001), and socially (Driessen et al., 2005; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Reynolds et al., 2001). The findings from these studies reinforced the popular notion that when parents are engaged in the education of their children better learning outcomes are achieved (Berthelsen & Walker 2008). Despite the fact that there is a requirement for teachers to engage with parents, studies have also identified barriers that limit parental involvement in schools. Researchers (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Lareau, 1987; Lasky, 2000; Miretzky, 2004) recognised family barriers, such as social class (Lareau, 1987), socio-economic status (Hughes & Kwok, 2007), and culture (Crozier & Davies, 2007); as well as school barriers, such as the teachers' availability due to time (Lasky, 2000; Miretzky, 2004), and teacher self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987). However, whilst parental involvement has positive outcomes considering these limitations, Berthelsen and Walker (2008) state that the "quality of the contact makes the largest difference". This current research investigated this 'quality of contact' through the practices of parents and teachers that afforded positive interactions. The findings from this current study identified several practices that resulted in positive outcomes for students and the engagement of parents in their schools.

In summary, the findings from this study revealed several collaborative practices that provided positive parent-teacher interactions, conversely, several non-collaborative practices were identified as resulting in less than satisfactory parent-teacher interactions, thereby limiting parental involvement. If the government is developing a *Students First* approach that is seeking 'to improve educational standards', then by examining these practices greater parental involvement will transpire thus improving student performance levels.

Research Methodology

This study sought to investigate parent-teacher interactions through the collection of their stories. Participants were asked to share positive, as well as less than satisfactory experiences of their parent-teacher interactions. This was then interpreted as their reality. The researcher, therefore, has conducted this study using an interpretive methodology.

The interpretive methodology allows the researcher to capture the social aspects of people and their relationships (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretivism believes that "reality is internally experienced, is socially constructed through interaction and interpreted through the actors, and is based on the definition that people attach to it" (Hughes cited in Sarantakos, 1993, p. 36). Furthermore, interpretivism "emphasizes social interaction as the basis for knowledge" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 9) and describes reality as being what people make it to be (Schwandt, 1994). This research methodology allows the researcher to "understand how others understand their world" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 10). In this current research, the interpretive perspective assumed a "relativist ontology, a subjective epistemology and a naturalistic set of methodologies" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 14). This study was undertaken in primary schools with parents and teachers as participants whose stories were collected, described, and interpreted as their realities of parent-teacher interactions. This investigation captured the lived experiences of parents and teachers and the subjective meanings they assigned to their interactions.

There are limitations and boundaries to this current research. Interpretivism seeks to understand the perspectives of the participants, which can be generalised to similar settings (Willis, 2007). According to Willis (2007, p. 40), the interpretive paradigm may not "prove anything; ... [it may] simply add to the evidence ... ". Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this investigation reflect the perspectives offered by the participant parents and teachers of these particular schools. The results from this present research can be considered as local knowledge and, whilst they should not be generalised to all schools, similarities may be drawn. Nevertheless, the findings from this current research add to the body of knowledge on parent-teacher interactions. However, in the final analysis, this study captured the meaning that parents and teachers assigned to their positive and/or less than satisfactory experiences of their interactions. This revelation enables us to better understand their world.

Research Methods

The research methods adopted for this study were focus groups and individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (interviews). These data collection methods allowed the researcher to capture how parents and teachers viewed their socially constructed world. Focus groups permitted the participants to offer their points of view, experiences, and/or perspectives on a given topic. Knowledge gained from these focus group sessions helped to inform the interview questions. The interviews were used to collect information about the participants' insights and experiences of the world in which they operated, and the meaning that they gave to these experiences (Seidman, 1991). Rich descriptions from the perspectives of parents and teachers were obtained using these research methods and from the analysis of the stories, a number of themes were discovered.

During the first phase of data collection, parents and teachers responded to a set of guiding questions such as describing a positive parent (or teacher) meeting followed by a description of a less than satisfactory parent (or teacher) meeting. Other questions included:-
- What general topics were discussed at these meetings?
- What was the purpose of the meeting?

- How did you and the parent (or teacher) take on board each other's ideas/suggestions?
- How was your goal of the meeting achieved?

The second phase of data collection involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with individual parents and teachers who recounted their experiences of a positive parent (or teacher) meeting followed by a description of less than satisfactory parent (or teacher) meeting. Other questions included:-

- What general topics were discussed at these meetings?
- Who initiated the interaction?
- How do you feel when a parent (or teacher) initiates a meeting?
- How was the meeting conducted?

As stated previously, the research methodology adopted for this study was interpretivism. Interpretive research allowed the data to be organised and reduced to uncover patterns of meaning (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). In this current study, data were analysed by extracting meaning from the transcripts to uncover emerging themes concerning parents' and teachers' experiences of their interaction. In addition, an analysis of the data for sub-themes exploring any similarities and differences in the data was also undertaken (Strauss, 1987). Reading, interpreting, and coding transcripts with the assistance of NVivo 8 software aided in the uncovering of patterns of meaning.

The transcripts from these interviews with parents and teachers were analysed individually, followed by parents as a group, and teachers as a group. Parents and teachers were recorded as sources, where, some parents and teachers reported more than one incident or experience of a collaborative and/or non-collaborative practice in this study. Using NVivo 8 software, these incidents of collaboration/non-collaboration were counted as references and calculated within the data; thus, incidents, experiences, and stories from parents and teachers were calculated as individual, separate references. In this study, references were described as either a collaborative practice (*approachability, honesty, listening, relationships, sharing information,* and *working together*) or a non-collaborative practice (*emotive behaviours, lack of confidence, lack of information, lack of support, not listening, not working together,* and *unapproachability*). Therefore, one source (parent/teacher) could report, for example, five references (or incidents) under a particular collaborative or non-collaborative practice.

Participants

The parents and teachers who participated in this study were from four of Western Australia's low fee, independent, Protestant, metropolitan Perth primary schools with a 2008–2009 median socio-economic score (SES). The literature on parent-teacher interactions and parental involvement highlighted barriers to parent-teacher interactions that included the schools' population based on their SES. For example, schools with parents who were middle class were found to be more involved in the school and more confident to interact with the school and its teachers (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Therefore, these low fee, independent, Protestant, metropolitan Perth primary schools were considered for this present study – firstly, because they had a median SES, and secondly because they had strong parental involvement programs, meaning that parents and teachers engaged with each other on a regular basis.

A breakdown of participant information and the data collection methods used in this study is presented in two tables (see below). Stories for this study were collected from a total of 67 participants, comprising 35 female and one male parent participant, as well as 28 female and eight male teacher participants, totalling 36 parent participants and 31teacher

participants. The demographic information regarding the parents and teachers who participated in this research indicated that they were predominantly Australian citizens who had completed further education such as Technical and Further Education or tertiary education, had time available to be involved in the school, and ranged from being new to established members of either the local school or teaching community. A breakdown of the figures shows that 67 people participated in this study, comprising 36 parent participants (see Table 1.1), as well as 31 teacher participants (see Table 1.2).

School Name	Data Collection Method	Number of Participants
East Point	Focus Group Sessions	3
Queen Street	Focus Group Sessions	4
Jarvis Lane	Interviews	20
South Boulevard	Interviews	9
Total Number of Participants		36

Table 1.1 Number of Parent Participants from Each of the Four Schools

School Name	Data Collection Method	Number of Participants
East Point	Focus Group Sessions	5
Queen Street	Focus Group Sessions	7
Jarvis Lane	Interviews	12
South Boulevard	Interviews	7
Total Number of Participants		31

Table 1.2 Number of Teacher Participants from Each of the Four Schools

From the tables, nineteen participants consisting of seven parents and 12 teachers from 2 different schools, East Point School (EPS) and Queen Street School (QSS) attended focus group sessions. In addition, 36 people comprising 29 parents and 19 teachers from the other two schools, Jarvis Lane School (JLS) and South Boulevard School (SBS) attended interview sessions.

The role of researchers, in interpretive research, is to avoid imposing their own interpretation and to be true to the meaning given by the participants (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985). However, cultural assumptions and/or bias of the researcher can influence what is asked and what is heard (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In this research, bracketing and suspending

judgements or assumptions were undertaken so that the subjective meanings of the participants' actions were provided (Christ & Tanner, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher's task was to interpret how others understood their world and to consider the meanings behind their actions (O'Donoghue, 2007). Being aware of her own potential for bias, the researcher therefore, adopted a reflexive process and evaluated the potential for bias when interpreting data (Bednall, 2006). This was established through maintaining a research journal, which allowed thoughts to be entered post interview, recording of perceptions of the information presented, comparing understandings during the focus group sessions with the research assistant, evaluating the interviewing process by considering the factors that impacted on the interview, as well as developing an awareness of contextual information that was apparent or observed. The journal acted as an aid to remember details and interpretations of the participants during focus group sessions and individual in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were later used to assist with analysing stories.

Findings

Four key factors were identified from the data as impacting on parent-teacher interactions. Firstly, parent-teacher interactions were classified as either collaborative (satisfactory) or non-collaborative (less than satisfactory). Secondly, there were specific activities that underpinned these collaborative and non-collaborative practices. Thirdly, these collaborative and non-collaborative practices resulted in outcomes that impacted on the student. Finally, parents and teachers held different views (preferences) about which of these practices resulted in their satisfactory or unsatisfactory parent-teacher interactions. It is these practices, activities, outcomes and views (preferences) that inform the current body of knowledge on parents and teachers engaging with each other. The following sections will firstly discuss the collaborative practices, activities and outcomes of parents and teachers, secondly the non-collaborative practices, activities and outcomes, and finally, the different preferences of parents and teachers to using these collaborative and non-collaborative practices.

Collaborative Practices

Several positive actions were described by parents and teachers and were classified as being collaborative practices. These include (in alphabetical order): *approachability*, *honesty*, *listening*, (developing) *relationships*, *sharing information*, (providing) *support and resources*, and/or *working together.* In addition, each of these collaborative practices had different activities that were found to enhance parent-teacher interactions. Moreover, these practices resulted in positive outcomes being afforded to the students including higher levels of pastoral care and/or student support. Subsequently, the findings identified that parents had different views (preferences) for these collaborative practices than the teachers. This is discussed in the section 'Parents and Teachers Preferred Collaborative and Non-Collaborative Practices'. Overall, these collaborative practices resulted in positive parent-teacher interactions.

Table 1.3 outlines the preferred collaborative practices of parents and teachers, the associated activities that enhanced parent-teacher interactions, and the resulting outcomes afforded to the student. For example, when parents and teachers engaged the *relationships* practice, rapport, insight, connectivity and levels of trust ensued, coupled with either support or a level of pastoral care furnished to the student. This new knowledge highlights the leading

collaborative practices utilised by parents and teachers and the key activities and noted outcomes developed from positive parent-teacher interactions. The findings from this investigation recommends that teachers, as well as pre-service teachers through school and university led training opportunities, use these new understandings to foster positive parent-teacher interactions in schools thereby, engaging parents in the educative process, satisfying *Students First* - parent engagement and AITSL's *National Professional Standards for Teachers*.

Practices	Activities	Outcomes
Approachability Practice	Accessibility Embracing nature of the other person Comfortability	Student support
Honesty Practice	Truthfulness Student capabilities Reality	Student support
Relationships Practice	Rapport Insight into their nature Connectivity Levels of trust	Student support Pastoral care
Sharing Information Practice	Exchange of student-related facts Communication (two-way and one-way)	Student support Pastoral care
Working Together Practice	Partnership Consultation Sharing ideas	Student support Pastoral care

Table 1.3 Collaborative Practices of Parents and Teachers with Key Activities and Noted Outcomes

This study firstly discovered the *approachability* practice was found to have encouraged a level of comfort for the parents. This was achieved through the teacher being accessible and offering the parents a welcoming nature. As a parent, Alison explained *approachability* in terms of how the teacher made her feel, saying, "… for a teacher to ... be open and give those signals that she's happy to discuss anything, whether it's something to reveal what's happened or, ... the more important stuff, but you feel like you can talk to them about all sorts of stuff" (Interview 6, 2009 - Alison). For teachers they expressed "Relaxed ... more friendly ... open" (Interview 63, 2009 - Tennille), "… comfortable in coming to see you" (Interview 65, 2009 - Trisha) and, "… [being] invited into the classroom ... to discuss anything ... warm ... informal as possible" (Interview 42, 2009 - Tristan). In essence, the research revealed that the *approachability* practice facilitated more information being shared between parents and teachers, thus resulting in higher levels of support for the student.

Additionally, the study identified that teachers viewed *honesty* as being an important collaborative practice. Teachers held the view that there needs to be a level of truthfulness about the child's capabilities. This was achieved by teachers providing facts about what the child can manage at school, presenting a reality concerning the students' actual capabilities. Similarly, parents also need to provide teachers with a real account of their child's abilities and achievements at home. This enhanced parents and teachers working as partners in the educational process by providing a recognisable level of support for the student.

Furthermore, the research found the *relationships* practice facilitated rapport between parents and teachers by presenting them both with an empathetic insight into the other person's world. Parents generally wanted a connection with the teacher, "… you get to sort of know what the teacher is kind of like .... When you've got more of a relationship with them, they open up more about your child" (Interview 15, 2009 - Aida). Consequently, teachers found that interacting with parents, "… builds the relationship with you and the parent whereby you can have a channel of information. They know you are not that scary teacher ... somebody that is approachable, somebody that cares for your child and is working with you for your child" (Interview 39, 2009 - Tia). These understandings enhanced levels of trust between parents and teachers, promoting benefits to the student in the form of care and support. In addition, parents and teachers exchanged varying degrees of personal information, which was interpreted as assisting with the engagement of a relationship to the other person. Some teachers, however, found that some parents wanted to know too many details about their personal lives and so 'drew a line' in order to maintain a professional boundary.

A further activity that defined collaborative parent-teacher interactions was the *sharing information* practice. Positive parent-teacher communication was described as being regular, open, and usually two-way. This study also revealed that the *sharing information* practice was not just the communication process itself, but also an opportunity for all types of information to be exchanged; therefore, assisting the parents' and teachers' understanding of the other persons' needs and that of the student. Findings from this research identified that the *sharing information* practice assisted with facilitating the discussion of a range of subjects, including student progress and behaviour: for example, the *sharing information* practice meant that reassurance was given to the parents (or the teachers) about their parenting styles (or teaching practices) and, therefore, parents (and teachers) continued with their supportive measures.

One of the most significant outcomes from the *working together* collaborative practice was the formation of partnerships between parents and teachers. Consultation and the sharing of ideas underpinned the *working together* practice, resulting in support being provided to the students. A parent described *working together* as finding out where, "… the kids are at and what areas we [the parents] need to focus our attention on at home" (Interview 10, 2009 - Amy). A teacher further defined the practice of *working together* as, "… feeling that you are on the same page ... you have actually come together and you have understood each other and you are going forward together" (Interview 65, 2009 - Trisha). Teachers and parents conferring with each other, exchanging knowledge, as well as sharing in the provision of support for the student achieved this *working together* notion.

Non-Collaborative Practices

Less than satisfactory actions of parent-teacher interactions were categorised as being non-collaborative practices. These include (in alphabetical order): *emotive behaviour, lack of information, lack of support* and *unapproachability*. In addition, each of these non-collaborative practices had different activities that adversely impacted on parent-teacher interactions. This resulted in the unfavourable outcomes being afforded to the students. The findings also identified that parents and teachers had different preferences of what constituted non-collaborative practices. This will be discussed in the section 'Parents and Teachers Preferred Collaborative and Non-Collaborative Practices'

Table 1.4 outlines the dominant non-collaborative practices of parents and teachers, the associated activities that underpinned these less than satisfactory parent-teacher interactions, and the consequences endured by the students: for example when the

unapproachable practice was engaged by teachers, parents felt that the teacher was inaccessible, lacked warmth, was intimidating or brusque in their manner. This resulted in limited exchange of information, low levels of support, and reduced assistance being provided to the student. Similarly, when the *emotive behaviour* practice was employed by parents, teachers felt threatened and intimidated resulting in limited exchange of student information (see Table 1.4). This study suggests that educational providers, including universities in their undergraduate programs can use this information to progress parent-teacher interactions by providing professional development opportunities on these non-collaborative practices. This would, in turn, progress quality teachers, foster home-school links and engage parents in the schooling process, thereby lifting current educational standards and satisfying AITSL's *National Professional Standards for Teachers.*

Practices	Activities	Outcomes
Emotive Behaviour Practice	Aggression Shouting overtones Verbal abuse Intimidation	Limited exchange of student information
Lack of Information Practice	Not enough information Does not recognise requests Poor communication	Limited exchange of student information Parents cannot support child at home
Lack of Support Practice	Provides no assistance to child Fails to carry out educational program at home	Reduced assistance to parent and decreased support for the student
Unapproachability Practice	Inaccessible Lacking in warmth Intimidation Brusque professional attitudes	Limited exchange of student information Low levels of student support

Table 1.4 Non-Collaborative Practices of Parents and Teachers with Key Activities and Noted Outcomes

Firstly, from the teacher's perspective, one key non-collaborative practice used by parents was the *emotive behaviour* practice. Teachers described particular incidences of parents being aggressive towards them, threatening them with assault, and using verbal abuse, leaving the teachers feeling intimidated and in danger. Tristan describes his experience. "This father came in to pick his son up .... And, he just started swearing, from outside, this wasn't in the classroom, came right in to me, and confronted me going, 'What's going on here?' ... 'I'm sick of this shit, I'm sick of this school, I'm sick of this ... this is absolute bullshit'" (Interview 42, 2009 - Tristan). Consequences of this *emotive behaviour* included limited future parent-teacher interactions and communication which impaired parent-teacher relationships. In addition, it was found that on most occasions, teachers engaged a member from the school's leadership team to intervene or arbitrate their interactions with these particular parents. Threatening language and physical assault towards a teacher is not new information; however, the use of the *emotive behaviour* practice and subsequent activities to impede an interaction with a parent extends the current knowledge surrounding work-related violence in schools. Parents, on the other hand, did not identify this as a key non-collaborative practice of teachers.

A second non-collaborative teacher practice was *lack of information*. Parents described this as teachers deliberately not communicating facts or knowledge, not contributing extra information that was later deemed necessary, and/or not recognising a parent's request. Lack of feedback was described by a parent as, "I could see him struggling .... I kept asking, 'How is he going?' And she kept saying, 'Yeah, he's okay, he's okay' but I could tell from his work that it wasn't" (Interview 3, 2009 - Adele). A consequence of the *lack of information* practice was that these parents were unable to provide the necessary support at home for their child. In this study, parents also stated they experienced selective and/or non-existent communication with some teachers and this impeded communication. Conversely, teachers did not view this as being central to parents' non-collaborative practices.

In this research, teachers described the parents' use of the *lack of support* practice as occurring when teachers might for example, organise extra help for a student (sometimes at the parents' request) only to realise that the parents did not follow through with the recommendations. Thus, *lack of support* was characterised by the inactive nature of parents. Tamsin said, "They agree to do lots of things and don't do anything …. Then you realise it is just lip-service and the onus is on you" (Interview 58, 2009 - Tamsin). Terry found that, "Some go yep, yep, yep and go off and do totally the opposite" (Interview 64, 2009 - Terry). The teachers also revealed that, at times, a consequence of the inactive nature of parents was limited future interactions with these parents and, therefore, limited assistance being provided for the student. Nevertheless, parents did not ascribe teachers with the *lack of support* practice.

From the parents' perspectives, one primary non-collaborative practice used by the teachers was being *unapproachable*. In this study, parents described some teachers as not being accessible or personable, and as lacking in warmth during their interactions. This resulted in some of the parents withdrawing from the teacher, thereby withholding student information. Agatha summed this up, "I have had a couple of teachers where you didn't feel comfortable to approach them .... You would stand back because you feel a bit intimidated I suppose" (Interview 30, 2009 - Agatha). Furthermore, the *unapproachability* practice resulted in barriers developing between parents and teachers, as parents described feeling intimidated and uncomfortable and, therefore, distanced themselves from the teacher. The *unapproachability* practice resulted in inhibiting parent-teacher relationships, and limiting student support and/or levels of student pastoral care.

Furthermore, activities that underpinned the *unapproachability* practice were power struggles and teacher self-efficacy. In this study, parents described how early-career teachers utilised the *unapproachability* practice during their interactions. This finding further supports the notion of pre-service teacher training on methods to foster positive parent-teacher interactions. Parents described early career teachers as being less confident with brusque professional attitudes. Consequently, parents stated that during their interactions with these teachers they often felt powerless and, therefore, did not pursue minor concerns with them with the result that a barrier was formed between them. Subsequently, these parents would address their more serious concerns with the school's deputy primary principal or primary principal instead of these early career classroom teachers. This also has an impact on how parents and teachers work together.

Summary of Collaborative and Non-Collaborative Practices

To summarise, this study identified parent-teacher interactions as being either collaborative or non-collaborative, having specific activities that underpinned these

collaborative and non-collaborative practices, and finally that these practices resulted in outcomes that impacted on the student. Furthermore, this current research recognised that parents and teachers held different views (preferences) about which of these practices shaped their positive and/or less than satisfactory experiences.

Parents and Teachers Preferred Collaborative and Non-Collaborative Practices

Tables 1.5 and 1.6 demonstrate the preferences that parents and teachers had in relation to these collaborative and non-collaborative practices. Firstly, Table 1.5 indicates that parents valued the *relationships* collaborative practice followed by *working together*, *approachability* and *sharing information* practices. However, teachers primarily viewed the *working together* practice as facilitating their collaboration with parents followed by *relationships*, *sharing information* and *honesty* practices. In essence, parents wanted to build a personal relationship with the teachers, while, teachers wanted to maintain their professionalism and work together.

Parent Preferences	Teacher Preferences
Relationships Practice	Working Together Practice
Working Together Practice	Relationships Practice
Approachability Practice	Sharing Information Practice
Sharing Information Practice	Honesty Practice
Honesty Practice	Approachability Practice

Table 1.5 Preferred Collaborative Practices as Defined by Parents and Teachers

The table above exemplifies the preferred collaborative practice of parents and teachers in these schools. In contrast, the table below represents the leading non-collaborative practices as viewed by parents and teachers (see Table 1.6). Firstly, parents identified teachers employing the *unapproachability* and the *lack of information* practice which led to their less than satisfactory experiences. Conversely, teachers stated that parents employed the *lack of support* or the *emotive behaviour* practice which lead to their less than satisfactory experiences of parent-teacher interactions. This current study revealed that parents and teachers held different views (preferences) on what practices resulted in their non-collaboration.

Parent Preferences	Teacher Preferences
Lack of Support Practice	Lack of Support Practice
Unapproachability Practice	Emotive Behaviour Practice

Table 1.6 Non-Collaborative Practices as Defined by Parents and Teachers

Parents noted that teachers employed the *unapproachability* and *lack of information* practices, whilst teachers stated that parents demonstrated *emotive behaviour* and *lack of support* practices. In essence, parents wanted teachers who were not stand offish and teachers wanted parents who were not aggressive towards them. The findings from this study recommend that educational providers, including universities, offer coursework on the

preferred collaborative and non-collaborative practices of parents and teachers. This will generate quality teachers who can engage with parents/carers and enhance student achievement levels.

Overall, the stories collected from the parents and teachers highlight that they both described the nature of their interactions as being either collaborative or non-collaborative. Each discussed the activities that underpinned these practices from their own perspectives as contributing to fostering positive parent-teacher interactions or providing less than satisfactory experiences. In addition, these types of interactions resulted in positive or less than satisfactory outcomes for the students. Finally, parents and teachers held different views (preferences) on what practices constituted satisfactory and/or less than satisfactory experiences. These factors were identified as impacting on parent-teacher interactions, thereby, expanding the body of knowledge on parent-teacher partnerships, parent-teacher relationships, and outcomes afforded to students.

This study suggests that people who have a career, or are about to embark on a career, as a teacher need to be made aware of these collaborative and non-collaborative practices. By knowing what practices lead to successful interactions (conversely, what practices lead to unsuccessful interactions), parents and teachers will be able to work more effectively as partners in education. Likewise, when teachers and pre-service teachers understand the positive outcomes of their interactions, then student performance levels can be enhanced academically, behaviourally and socially. The findings from this research strongly recommend professional learning opportunities on these practices, activities, outcomes and views (preferences) in order for educators to satisfy the government's 'Policy for Schools' including: Teacher Quality, and Engaging Parents in Education, as well as aspects of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*.

A conceptual model has been developed from the findings to illustrate the dichotomy of parent-teacher interactions. Figure 1.1 encapsulates the discoveries made from this study.
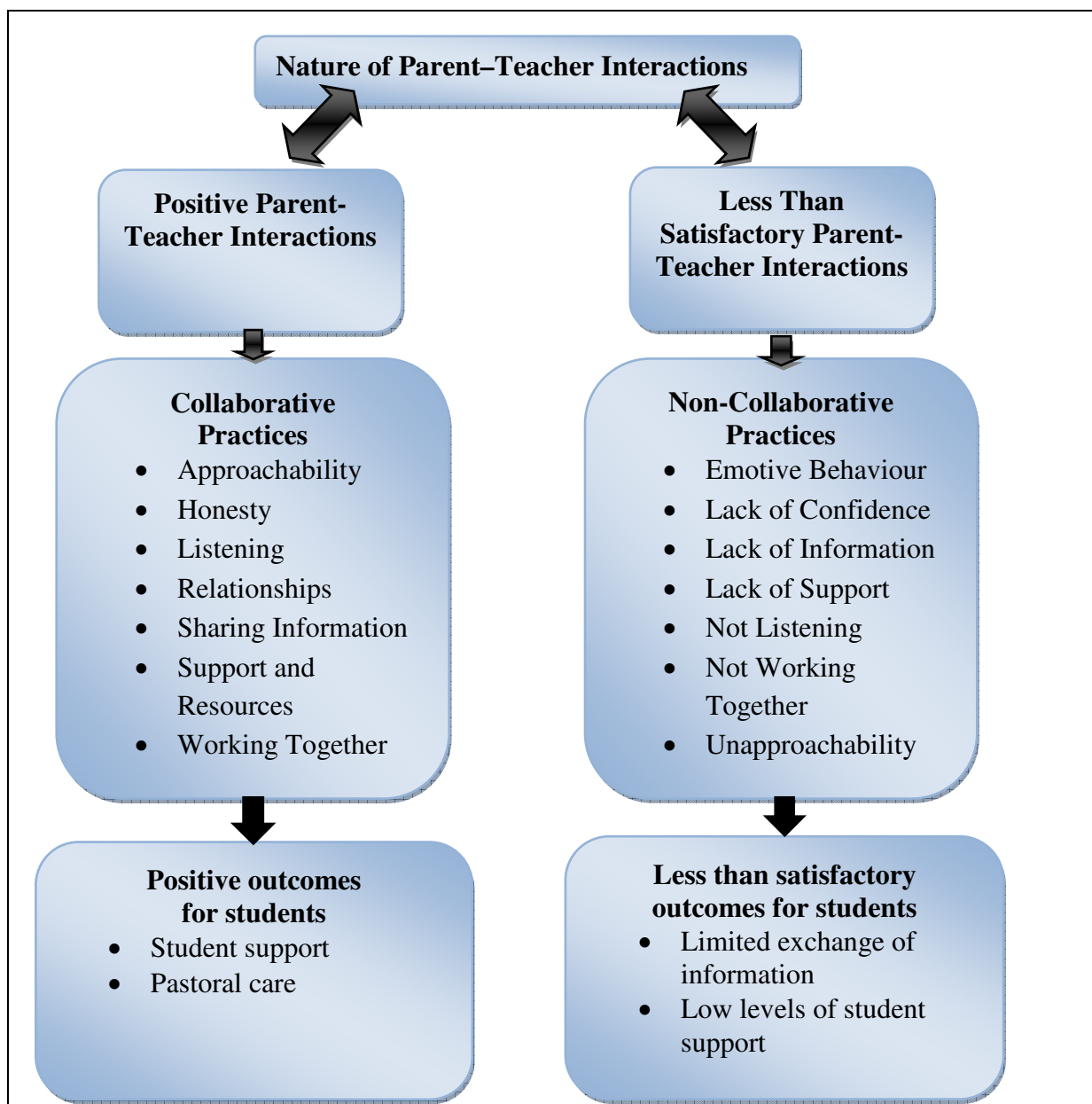
Figure 1.1 The Nature of Parent-teacher Interactions

Conclusion

The purpose of the present research was to identify factors that impacted on parent-teacher interactions in terms of them being positive and/or less than satisfactory experiences. Four conclusions were derived from the current research:

- Parent-teacher interactions were either collaborative or non-collaborative.

- Particular activities underpinned these collaborative and/or non-collaborative practices.

- Specific outcomes were afforded to students as a result of these collaborative and non-collaborative practices

- Parents and teachers had different views (preferences) on what collaborative or non-collaborative practices constituted positive or less than satisfactory experiences of their interactions.

The current research suggests that if teachers, including pre-service teachers, understand the many facets of collaborative and non-collaborative practices then teacher quality and parental involvement in schools will likely increase. Furthermore, the current research finds that AITSL's (2011) Standards can be supported by teachers and undergraduate teachers undergoing professional development on the practices identified from this study that resulted in satisfactory experiences of parent-teacher interactions and positive outcomes for students.

In conclusion, by understanding the findings from this study, schools can potentially support the request for "Teachers [to] demonstrate respect and professionalism in all their interactions with students, colleagues, parents/carers and the community. They are sensitive to the needs of parents/carers and can communicate effectively with them about their children's learning" (Australian Institute for Teacher and School Leadership (AITSL), 2011, Standards, Professional Engagement, Overview, para 2).

Michelle Ellis undertook this research as part of her Doctorate of Philosophy.

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