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Power relations within the homework process

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Contents

References

Tables Chart

Abstract

This research focuses on aspects of parental involvement in homework and the differing power relations which homework uncovered within the family. It is concerned with the deeper implications of homework through exploring the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs of teachers and/or parents and/or pupils and to consider who really is in control of the homework process, the perceived and actual roles of the participants, the resistances to homework and the possible changing social factors which impinge on homework.

This thesis offers a unique contribution to the homework discourses as it uses a qualitative approach, drawing on an extended version of the French and Raven (1959) conceptualisation of power as a means of interrogating the data, by labelling certain attitudes, behaviours and beliefs, to seek explanations of the patterns of power. These patterns of power are exposed through the family's story of their engagement, or not, in the homework process.

The notion of engaging pupils in the learning process is at the heart of many of the recent educational initiatives, arising from the National debate on Education (2002). At the heart of these new initiatives is the notion of learners being actively involved in the learning process, in and out of the classroom to encourage them to take responsibility for their learning.

A number of implications for pupils, parents, teachers and the government are considered. These particularly relate to the effective practices of teachers and parents as a means of preventing the pupils from controlling the homework process and to the government to consider appropriate and effective means of ensuring that all concerned are engaged in conducting homework which is interesting, stimulating and motivating.

Acknowledgements

1.   Introduction

This research focused on aspects of parental involvement in homework and the differing power relations which homework uncovered within the family. Barber (1986) suggested that homework is easy to impose and inexpensive to implement and that this may be the reason why the cry for "more homework" rears its head every decade or so. However, the question still remains as to its satisfactory value, its applicability and the opportunities it offers for students to be motivated and stimulated to learn.

My initial interest in homework started when, in 1993, I became a Principal Teacher of Home Economics in a department which required significant change. My original concern was to restructure the curriculum to provide courses which were interesting, stimulating and motivating to engage the pupils fully in the learning process. Further to this I wished to prepare homework which, I believed, would help reinforce learning. After consultation with the department and having researched differing possibilities, we devised a system which contained a recipe sheet, an information sheet and an applicable homework sheet for each lesson in a self-contained booklet. This system ensured that all pupils had the information available to enable them to complete the homework. We were pleased and proud of the system, which was incorporated into all courses, continually revising and updating as required.

I felt that parental involvement could be beneficial, particularly as a surreptitious means of informing parents about the work of the department and therefore my interest was sparked when I heard about parent prompts being used in the Mathematics department. This, I believed, offered me an opportunity for parental involvement. I introduced subject specific parent prompts into homework in an attempt to make it more interesting and stimulating. Although I am no longer part of the department, their success is evident as they are still used by the department today.

As a reflective practitioner, I was always looking for ways to improve my own practice and the provision within the department. I wholeheartedly believed that the pupils' voices were an excellent source. After talking to the pupils, I became aware of the restrictive nature of the system we had devised. Pupils used "*boring*", "*always the same*", "*repetitive*" and "*just fill in the blanks*" to describe our homework. Therefore, I was intent on devising a homework system which would engage the pupils, and hopefully the parents. I was also keen to address their preferred learning styles and/or interests and/or creativity to help them engage in homework but had no experience or knowledge of the type of homework which could fulfil this aspiration. Discussion with the pupils helped me develop what I considered to be innovation homework, which offered the opportunity for pupils to express themselves creatively. This took the format of an extended piece of work, set against specific learning intentions and success criteria, but which allowed them the freedom to present the facts in their chosen format, for example, a poem, a crossword, a puzzle, a cartoon, etc.

The notion of engaging pupils in the learning process is at the heart of many of the recent educational initiatives, arising from the National debate on Education (2002), that is, A Curriculum for Excellence (2004), Ambitious Excellent Schools (2004) and the Assessment is for Learning Development programme (2002). A Curriculum for Excellence (2004) clearly set out the 7 principles of challenges and enjoyment, breadth, progression, depth, personalisation and choice, coherence and relevance and I was exciting at the prospect that homework would be seen as having a part to play in the principle of challenge and enjoyment. These developments offered me an incentive to reconsider aspects of homework, as I wished to look at the deeper implications of homework through exploring the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs of teachers and/or parents and/or pupils.

Ambitious Excellent Schools (2004) clearly outlines the government's intention to provide the best education for all through offering new choice, space and time for teachers to design learning to suit the needs of young people. Ambitious Excellent Schools (2004) promotes

better, more flexible parental involvement in their children's learning by providing guidance for parents and schools on how parents can best support their children's learning. This was news I certainly welcomed! This recognition is increasing rapidly and has led to the formation of varying associations, for example: The Parents in Education Research Network, Home/School Councils, National Federation of Parent–Teacher Associations, Scottish School Boards Association and The Scottish Network for Parental Involvement in Children's Learning. All are concerned with the promotion and dissemination of research and its application of the roles, functions and participation of parents, families and carers in their children's education in the home, in school and in the community. The concept of setting up parental involvement bodies was exciting to me. I certainly welcomed the prospect of these bodies being able to promote and disseminate research to assist teachers to make homework more interesting, exciting and encouraging, helping engagement in the homework process. The government's commitment has resulted in several initiatives being set up, for example Parental Involvement co-ordinators with Learning and Teaching Scotland, Parentzone and Parents as Partners in Learning. However, as a practising educationalist, I question whether or not this has, as yet, had an impact on the involvement of parents in the homework process.

Learners being actively involved in the learning process, in and out of the classroom, is at the heart of the Assessment is for Learning Development programme (2002). It is my hope that, well crafted and applicable homework activities would encourage pupils to take responsibility for their learning. These new developments galvanised me to consider carrying out research into homework, from the teachers', pupils' and parental perspectives and to consider who really is in control of the homework process, the perceived and actual roles of the participants, the resistances to homework and the possible changing social factors which impinge on the homework process.

For these reasons, I decided to carry out research into the discourses surrounding homework, the nature of homework as experienced by the pupils and parents and to explore the power relations at play in the homework process. This thesis offers a unique contribution to these discourses as it uses a qualitative approach, drawing on an extended version of the French and Raven (1959) typology, to explore aspects of homework within the context of power. To give focus to the research, I decided to locate it in a first year cohort of the secondary school in which I taught. The secondary school was a large comprehensive, in a semi-rural location, with over 1300 pupils. As I wished to obtain pupil and parental perspectives and maintain a focused approach, I decided to survey the parents of the identified year group. I narrowed the focus further by conducting five family conferences. These were carried out in the family home where they were invited to respond to open-ended questions which explored their attitudes, behaviours and beliefs about homework. The family conference facilitated opportunities to view the differing power relations within the family structure.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature associated with homework and confirms the view that much of the research has taken place in America, with a limited amount in the United Kingdom and even less in Scotland. The chapter focuses on existing research associated with the nature of homework, for example, time spent on homework and its possible links to attainment, the purposes of homework and the effectiveness of homework. A dearth of research material on teachers' and/or pupils' and/or parental attitudes, behaviours and beliefs associated with various aspects of homework was identified, although research from the 1990's highlighted a certain amount of student dissatisfaction with the present system of homework.

Chapter 3 describes the research design. This was located within a social constructionist framework where meaning is not discovered but constructed Crotty (1998). Throughout, I sought to be consistently constructionist, putting all understandings on the same footing. A

theoretical perspective of interpretivism enabled me to explore and understand the research topic, exploring the differing perspectives of the participants by gaining access to their experiences and perceptions by listening to them and observing them. Data was collected in a three dimensional framework, namely 188 pupil questionnaires, 68 parental questionnaires and five family conferences.

Chapter 4 describes the data analysis framework. Throughout, my constructionist epistemology and theoretical perspective of interpretivism made a difference to how all the data was analysed. Quantitative data was recorded through the use of Excel spreadsheets which offered opportunities for using formulae to construct meaning from the data through looking for possible linkages and interrelationships. The family conferences were analysed using a four step process, based on a combination of approached suggested by Cresswell (1998) and Radnor (2002) and the qualitative data analyse programme "Nudist". Careful "winnowing" of the family conference data helped identify six topics, namely nature of homework identities, relationships, manipulation or conformity, control, need or desire.

Throughout the family conferences, the social groupings of the family offered opportunities to explore and uncover the diversity of power relations at play within the context of the discussion surrounding homework. Although differing frameworks exist for exploring power relations, I decided to use the French and Raven's (1959) conceptualisation of power as a means of interrogating the data, by labelling certain attitudes, behaviours and beliefs, to seek explanations of the patterns of power. These patterns of power are exposed through the family's story of their engagement, or not, in the homework process.

Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, considers the main findings of the thesis and the implications for professionalism, policy and practice. These challenge schools and teachers to be engaged in more effective and conductive partnerships between school and home with respect to aspects associated with homework and for the parents to be more proactive in

their partnerships with schools. It challenges the government to consider more proactive and less paperbound methods of engaging parents in the learning process, whilst supporting the notion of disbanding homework unless it is constructed to take account of individual preferences, offering stimulating, interesting and motivating activities to support learning.

2.   Literature review on homework

2.1   The picture of homework

"Like mowing the lawn or taking the rubbish out, homework seems to be a fact of life"

<div align="right">(Kravolec and Buell 2000: 4)</div>

Homework can be defined as learning which takes place outside the context of formal classroom teaching, which is primarily the responsibility of the learner, and which is relevant to the teachers' curricular objectives (MacBeath and Turner 1990).

The research on the topic of homework appears to indicate a picture of fragmentation where much of the literature is inconclusive or at least the very least "muddy" and therefore requires further clarification into the multifaceted nature of the topic. Due to the diversity of the research carried out and the complex nature of homework, I felt it incumbent upon me to focus this literature review on specific aspects of homework. These are a generic introduction to the topic of homework; the purpose of homework; the nature of homework; time spent on homework; the effectiveness of homework and policy perspectives.

It was important for me to remain open minded to a subject which can be described as neither glamorous nor at the heart of what learning is all about. For several decades, the multi-faceted nature of homework has been one of those perennial problems of educators, parents and students alike. However, much of the research has taken place in America, with a limited amount in the United Kingdom and even less in Scotland where the main protagonists have been Rutter et al (1979), Holmes and Croll (1989), MacBeath and Turner (1990, 1991) and MacBeath (1993, 1994, 1996), although the American research could, nevertheless, provide us with a useful mirror image to the Scottish situation and/or form a basis for investigation. Some research seems to suggest that homework, when well

conceived, carefully crafted and effectively and/or consistently executed, can make a positive contribution to both the emotional growth and cognitive development of students, (Cooper 1989a and b; Wiesenthal et al 1997). Much of the research on homework has typically focused on the main characteristics of its purposes; the time spent on homework; the type and quality of homework given, and its beneficial effects on learning and attainment. In contrast with this there appears to be a dearth of research material on topics associated with the multi-faceted nature of homework. This multifaceted nature covers a diversity of topics, for example: the school's homework policy where strategies and procedures are established; teachers' attitudes, behaviours and beliefs about the various aspects of homework for example: homework behaviours of when to give it, how much, what kind and what to do with the homework once completed, (collect it, mark it, return it?).

Paschal et al (1984: 104) expressed the view that much of the voluminous literature, both theoretical and empirical, tends to offer diametrically opposing opinions and that surprisingly few methodologically adequate studies have been conducted. On the positive side researchers have focused on two main purposes for assigning homework: (1) the "instructional rationale" which is based on the belief that "practice makes perfect" and that it reinforces and refines previously taught materials, while offering students exposure to new ideas, (2) the "non-instructional rationale" which is based on the belief that benefits include strengthening the ability of students to work independently and to foster good work habits is advantageous (Wiesenthal et al 1997). Since learning is apparently enhanced, students who do their homework are likely to participate more in class and to score higher in tests (Wiesenthal et al 1997). Wildman (1968) and Wiesenthal et al (1997) argue that whenever homework crowds social experience, outdoor recreation and creative activities and whenever it usurps time devoted to sleep, it is not meeting the basic needs of children and adolescents. Echoing these sentiments, LaConte (1981) suggests that homework may undermine good attitudes and strong attainment motivation. Cooper (1989a and b and

2001) carried out an extensive review of the homework literature and suggest that homework probably involves the complex interaction of more influences than any other instructional device.

We cannot change the fact that we live in the midst of an economic, technological and sociological earthquake (Nixon 1995: 215) where accountability for one's actions is high on the agenda. This has never been more so than in education today. The National Debate on Education (2002) sought the opinions of a wide spectrum of consumers of education as a means of raising attainment and improving standards. This resulted in the development and launch of a raft of initiatives, namely, the Assessment is for Learning Development programme (2002), Ambitious Excellent Schools (2004), and the values, purposes and practices set out in A Curriculum for Excellence (2004). These show the importance successive governments have placed on improving the performance of students and practitioners but are also portrayed as a means of meeting government responsibilities whilst opening schools to the forces of marketization and providing information for "consumers" (Helsby 1999). In addition, rhetoric guided and fostered by successive governments has led to accountability, a more questioning stance on the part of both clients and representatives of government (Becher 1994), and hence professionalism becoming an issue to which education authorities, schools and teachers felt obliged to respond. All aspects of the teaching profession are in the public domain and, as such, are under the microscope much more than many professions, e.g. managers of private companies. The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000) serves as a powerful reminder that the improvement and inclusion agendas are high on the government's list of priorities and the voices of the consumers of the service are becoming every stronger with the power given to them by the government. This is evidenced from the National Debate on Education from which A Curriculum for Excellence (2004) arose, stating that the main reason for change was to prepare young people better for lifelong learning and employment, ensuring that assessment supports learning within increased choice. It is hoped that A Curriculum for

Excellence (2004) offers opportunities to be innovative in learning and teaching approaches; to be imaginative in timetabling and organising the curriculum; to be creative in using the new principles to meet the needs of children, young people and the local community. It aims to ensure that the curriculum will be a stimulus for personal attainment and, through the broadening of students' experiences of the world, be an encouragement towards informed and responsible citizenship (A Curriculum for Excellence 2004: 11). The curriculum should encourage high aspirations and ambitions for all. At all stages, learners of all aptitudes and abilities should experience an appropriate level of challenge, to enable each individual to achieve to his or her potential. They should be active in their learning and have opportunities to develop and demonstrate their creativity. There should be support to enable young people to sustain their efforts. This is the essence of the Assessment is for Learning Development programme (2002) which straddles three interlinking aspects of Assessment FOR Learning, Assessment AS Learning and Assessment OF Learning. Assessment FOR Learning, which is concerned with day-to-day classroom interaction and feedback that are focused on the learner and sensitive to his or her individual needs; Assessment AS Learning, where students' participation in assessment and reflecting on their learning helps them to become better learners; and Assessment OF Learning, which is concerned with determining how much individuals or groups have learned, at what level and how well (Assessment, Testing and Reporting 2004: 3). In order for a system to work, these aspects need to complement and support each other, where the learning environment is a place where everyone is learning together, including aspects of practise in the homework process.

British research work carried out in the 1990's on the topic of homework indicated a shift in homework practices towards taking account of the views of students, highlighting among other issues, a certain amount of student dissatisfaction with the present system of homework (MacBeath and Turner 1990; Harris and Rudduck 1994; Warrington and

Younger 1996) which is probably acknowledged by a significant number of practising teachers.

2.2   The Purpose of homework

Cooper (1989b; 2001) offers a list of effects of homework but highlights that the most obvious positive effect of homework is that it will have an immediate impact on retention and understanding Cooper (2001). He also considered that homework can have beneficial effects other than knowledge acquisition as in primary it can help develop good study habits, foster independent learning and responsible character traits (Cooper 2001: 37). MacBeath and Turner (1994) offered fourteen differing and diverse views on the main purpose of homework, collected from students, teachers and parents, for example, allows practice and consolidation of classwork, offers opportunities for individualised work, develops good study skills and provides information for parents. When considering these purposes and the suggested effects of homework established by Cooper (1989b), a pattern emerged of: 1. knowledge acquisition, for example, to allow practice and consolidation of work done in class and to allow assessment of students' progress and mastery of work, 2. foster positive attitudes, for example, to provide opportunities for individualised work, 3. foster habits, for example, to develop good habits and self-discipline and to encourage ownership and responsibility for learning, 4. offering opportunities for parental involvement in homework, for example, to provide opportunities for parental co-operation and support.

2.2.1   The students' perspectives

Research evidence on this aspect is varied, patchy and offers diverse opinions from students, in some cases, questioning the rationale for homework itself and acknowledging that the main purposes of homework were assumed rather than explicitly explored or developed with themselves. Research evidence indicates that homework can be viewed as a

cost-effective instructional device which can be used to diagnose individual learning problems (Cooper 1989b: 91).

In a study carried out by Warrington and Younger (1996) the students criticised the organisation and nature of the homework tasks set and found it difficult to reconcile the demands of homework with other extra-curricular and social activities. This study highlighted the possible resentment of students as one student argued that teachers set homework *"just to annoy you"*; another commented: *"we don't ask to come to school but we have to and then they give us homework to do in our own time. I don't think it's fair"*, whilst several others felt that *"enough work was done in school, and that they should not be expected to work at home as well"* Warrington and Younger (1996: 89). During this research, students offered opinions which are easily recognisable by teachers of "*I don't think we need to have homework. I don't think we should get it. We do enough work, I think, in the lessons and working at school. We do five hours at school, and then, I mean we've had some days where we've had four subjects homework"* (Warrington and Younger, 1996: 90). Critique of the research conducted by Kralovec and Bruell (2000) in America, indicates an agreement with the opinions offered by the students when they question the notion of "is homework healthy?" Kralovec and Bruell (2001) observed that recently, homework advocates have shifted their focus from homework's questionable impact on student attainment to homework's alleged importance in developing traits like self-discipline and time management.

Warrington and Younger (1996) found that many students gave the impression that the volume of homework, the general dullness and lack of interest of many of the tasks, and the competing demands from other subjects and other activities, meant that they were overwhelmed and therefore simply could not cope, which resulted in homework not being completed due to varying stresses, strains and competing pressures. The boredom and frustration expressed by students in their research evidence led them to suggest that schools

12

need to re-evaluate their approaches to homework and to consider exactly what is essential (Warrington and Younger 1996). As a member of the educational fraternity within the secondary sector, this story is easily recognisable, particularly to those teachers in the classroom. At the opposite end of the spectrum, some students acknowledged the value of homework as giving them an opportunity to consolidate classwork (MacBeath and Turner 1996; Warrington and Younger 1996), encourage academic pursuits thereby promoting independent learning, (Walberg et al 1985; MacBeath 1996; Warrington and Younger 1996), and develop perseverance and self-discipline (Warrington and Younger 1996). Consideration of some of these aspects is now perhaps beginning to permeate the classroom through the Assessment is for Learning Development programme, although teachers embrace the programme at their own point of need as classroom methodology is not compulsory. If students are being encouraged to actively participate in the learning process, then the use of effective feedback of their learning is essential to help inform judgements, choices and decisions about learning and to inform their planning for improvement, hence making them more independent learners. A range of empirical evidence shows that students prefer set criteria to enable homework to effectively contribute to the quality of the learning and teaching process, namely:

- Tasks must be realistic and well defined (Warrington and Younger 1996)

- Tasks to be well explained (MacBeath and Turner 1990)

- Tasks to be interesting, varied and set at their individual level of ability (MacBeath and Turner 1990)

- Tasks to be clearly structured into the learning and teaching process (Warrington and Younger 1996)

- Adequate deadlines to be set (MacBeath and Turner 1990)

- Within a reasonable span of time, work dutifully marked and returned, appropriately annotated with encouraging and supportive comments (Warrington and Younger 1996)

All of these factors contribute to the students acknowledging the purpose and worth of homework and the positive contribution that it can make as a very important learning device within the educational sphere. Therefore, if homework forms part of the teaching process, teachers' require to address these factors to encourage students to complete their homework effectively. If teachers ignore these factors then they run the risk of homework forming a barrier to learning and offer it the opportunity to intervene in the learning process and/or family life.

2.2.2   Teachers' perspectives

There is limited definitive research into teachers' perspective of homework carried out within the United Kingdom as most of the research materials emanate from within the United States of America, although the findings may be relevant to educational thinking within Scotland and the UK.

The purpose for which homework is set may vary but it may be assumed that in all, or virtually all cases, it is intended that homework should help students benefit academically by enhancing the quality of the learning and teaching process. Research evidence (MacBeath and Turner 1990; Wiesenthal et al 1997; Weston 1999; Cooper 2001) indicates that a main purpose of homework was to reinforce classroom learning. This was mainly done through increasing their knowledge acquisition, enhancing their motivation, developing good study skills for independent living and utilising a greater diversity of resources. Homework offered the opportunity to extend their knowledge further than classroom activities would allow. Kralovec and Buell (2000) express the view that homework diminishes the interaction between teachers and students, and thus makes it more difficult for teachers to understand what each individual student needs to work on and that, in addition, when work goes home, teachers have little control over who actually does the work. Did the students do their own work? Did they exchange answers with friends

over the phone? Did a relative do the problem for them? This ultimately leaves the teacher in the dark, and therefore they have little understanding of a particular student's academic weaknesses.

As teachers are members of an educational establishment, i.e. a school, aspects of the teacher's perspective will be elaborated further in the school perspective.

2.2.3 School perspective

In a small scale research carried out by Holmes and Croll (1989) they found that schools in which homework is set and checked tend to show an increase in academic attainment in external examinations rather than in schools where this is not so. Such correlations may reflect benefits to individual students of time spent on homework, but they could also be the consequence of numerous external factors, for example: the academic ethos of the school influencing both the emphasis on homework and average levels of performance and/or the natural intelligence of the child and/or the influence of the teacher to be able to explain the concept effectively and/or a parental influence.

Weston (1999) identified homework within schools as an integral part of the learning process as it is the lynch pin to a 3 way partnership involving teachers, students and parents. Homework assignments can be a means by which parents can form impressions about the school/department/teacher as they form the vital link between home and school. Although homework may be seen as an effective communication tool between home and the school, Cooper (1989a: 38) also suggested that homework should be one of several approaches, along with soccer and scouts, to show children that learning takes place elsewhere. Parents protest that assignments are too long, too hard or too easy, too ambiguous. Teachers complain about a lack of training, a lack of time to prepare effective assignments, and a lack of support from parents and administrators. Students complain

about the time homework takes from their leisure pursuits, as well as criticise the organisation and nature of the set tasks (Warrington and Younger 1996: 87).

Although there appears to be some areas of conflict amongst the views of the parents, students and teachers, a commonality of purpose emerges towards the reinforcement of classroom learning to help raise attainment and encourage independent learning for the future as being the main aim of homework (Cooper 1994; MacBeath and Turner 1990; Warrington and Younger 1996; Wiesenthal et al 1997; Weston 1999) and acknowledging that it is an integral part of the learning process, although perhaps set criteria for homework are required to ensure clarity for all consumers. Cooper (2001) acknowledged that the key to ending the battle over homework is communication. It is critically important for all parties to know what others are doing and why. The role of research in forming the homework attitudes and practices of teachers, parents, and policymakers has been minimal. However, it is important to acknowledge that the influences on homework are complex – no simple, general finding proving or disproving its utility is possible. However, research is plentiful enough that a few studies can be found to promote whatever position is desired while the contradictory evidence is ignored. Thus advocates for or against homework often cite isolated studies either to support or refute its value (Cooper 2001).

2.3   Time spent on homework and its possible links to attainment

The form of any causal relationship between time spent on homework and achievement is unlikely to be simple (Holmes and Croll 1989: 44). Unlike characteristics such as ability, family background and/or parental influences, the time a student spends on homework is very flexible depending upon their attitude, motivation, gender, stage of education and/or whole school policy requirements. It will, however, be influenced by decisions a student makes, but will also be influenced by the school and parents (Holmes and Croll 1989: 44).

Most secondary schools, nationally and internationally, acknowledge the expectation that students are required to complete homework, although time spent on homework varies widely (MacBeath and Turner 1990). Cooper (1989) completed an extensive review of issues associated with the topic of homework in America, culminating in the conclusion that the optimum amount of homework varied with the stage of education. For junior high school students attainment continued to improve with more homework until assignments lasted between 1 to 2 hours per night. This is often referred to as the "10 minute rule", i.e. 10 minutes multiplied by the students age level per night. Junior High School pupils in America are aged 11-14 which is similar to middle school in England and first and second year in secondary school in Scotland and therefore direct comparisons can be made. The findings of Cooper (1989) are comparable to the findings of MacBeath and Turner (1990) who established a norm within the Scottish education system in which 9% did no homework; 41% did less than 1 hour; 49% did more than 1 hour and 2% did between 2 and 3 hours each evening. The data pertaining to this research was drawn from students' self-reports, corroborated by very similar parental estimates of time spent on homework from a range of ages across a geographical spread within Scotland but it does raise the question of applicability of establishing quotas of time. However, with the changes in society, it is generally agreed that time has become a precious commodity with a significant number of families having differing work patterns and/or combinations of relationships, for example: having working parents and/or longer working and/or the effects of significant technological advances. As suggested by Kralovec and Buell (2000: 19) the phenomenon is so striking that researchers now talk about "time poverty" and it leaves the question as to where homework fits into this cycle. Cooper (1989b) suggests that if educators and parents expect homework far out of line with these recommendations to result in big gains in students test scores, they are likely to be disappointed and that time spent on homework in the primary sector had very little effect on attainment. Empirical evidence also suggests that there are significant differences between schools and teacher preferences on the amount and type of homework given to students. Regardless of the style of research carried out or

the location, nationally and internationally, the correlation between homework and its associated affects on attainment have been a subject for much debate. Of course correlation does not mean causation: it is just as likely that high attainment causes students to do more homework as vice versa. Therefore, care must be taken not to over interpret results.

The call for greater accountability in the education system, the publication of league tables and the publication of statistics for each school, has increased the focus of examination results and put a pressure on homework, pushing it into the limelight once again. Empirical evidence on the linkage between time spent on homework and attainment is diverse and complex, with some studies showing a clear positive correlation between time spent on homework and attainment whilst others view the linkage in a circumspect manner due to the multifaceted nature of the equation where it is recognised that many other factors may impact on student attainment and/or satisfactory completion of homework. Cooper (1989a: 1994, 2001) and Cooper et al (1999, 2000) explored the time-learning link through reviewing the research evidence of the last three decades. Cooper established that homework has a substantial positive effect on the attainment of high school students and is particularly related to stage of education, although his work highlighted the difficulty of establishing causal connections. Time and attainment may indeed be related, but it is not defined that homework causes attainment, as many other factors may contribute, e.g. teachers may give more homework to higher achieving students, the impact of the parental influence, socio-economic factors, to name but a few. Students' self-reports were used as the basis of much of the research evidence which rely on the accuracy of the data recorded and the integrity of the recorder. These raw variables could lead to misrepresentation of the data which could imply in the data analysis that time spent on homework did not increase attainment. Keith and Cool (1992) identified the use of self-reports as a limitation in their research but they attempted to overcome the problem of establishing causality by developing a causal model when carrying out their path analysis. In this instance, their findings appeared to support the view that time spent on homework by high school students

has a small but meaningful direct effect on attainment. The relationship between correlation and causality raises many questions in the discussion of exploring the issue of the time-learning link. If A and B happen simultaneously, we do not know whether A causes B or B causes A or whether both phenomena occur casually together or are individually determined by another set of variables (Kralovec and Buell 2000: 31). They suggest that social sciences display a distinctive relationship of theory to practice. They suggest that arguments put forward by social scientists could be flawed when they argue that homework improves educational outcomes, as the very theory portrayed may enter into and affect the environment under study. Frequent repetition of the notion that homework is the only way to boost student performance, however defined, cannot help but affect teachers and students. Most of the empirical evidence to date has been of a quantitative nature, analysing crude correlations without teasing out the multifaceted nature of the equation. I believe that the only way to move forward is to isolate other variables from the equation or to conduct in-depth interviews with students and families to consider the learning process itself and role of homework, although the former may be more problematic than the latter.

Kralovec and Buell (2001: 41) quote Piaget's theory that asking children to perform tasks before they are developmentally ready proves counter productive to development. This could be a hidden variable in the empirical evidence reviewed by Cooper (1989a and b, 2001) which shows that the most dramatic influence on the time-learning link and attainment relationship was the stage of education of the student and that a positive relationship is more evident amongst older students than younger students. Over the last 5 decades varying researchers have expressed a similar view but have neglected to inform the discussion about the size of gain established. Barber (1986) offered his belief that the gains have been minimal, especially in comparison to the amount of work expended by teachers and students but it should be remembered that little research has been carried out, within the U.K., on the relationship between time spent on homework and attainment. MacBeath and

Turner (1990) explored time spent on homework but did not consider its correlation to attainment within the Scottish curriculum. Keys and Fernandes (1993) explored time linked to attainment within the English and Welsh curricula, focusing specifically on students aged seven and nine.

In conclusion, both positive (Paschal et al 1984; Walberg et al 1989; Holmes and Croll 1989; Keeves 1995; Beaton et al 1996a and b; Cooper 1989a and b, 1994, 2001; Copper et al 1999, 2000; Glazer and William 2001) and negative (Barber 1986; Kralovec and Buell, 2000) correlations have been found in past research, although positive correlations appear to dominate the research evidence. The major problem appears to be that the results indicate that homework and attainment are inextricably entwined but cannot demonstrate which, if either, causes the other and whether or not other factors may have a more significant impact. It has been suggested by Cooper (1989b) that studies in the past have used poor research designs and that the homework question could benefit greatly from some well-conducted, large-scale studies. Given the richness of thinking and debate on homework, exemplified by the list of its suggested positive and negative effects and the process model, research has been narrowly focused on attainment as an outcome. Only a few studies looked at homework's effect on attitudes toward school and subject matter, with generally negligible results. No studies appear to have explored the non-academic outcomes, for example: study habits or participation in community activities or the effects of socio-economics factors or socio-economic status. Any data on these potential outcomes of homework – really the outcomes that make homework unique – would be better than the evidence we have now (Cooper 1989b: 89).

2.4   **Nature of homework**

Most of the research evidence on this aspect of homework highlights wide variations in the nature of homework and shows a lack of consistency in practice (Hallam and Cowan 1998; MacBeath and Turner 1991; Murphy and Decker 1989). The differing categories, correlated from empirical evidence, appear to indicate the following broad headings of:

- Assignments / projects where students have to research or explore new ideas using a greater variety of sources and perspectives to explore the given question or issue posed.

- Extension work allied to coursework

- Self-contained homework as a discreet piece of work running parallel to classwork

- Finishing off work begun in class

- Preparation for the next lesson

- Revision of classwork or coursework

- Practice of an existing skill

Research evidence suggests that, regardless of the type of homework given, that students completed homework more successfully when the task varied according to the needs of the individual and that learning in school was more varied, imaginative and differentiated than homework (MacBeath 1996). The challenge, therefore, is set for teachers to be more imaginative in the nature of the exercises being set for homework and to consider homework which would engage the students in the homework process through stimulating, interesting and appropriate activities, set at an appropriate level to meet the needs of the individual. It is recognised that, when homework is given in an appropriate format, it can give students an opportunity to apply a concept beyond the controlled conditions of the classroom. As Cooper (1989) and Wiesenthal et al (1997) explain the completion of homework involves a complex interaction of more influences than any other part of the schooling process. Thus homework comes closer to the real-life conditions of working on

ones own, guided by intrinsic motivation, a good proxy for the adult world of more autonomy, work and responsibility. If homework is to fulfil this role then homework assignments could be more effective when they not only supplement the classroom lesson but encourage students to be independent learners through following directions and developing responsibility and self-discipline.

The philosophy that "variety is the spice of life" could be applied to homework to ensure continued stimulation, leading to successful completion of homework. However, from the schools and/or teachers perspective, many could find difficulty in co-ordinating a whole school homework system, across a wide range of autonomous curricular areas, which meets the needs of all. From a student's perspective, and after all they are the consumers, they request homework which is interesting, stimulating and motivating which will engage them in the learning process. MacBeath and Turner (1991) highlight that in secondary schools in Scotland there were quite wide differences in attitudes to homework by subject departments and whole school policies, reflecting patterns of timetabling and differing perceptions of what was "important". MacBeath and Turner (1991) suggested that in some schools, homework practices tended to be the domain of individual departments and/or school policies, often reflective of a traditional hierarchy, whilst in other schools it was seen as important to balance the distribution of homework across the whole range of curriculum areas. Warrington and Younger (1996) observed that the nature of the homework task, the status of the subject, the resources available to support the task and the perceived value of the task by the teacher; all profoundly influenced the students' reactions to their homework. Students were more inclined to respond positively to homework tasks which gave them the opportunity to show individual initiative and/or research where a clear purpose to the task was evident. Giving students the opportunity to research specific areas offers them autonomy, independence and a sense of discovery which can all work in tandem to increase motivation and involvement to give renewed zest for learning where students can react with enthusiasm, commitment and determination (Warrington and Younger 1996).

MacBeath and Turner (1996) carried out a review of the research evidence which indicated a hiatus between classwork and homework and an underlying failure on the part of many schools to think through what that relationship might be. Whilst learning in school had apparently become more varied, more differentiated and more imaginative, learning outside of school seemed to be stuck in a time warp where the tasks lack a quality of thinking as to the needs of the learner. Ronen and Eliahu (1999) carried out research in Israel into simulation-based homework tasks, as offering a means of capitalising on a medium which could encapsulate some of these aspects. As many students spend much of their time watching T.V. or playing with their personal computers or playing computer simulated games, then perhaps simulation-based homework tasks would facilitate opportunities for interesting and stimulating tasks which would build on an existing area of expertise? However, it is acknowledged that, presently, every student's social status may vary, learning styles apply and gender differences may impact on the situation but these will be discussed later in the chapter. The findings of Ronen and Eliahu (1999) reveal that most students in Israel favour using simulation as a home learning tool and find it more interesting and effective than other homework activities. It has to be acknowledged that this study focused on science homework and that simulation-based homework may be more suitable for some curricular areas than others. Ronen and Eliahu (1999) enquired of students if they thought it would be effective in other curricular areas. The research revealed that 50% of the students would always recommend simulation-based homework as it made them spend more time on their homework, although it is interesting to note that about 25% of the students preferred practical and/or didactic homework. The findings of this 25% were significantly correlated with their prior computer experience, especially amongst girls who had little or very little computer experience. Students realised the potential of the simulation-based homework as a source of constructive feedback that enabled them to take more responsibility for their learning. Effective feedback is an important plank of the Assessment is for Learning development programme which

23

acknowledges that learners need to know where they are in their learning, where they are going and how to get there. It purports that the purpose of assessment in education is to provide all stakeholders with sufficiently dependable information and feedback to inform judgements, choices and decisions about learning, and to inform planning for improvement. Black and Wiliam (1998) offer the suggestion that tests and homework exercises can be an invaluable guide to learning, but the exercises must be clear and relevant to learning aims. Feedback should be given to each student for guidance on how to improve, and then each must be given opportunities and help to work at the improvement.

2.5   Effectiveness of homework

The effectiveness of homework is an abstract concept which is difficult to define and subsequently relates to the "muddy" topic of homework. Research in this area is very limited, with very diverse views expressed on the topic.

MacBeath and Turner (1990); Hallam and Cowan (1998); Black and Wiliam (1998) considered homework's impact on the learning process especially when teachers were diligent and constructed their written comments thoughtfully. Black and Wiliam (1998: 9) suggested that feedback to any student should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she could do to improve, hence avoiding comparisons with other students. Research has shown that marks and grading do not help children learn and in fact can impede the learning process by blocking the student's ability to identify areas of improvement in the learning process. Quality feedback can result in significant improvement in learning, whilst peer and self assessment offers students the opportunity to become successful learners, effective contributors, responsible citizens and confident individuals who value the opinions of others.

Black and Wiliam (1998) considered the importance of the dialogue between students and a teacher. They suggest that it should be thoughtful, reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding, and conducted so that all students have an opportunity to think and to express their ideas. MacBeath and Turner (1990) highlighted that homework should be seen as a collaborative venture that gives the students a sense of ownership. However, students appear to be astute at determining the teachers who produce constructive and consistent feedback and therefore were selective in the completion of their homework. Harris and Rudduck (1994) identify the need for teachers to be effective in consistently maintaining an expected schedule of homework, explaining to students and parents that when homework is well managed it should help to advance learning. When teachers provide specific suggestions on how the homework can be improved and discuss problems and remedies, then homework was found to be a useful exercise in the learning process, although MacBeath and Turner (1990: 55) acknowledge the practical difficulties of giving individual feedback. Hallam and Cowan (1998) recommend that much more research is required into the most effective types of homework but determine that teacher expectation is one of the decisive factors in motivating students to complete homework. A healthy common agenda of respect can develop between the student and the teacher by utilising both sides of the feedback agenda where praise is recognised as being genuine, impacting on the student's inclination to complete their homework effectively. However, it has to be acknowledged that there can be several stumbling blocks for students in completing their homework, for example: homework overload can occur as each curricular area works autonomously which can lead to students feeling satiated with academic information (Cooper 2001). This can lead to physical and emotional fatigue and/or the students personal circumstances and/or the student's desire for social experiences as homework can sometimes deny them access to leisure time and community activities of sport, television, computer games, and/or part-time employment which can be beneficial to students as they can learn important lessons, both academic and non-academic, (Cooper 2001: 35). Whenever homework crowds out social experience, outdoor recreation and creative

activities, and whenever it usurps time devoted to sleep, it is not meeting the basic needs of children and adolescents, (Wilderman 1968; Kralovec & Buell 2000). This coupled with diverse and multi-faceted socio-economics factors within the family, for example: an unstable home life and/or a lack of money and/or busy parents etc can impinge upon the type, quantity and quality of help offered in the homework process. Parents who demonstrate a positive role model and a valuing of education appear to have a crucial role to play in encouraging their children in the homework process. However, Cooper (2001) suggests that parental involvement can often lead to parental interference which can lead to confusion for the student, particularly when methodologies differ, which can lead to the acquisition of undesirable character traits. Acknowledgement has been made to the multifaceted nature of the homework process and therefore it must be remembered that each of these factors can be interrelated and enmeshed differently for every circumstance and/or family but each could impinge and impact on any student at any time of their academic life.

2.6 Policy perspective

Policy is everywhere, at every level. The concept of policy both explains and validates the action: it explains what people are doing, and it makes it appropriate for them to do it. So it is not simply a descriptive term, it is a concept in use, and understanding policy means understanding the way in which practitioners use it to shape action (Colebatch 1998).

Colebatch (1998) suggests that policy makers develop the policy which implies a settled, considered choice, whilst other professionals implement the policy. This can cause tension between the policy makers and the teachers because one has to implement what they have not constructed, which can sometimes lead to the implementers looking for holes in policy, thereby creating possible tension. Policy is the choice which decision-makers have made and they are clearly set out so that everyone knows them (Colbatch 1998: 8). The plethora of documentation showed the importance that successive governments have placed on

improving the performance of students and practitioners. Such developments have been portrayed as important to educational effectiveness and improvement, and are also there to meet government responsibilities whilst opening schools to the forces of marketization and providing information for "consumers", i.e. parents (Helsby 1999: 39). There is a tension in government policy between the "crusade for standards", which requires schools to focus on their "core business" of curriculum delivery and a broader social inclusion agenda which implies a more extended community role for schools (Ball 1998). Although there are points of congruence between these agendas, they also create significant dilemmas for schools. The volume of recent documents pertaining to raising standards appears to confirm this. Policy could therefore be considered like a pebble being thrown into a pond, where the ripples constantly extend in ever widening circles. Everyone involved in the educational sphere feels the impact of education policies. There is also recognition that the centralised prescription of the curriculum is impeding moves towards a new professionalism amongst teachers.

As detailed earlier there is presently, within Scotland, a plethora of new policy initiatives being implemented by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) which will impact on learning and teaching, although not specifically relating to homework. At present the philosophy is to lay a strong foundation of the "how", i.e. the methodologies of the profession and therefore, at the implementation point of 2007 the "what", i.e. the curriculum will embed naturally into place. Unfortunately, the practising teacher has the ultimate responsibility and is accountable for trying to meet the aims as laid down in these policies. The term "accountability" has many and varying definitions but for the purposes of this study it will be taken to relate specifically to the obligation of professionals, individually and collectively, to justify their actions and decisions to legitimate audiences (Becher 1994). Legitimate audiences can be categorised as being the Senior Management Team or department (collegial), parents and students (moral) and the education authority, (contractual or political). There is a general consensus of opinion that the

contractual/political accountability is growing in strength and significance (Becher 1994), which is demonstrated by the continual stress and pressure placed on the profession to raise standards and improve student performance. The general public are constantly being invited, by the media, to participate in a discourse pertaining to aspects of education and to share in the continual debate and concern over "falling standards", "failing teachers" and inadequate accommodation. The volume of press coverage appears to engender an admiration for the determination of governments to improve the "quality" of education and to publicly pillory the teaching profession. Presently, the limelight is on the curriculum and associated methodologies but the topic of homework is sitting on the horizon, waiting its turn for the media circus and political debate to turn in its direction. Nixon (1997) suggests that learning is active and pressing and invariably involves change, which is why its most significant outcomes can never be pre-specified with certainty. A consequence of conceptualising learning in this way is that students' motivation becomes a major pedagogical concern. If motivation is seen not as a precondition of learning but as a vital and active constituent of learning, then student motivation itself becomes central to the task (Nixon 1997: 94). We require to alter the purposes and forms of learning to acknowledge that the key to motivating pupils to become more active learners grows out of recognising, valuing, and accommodating the complex and different identities they have as persons. Behaviour, attendance, self-esteem and trust are other factors in the complex nature of improving pupil performance (Stoll & Fink 1996) which could perhaps be addressed through successful homework strategies which engage the pupils in learning.

Policy frequently draws on authority, cascading down through organisations via the principle of "hierarchy". It portrays the principle of hierarchical surveillance where teachers and schools are not trusted to get on with their job but have to constantly strive to prove that they are doing a good job. Ofsted inspections in England noted that, although homework policies existed in schools, there was great diversity in quality from the well conceived to the non-existent, which is reflective of the published HMIe reports for

educational establishments in Scotland. Most aimed to emphasise the link between study and attainment; consolidation of classroom learning; information on the guidance student should receive; the procedures for marking and returning homework; monitoring procedures; frequency statements per year group and procedures for managing the homework process, (Zeigler 1986; Weston 1999).

A key factor in determining responses to imposed reforms is the level of our "professional confidence" (Helsby 1999: 173). We have to be confident in our abilities as professionals and show that we appreciate the moral situation within which we operate, have an understanding of the complexity of the decisions which we take and an overall sense of responsibility for our actions. Helsby (1999) suggested that as long as the government remains dependent upon teachers to translate their policies into practice, then teachers will retain a degree of freedom in their day-to-day work and therefore hopefully retain a degree of their professional autonomy. However, in the homework process autonomy appears to lie in the domain of the school, where each school is required to formulate their own policy without the constraints of government or local authority imposed policy. Research in America suggests that homework policy guidelines are an effective means in ensuring that homework is an effective teaching tool and that the guidelines serve as a starting point for discussions about homework (Cooper 2001).

MacBeath and Turner (1990) and Weston (1999) suggest that when establishing a homework policy and associated procedures, the following examples of good practice should be incorporated into the development:

- Consultation should be widespread

- Policy should be clear

- Policy should be disseminated effectively to all concerned in the homework process

- Leadership should be provided from the top

- Guidance should be given on managing time

- Systems should be developed for managing homework, e.g. time allocations, procedures for collecting and returning work and recording marks

- Procedures should be developed for ensuring compliance

- Procedures should be developed for motivating students

- Resources should be provided, where necessary

- Monitoring procedures should be developed to review effectiveness

Warrington and Younger (1996) offered the student's perspective of homework whereby they considered an emerging theme of a lack of co-ordinated planning across areas of the curriculum, resulting in an overwhelming burden for students. They found that teachers/departments worked autonomously when distributing homework and therefore had no conception of the holistic picture of student workload. Many teachers, it appeared, expected students to give their subject priority without taking other commitments into account (Warrington and Younger 1996: 91). This pointed to a need for schools to plan homework demands effectively and coherently across subject departments when constructing a whole school homework policy. It raises the question as to whom the policy is constructed to benefit. Is it the answer to the accountability factor? Is it a justification and/or abdication of responsibility? It raises the question of how the homework practices, organised by the teacher and/or school, impact on family life and whether or not there is clarity of thought associated with the homework process? Warrington and Younger (1996: 87) quote Wooton (1992) when he points out that there is often a marked difference between what school policy says should happen and what actually happens in practice, with schools' approach to the homework problem often representing "*yet another triumph of hope over experience*".

There is also evidence that the development of partnerships imposes strains on schools, which have to manage such initiatives alongside other priorities (Ball 1998) in this time of innovation fatigue. More fundamentally, the literature demonstrates an underlying power imbalance between education professionals and parents (Martin 1996; Vincent and Tomlinson 1997). Partnership takes place very much on terms dictated by the former, with the consequent marginalization of the latter. There was little indication in the literature as to how this issue might be addressed (Ball 1998) and even less about how it might be addressed with respect to homework. Hopefully, this thesis raises the awareness of the issue of parental participation with respect to homework and explored the perceptions of all involved in the process. Building on the work of Vincent and Tomlison (1997) and West et al (1998), I explored the possibilities of actively involving parents in the learning process through their involvement with homework. Exploring how parents perceived homework issues, enabled me to gain an understanding about the nature of the parental interest in homework and to examine, both critically and cynically, the possible pedagogical benefits.

3.   Methodology

"EDUCATION =   school learning + home learning + community learning"

(Macbeth 1989: 3)

3.1   Aims of research and research questions

This research aimed to explore the issue of parental participation in homework, a flimsy construct which has not been fully addressed by policy or research but which is expected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. There was a need to collect empirical evidence on how the different parties construed the notion of parental participation and their perception of the best approach to this. I was also interested in how homework uncovered the differing power relations at play within the dynamics of family life.

Research questions

1. What constitutes the nature of the homework?

2. To what extent does homework uncover differing facets of the child's and/or mother's and/or father's relationships and to what extent does this feature in the dynamics of the homework process within the family?

3. To what extent do the differing identities of the family members affect the homework process?

4.   To what extent do strategies of resistance to the homework process affect family life?

5. To what extent do differing members of the family control the homework process, how is control achieved and are there any possible manifestations and/or consequences of this?

3.2 Research methodology / design

3.2.1. The "site"

The education system can be viewed as an organised entity within the structure of society and which also forms part of my social world. I explored the position of parental involvement with respect to homework within the raising attainment genre in my own educational establishment. Whilst I acknowledge that this gave me a small "snap shot" of a bigger picture, I felt that locating it within one educational establishment gave me the advantage of depth, although the disadvantage of a lack of generalisability. However, the diversity of the school population within my own educational establishment facilitated a good cross-section. My objective was not to give definitive answers but rather to make known my findings with suggestions which could perhaps bring about improvements in practice, whilst perhaps effecting a change in outlook for the participants, regardless of location. Challenging schools' limiting beliefs about what they can achieve is at the heart of what school effectiveness and school improvement is all about (Macbeth 1989). By choosing to locate the data collection within my own educational establishment, I acknowledged that it offered some benefits and some disadvantages, but I decided that the former outweighed the latter. The main benefits were that I had access to multiple sources, without the added conflict of external factors confusing the empirical evidence, offering opportunities for a high return rate of the questionnaires. The size of the individual year groups offered ample participants within the one age range, whilst accepting that I would be known within the establishment and that generalisability would be extremely difficult as each school is unique in many aspects. I chose to carry out my research with first year

pupils as they were at the interface between primary and secondary education. The curriculum at that stage had more flexibility to facilitate their involvement and I believed that they would be more willing to participate in the research process.

3.2.2. The Research Process

I originally planned to gather empirical evidence in a three-dimensional framework, (i.e. questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and family conferences) from a range of sources i.e. senior management, curricular areas, colleagues as parents, pupils and parents, to provide me with a wide range of views and/or opinions on how effectively this issue can connect to the learning process to help raise pupil attainment. Although I acknowledge that all these participants could have invaluable insights and perceptions into the varying issues associated with the topic, I quickly abandoned this idea as I realised that I required a narrower focus. On reflection, it may have been advantageous to conduct additional family conferences and obtain less quantitative data as, in the end, I found the family conferences to be much richer. However, I believe that I originally focused on quantitative data as a "comfort blanket" because I felt confident in my ability to be able to analyse this type of data robustly and because of my positivist orientation. In contrast, I felt a lack of confidence and uncertainty in my ability to analyse the qualitative data effectively. However, although I felt uncertain and unsure, I realised that the qualitative data afforded me a much more interesting and unique opportunity to explore the power relations which may be uncovered through the discussion about homework.

It can be said that people view the world differently, depending on their circumstances at any given time. Schon (1987) states that the world is a messier place than we actually think that it is. With this in mind, I realised that with so many different perspectives from differing realities that the picture would be considerably "muddy", as each can perceive it

differently depending upon where they are located in the "plot". It was my job as a researcher to try to understand these different perspectives.

The research design was located within a social constructionist framework where meaning is not discovered but constructed Crotty (1998), hopefully through the interconnections and linkages collected from the participants. Truth or meaning came into existence in and out of my engagement with the participants and of the interaction between the participants and their world, developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty 1998). I required to be conscious of the reality that different people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon, for example time spent on homework, is relative. This was important as social constructionism emphasises the hold our culture has on us as it shapes the way we see things (even the way in which we feel) and gives us a quite different view of the world. The shaping of minds by culture is welcomed as it makes us human and endows us with the freedom we enjoy (Crotty 1998: 52). Different participants viewed the world differently and therefore I required to attempt to detach myself to ensure that I did not pass on my understanding as simply the "truth", although I acknowledge that this was difficult because of my position as a professional. However, having an awareness of this issue hopefully helped me to maintain some distance. Understandings transmitted in this way can gain a place in our views of the world and can take deep root and therefore I had to guard against becoming a victim of "tyranny of the familiar" (Crotty 1998: 59). However, this 'tacit' knowledge that I, as a member of the teaching profession bring to the process of doing research is important and should not, therefore, be discounted through 'detachment'.

I accepted the relativist nature of social constructionism. What is said to be "the way things are" is really just "the sense we make of them" (Crotty 1998: 64). Therefore, I embraced my understandings much more lightly and tentatively and far less dogmatically, seeing

them as historically and culturally affected by interpretations rather than external truths of some kind.

The main aim of an interpretive researcher is to get to grips with the social world, which is fundamentally different from the natural world because in the social world, people have their own intentions, their feelings and emotions, impacted by each other as well as the context in which they live. People can be viewed in society as one of the active agents participating in dynamic changing networks of interaction framed within structural conditions (Radnor 2002: 20). Beck (1979: 12) also captures this spirit when he states that the purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. Since the social sciences cannot penetrate to what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with man's definitions of reality and with the rules he devises for coping with it. While the social sciences do not reveal ultimate truth, they do help us to make sense of our world. What the social sciences offer is explanation, clarification and demystification of the social forms which man has created around him. Everyone may have their own view on what they perceive reality to be, thereby developing differing constructions. Therefore, the interpretive researcher's task is to make sense of the world, to understand it, and by so doing to see what meaning is imbued in that situation by the people who are part of it, thereby gaining an interpretation of the meanings and experiences of the people who function in the cultural web being studied. As Geertz (1993: 5) suggests, man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.

I employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies using the epistemology of social constructionism and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, which enabled me to explore and understand the research topic, exploring the differing perspectives of the participants to establish topics and categories which emerged from the data, examining the

possible linkages and interconnections. Care was required to ensure that I did not make the data say what I wanted it to say and to ensure transparency.

The linkages which were reflected in my research questions were:

- the facets of the relationships between the child, mother and the father and how these play out when completing homework;

- the effectiveness of parental participation in homework;

- the resistances to homework displayed by family members and their effects;

- the advantages and disadvantages of using parents as learning partners in homework.

I collected and analysed data from three differing sources, namely:

- questionnaires from first year pupils;

- questionnaires from the parent(s) of the first year pupils;

- family conferences including the parents and the child;

3.2.3. Data Collection Framework

Brewer (2003) outlines the generally accepted view that method refers to the tools that a researcher might use to gather data, e.g. questionnaire, interview etc and to the techniques by which the collected data are analysed. In this way, methods can be seen to relate to the tool bag from which the researcher selects the most appropriate tool(s) with which to gather and subsequently analyse data.

Crotty (1998: 15) suggests that, whatever research we engage in, it is possible for both quantitative and qualitative methods to serve our purposes, without this being problematic but stresses that the consistency of the epistemological stance is of ultimate importance. Throughout the research process I sought to be consistently constructionist, putting all

understandings on the same footing, i.e. where data was constructed, and none was objective or absolute or generalisable. Therefore, my constructionist epistemology and theoretical perspective of interpretivism made a difference to how the all data was analysed.

3.2.3.1. Questionnaires

I carried out a survey by questionnaire of first year pupils and their parents, to collect basic statistical data associated with homework, for example: the purposes of homework; the influences affecting completion; the perceived benefits of homework, the type(s) of homework preferred by pupils and parents, the frequency of help offered, how the pupils feel about the help received and the barriers to successful completion. These aspects focused primarily on research question 1. Survey by questionnaire had the advantage of reaching a large number of participants but I also required to carefully consider its structure, for example: the layout for ease of completing the questionnaires, the suitability of language and its overall clarity. However, it afforded me the opportunity to explore aspects of the nature of homework from a broad and diverse perspective.

3.2.3.1.1 Pupil Questionnaire

The initial questionnaire was prepared using information drawn from background research of the present literature on homework and existing practitioners' information. I spent a considerable amount of time thinking about the questions to ensure applicability and then prepared a draft questionnaire. This questionnaire was used as a pilot to establish clarity of language, identify areas of ambiguity and areas of difficulty in completing. In an attempt to alleviate the possibility of affecting the cohort group, I carried out the pilot with a group of twenty first year pupils in the secondary school of my friend which was located close by. To ensure consistency, I issued the instructions to the class personally. I kept accurate field notes of the process and used these to inform the re-drafting of the final questionnaire. The

final version of the questionnaire was used to carry out the survey of 210 first year pupils, although careful consideration was required for the distribution. I decided that the easiest access to this number of pupils was when they attended my own department. However, this was further complicated by my personal teaching commitment and by the fact that two registration classes are divided into three practical sets, giving more classes, therefore, I sought the help of the other members of the department. In an attempt to gain consistency of approach, I prepared a crib sheet for the teachers involved as well as organising a collegiate meeting. We met as a group to set clear expectations and parameters on the distribution of the questionnaires. In attempting to ensure successful completion of the pupil questionnaires, the meeting of the group of teachers became of paramount importance, as the teachers were required to distribute and collect the questionnaires in the specific order of the class register from the schools computerised registration system. This enabled me to subsequently correlate the class registers with the collected individual pupil's questionnaires to number each questionnaire individually, thereby clearly identifying them. The high return rate of 89% of the pupil questionnaires was testament to the system.

3.2.3.1.2. Parental Questionnaire

The parental questionnaire was generated from the pupil questionnaire in an attempt to ensure consistency across both. For clarity of understanding and to hopefully gain a more realistic response, I altered the language slightly in some of the descriptors, although the meaning and essence remained constant, for example, the parental descriptor states "makes them independent learners" whilst the pupil descriptor states "makes you work by yourself". The adapted parental questionnaire was used to carry out the survey of parents of first year pupils, acknowledging that I took a risk in not piloting the parental questionnaire as I had no access to the parents in the school where the pupil pilot was carried out. However, given the success with the pupil questionnaire, I was confident that it would suffice.

The parental questionnaires were completed during a first year parents' evening. The organisation of the school's patents evenings was part of my whole school remit, meaning that I was required to carry out other duties on the evening. I sought the help of six sixth year pupils, with whom I had an existing good relationship. We met in advance of the parents' evening to ensure the pupils had clarity in carrying out the survey effectively.

Immediately after the parents registered their attendance, the sixth year pupils politely asked the parents if they would assist in the research process by completing a questionnaire. I believe that these factors facilitated the high return rate of 56% of the parents in attendance. It is acknowledged that frequently parents' who attend are those who are essentially interested in their child's academic progress but it was, nevertheless, an expedient method of collecting the data. Parental permission was sought for their involvement simultaneously with their completion of the questionnaire.

3.2.3.2   Family conferences

When adapting the parental questionnaire, I inserted an additional question asking parents to indicate if they would participate in a family conference in the comfort of their own home. This generated twelve families who indicated their willing to participate further in the research. Subsequently, I sent a covering letter, with an attached pre-paid postcard, requesting the families to identify an appropriate time for the family conference. I hoped this would give me a representative sample of parents/families but acknowledged that I had no control over the responses except that all the families would live in approximately the same locale as they were all sourced from the same secondary school. Of the twelve families, three did not respond, four responded to the postcard with regret that they couldn't be involved for varying reasons, for example work commitments and five responded positively with suggested times. In an attempt to ensure that all participants were well acquainted with the process, and to hopefully alleviate any anxiety, I wrote to the five

families confirming the time and giving them outline information of what to expect of the family conference. The family conferences were carried out using semi-structured interviews and field notes. These offered me the opportunity to explore underlying issues associated with homework, gain an understanding of the family's perspectives of homework and explore the sources of power within each family, primarily focusing on research questions two, three, four and five.

The family conferences, conducted in the family home, afforded me the opportunity of being an observer, a "fly-on-the-wall" within a family context. Pre-determined semi-structured questions stimulated and focused the discussion. It was important to pre-determine the agenda by offering a framework for discussion, to ensure that I obtained meaningful data whilst giving the family an opportunity to freely express their views, share ideas and exchange opinions. The questions were used as a guide only and did not prevent the participants from expressing their views and opinions on other topics, as they arose, thereby allowing the emergence of valuable data.

As I had no past experience in observation and interviewing techniques, I felt the need to plan and pilot the questions carefully, to ensure that I was acquainted with the technology and to ensure that the language I used was appropriate. I hoped this planning would help relieve some of my anxiety, whilst ensuring that I obtained relevant and valid data. I asked a colleague if her family would replicate a family conference and thankfully they agreed. During this pilot stage, I asked a friend to observe this family conference with me in an attempt to hopefully identify possible areas of conflict and/or differing interpretations of events. We each kept notes and conferred later on our findings. I found this to be very useful in building my confidence before carrying out an actual family conference. Before carrying out the family conferences, I ensured anonymity of the questionnaires by not logging any of them onto the Excel spreadsheet, as I wanted to approach the family conferences with an open a mind. I took the decision to not offer the participants an

advance copy of the interview schedule as I did not want the family to discuss the questions in advance and prepare answers.

Each family conference was tape recorded to give me the freedom to concentrate on "field notes". I used the suggestion of "field notes" offered by Simpson and Tuson (1995: 49) to record my observations of actions, gestures etc of the participants. I subsequently used them, in conjunction with the transcriptions, to develop a framework of topics and categories to make the interpretive framework more explicit. During the family conferences I clarified my role as a researcher to the family and distinguished this from my role as teacher. I did not want to be perceived as being "a school spy" but wished to impress upon them the value of their contribution to the research process.

3.2.4. Data Analysis Framework

3.2.4.1 Pupil and Parental Questionnaires

At an early stage in the analysis process, researchers require to organise their data in whatever means is appropriate to them and its planning is a crucial part of the early considerations. Therefore I required to find a means of effectively and efficiently recording data which would enable me to begin to "make sense of the data". As I am very computer literate, I was aware of the advantages that an Excel spreadsheet could offer. Therefore, all questionnaire data were labelled according to the descriptors in each question and recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. The number one was used to record a positive response which facilitated the opportunity to write formulae to explore possible linkages and interrelationships. However, it was important for me to remember that pupils and parents could select descriptors randomly and as frequently as they wished, although subconsciously they may have been making connections between descriptors and/or recognising similarities between descriptors and responding accordingly. I used separate

workbooks to record the results of the pupil and parental questionnaires which offered the opportunity to write formulae across the workbooks and hence look for further possible linkages and interrelationships.

Formulae, as mathematical calculation, were created to facilitate comparisons using combinations of "AND" and "OR" formula. An "AND" formula facilitated the comparison of stated descriptors against other stated descriptors, for example: IF(AND('pupil info'!$C2=1, pupil info'!$T2=1),1,0) to determine the total number of positive responses to both descriptors simultaneously. This formula could be carried out for innumerable comparator descriptors. An "OR" formula facilitated the comparison of similar descriptor, to negate confusion of descriptors, for example: IF(OR('pupil info'!$C2=1, pupil info'!$T2=1),1,0). A combination of "AND" and "OR" formula could be utilised to facilitate comparisons of groupings of cells against other groupings of cells, for example: IF(AND(OR('pupil info'!$C2=1, pupil info'!$T2=1) OR ('pupil info'!$D2=1, pupil info'!$S2=1)),1.0). Using the differing versions of formula, descriptors could be grouped together according to similarities to explore possible interconnections across descriptors and/or questions. Therefore, the use of the Excel programme opened enormous opportunities for using formulae to construct meaning from the data through the interconnections and linkages displayed in the spreadsheet.

3.2.4.2 Family Conferences

Qualitative research concentrates on the study of social life in natural settings. Its richness and complexity means that there are different ways of looking at and analysing social life, and therefore multiple perspectives and practices in the analysis of qualitative data: 'there is variety in techniques because there are different questions to be addressed and different versions of social reality that can be elaborated' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 14). The different techniques are often interconnected, overlapping and complementary, and

sometimes mutually exclusive – 'irreconcilable couples' (Miles and Huberman 1994: 9). Undoubtedly, no consensus exists for the analysis of the forms of qualitative data (Bogdan & Biklen 1992; Miles and Huberman 1994; Wolcott 1994; Cresswell 1998). There are many similar processes, as well as a few different ones suggested for the analytic phase of qualitative research. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that data analysis is not off-the-shelf; rather it is custom built, revised and choreographed by the researcher, whilst Dey (1993: 3) suggests that qualitative researchers "learn by doing". Coffrey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that what links all the approaches is a central concern with transforming and interpreting qualitative data – in a rigorous and scholarly way – in order to capture the complexities of the social worlds we seek to explain. A similar point about the need for scholarly discipline is made by Silverman (1993), whilst Gilbart and Husler (2005) refer to it as the detailed descriptions and analyses of what people say and do. However, this leads critics to claim that qualitative research is largely intuitive, soft and relativistic or that data analysts fall back on the 3 "I"'s – insight, intuition and impression (Dey 1995: 78). Cresswell (1998) suggests that researchers craft each study differently, using analytic procedures that evolve in the field, conforming to a general contour.

Analysing a qualitative interview involves close examination of the information you have collected in order to find an answer to your research questions. Through the voices, feelings, actions, meanings and descriptions of the interacting individuals you explore the interviewees' attitudes, values and beliefs, and their perceptions of their practices. A systematic approach to data analysis helps the researcher to order the data so that it is possible for the researcher to consider them clearly. A systematic approach makes for a consistent, thoughtful ordering (not a mechanistic one), encouraging rigour without rigidity, leading to the researcher being able to give an account of their interpretation as a result of laying out the data in a way that stimulates careful analysis (Radnor 2002). Despite the variety of approaches to data analysis, some writers have sought to identify the common features of qualitative data analysis, e.g. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest a 'fairly

classic set' of 6 moves common across different types of analysis. Similarly, Tesch (1990), while concluding that no characteristics are common to all types of analysis, nevertheless identified 10 principles and practices which hold true for most types of qualitative analysis but also identified no fewer than 26 different approaches. Cresswell (1998) suggested a spiral of data analysis and Radnor (2002) offered a 6 point step by step guide. Punch (1998) suggests that regardless, the method(s) for analysis of data needs to be systematic and disciplined. Whether complementary or contrasting, there are good reasons for the existence of the many analytic strategies, since any set of qualitative data can be looked at from different perspectives and different techniques can be applied to the same body of qualitative data, illuminating different aspects. Punch (1998) suggests that this variety and diversity in approaches underlines the point that there is no single right way to do qualitative data analysis and therefore it is important to explore differing frameworks to meet the needs of the research.

Having explored a variety of differing frameworks, I discovered a commonality of approaches between the data analysis spiral proposed by Cresswell (1998), although mainly based on the framework proposed by Wolcott (1994) and the six point step by step guide offered by Radnor (2002). Therefore, I decided to use a combination of these two approaches to analyse the data as detailed below:

1. *Data management*

2. *Reading and memoing* which is similar to the topic ordering aspect of Radnor (2002: Chapter 5).

3. *Classifying.* This title encompasses several aspects of the guide proposed by Radnor (2002: Chapter 5), i.e. constructing categories, reading the content, completing the coded sheets and generating coded transcriptions.

4. *Analysis to interpret the data* which is reflective of the same area covered by Radnor (2002: Chapter 5).

3.2.4.2.1   Data Management

I word processed the transcription of the family conference and, as a means of further organising the data, I used the data analysis programme of "Nudist" which required all the transcriptions to be in "rich text" format in preparation for the next stage of the data analysis process. I used the programme because I felt it would assist me in looking for possible linkages and interconnections in the data in a manner which suited my preferred working style.

3.2.4.2.2   Reading and memoing

For the purposes of this study, I chose to use the terminologies of "*topic*" to identify large areas and "*initial categories*" to identify areas from the initial reading and re-reading of the transcriptions. Radnor (2002) and Cresswell (1998) recommend that the researcher continues the analysis by getting a sense of the whole database. To facilitate this I read the transcriptions in their entirety several times, immersing myself in the detail, trying to get a sense of the family conference interviews as a whole before breaking them into parts.

3.2.4.2.3   Classifying.

Classifying involves taking the text or qualitative data apart and represents the heart of qualitative data analysis. To assist in this process, I used "Nudist" to help continually build these "*initial categories*" by reading and re-reading the transcriptions, continually adding to and refining them by identifying short phrases, ideas, key concepts that occurred to me as I read and re-read the data. The taking of data from the mass and its re-emergence under a "*category*" heading is what makes interpretation possible (Radnor 2002: 80). Using "Nudist" as a tool for interpretive research was useful as it meant that I was able to allocate data to several differing categories. Reading and re-reading the transcription(s) encouraged

the formation of new *"categories"* to emerge from the data, until saturation occurred. This process enabled me to identify any further possible categories from the text: that is, those *"categories"* embedded implicitly in the responses as well as topics that are explicitly stated through the interview schedule. Nudist enabled me to develop *"categories"* in a manageable way and provided a structure through which *"categories",* and subsequently *"topics"* were constructed.

Given the volume of data, it was difficult to reduce the information down to five or six *"topics"*. Cresswell (1998) describes this method as "winnowing" the data, reducing it to a small, manageable set of "topics". Careful winnowing of the *"categories"* by reading and re-reading the text and by refining with "Nudist", helped identify the following six topics.

1. **Identities** are mainly the roles that each perceives for themselves and/or others within the family unit.

2. **Relationships** are more multifaceted in nature and have the capacity to change depending on the circumstances and/or situation. It also focuses on how the identities of the individual members of the family impact on each other in the family unit.

3. **Manipulation or conformity** as the term focusing on the differing means extrapolated, subtle or otherwise, by members of the family unit to ensure the situation is manipulated to suit their own needs, wants and/or desires.

4. **Control** as the means by which members of the family perceive themselves to be able to get others to do as they desire.

5. **Need or desire** as the antithesis of need. Children know what they desire but adults think they know what children need. Although I initially identified this as a separate topic, as I worked with the data more closely, I became aware that need/desire was an integral part of the topic manipulation/conformity and therefore I decided to combine them.

6. **Nature of homework** as to the types, purpose, influence, effectiveness etc.

3.2.4.2.4   The analysis of the process

In the final analysis stage the data is subjected to a refining process. Cresswell (1998) believes that one enters with data of text and exits with an account or a narrative. In between, the researcher touches on several facets of analysis.

To enable the interpretive process to take over from the descriptive, the data under the specific categories and topics were read for different subtleties of meaning. Interpretation involves making sense of the data, the "lessons learned" (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Several forms exist, such as interpretations based on hunches, insights and intuition. It was important at this point in the analysis to step back and form larger meanings of what was going on. As the basis of my interpretive research is the epistemological position that knowledge is socially constructed and that we are in a world of multiple constructed realities. Therefore, it has to be the responsibility of each researcher to interrogate his/her data to engage in the creative, constructive intellectual process of making sense of the data and theorising from it.

Through the reading, memoing and classifying stages of the analysis, I became aware that social relationships appeared to play a significant role in the homework discussions and therefore I wished to explore this further. I considered that the social groupings offered the opportunity to explore and uncover the diversity of power relations at play within the context of the discussion surrounding homework. Power is considered to be a useful concept with which to explain the social process of interpersonal influence (Buchanan & Huczynski 2004: 723). Household and family structures are the crucial contexts in which interpersonal power is honed, exercised and practised, producing patterns of power that differ markedly from those arising in the formal, public relations of the State and the economy. Therefore, I decided to consider varying frameworks which I could use to explore the power relationships at play within the context of homework.

3.2.5   Power framework

3.2.5.1   Introduction

Over the decades the research on power has been plagued and blessed by a multitude of theories and approaches, on both theoretical and empirical levels. As the basis for interrogating the family conference(s) data, I decided to use an extended version of the French and Raven's (1959) conceptualisation of power.

This classic work of French and Raven (1959) helped scaffold and develop an understanding of the concept of power, which has altered over time. This five-fold typology is recognised as being the earliest and most important contribution to the study of interpersonal power and the effects of perceived attitudes and behaviours (Scott 2001). French & Raven (1959) identify the relationship between two persons, the influencers and the influencees, as the bases of power. Although there are many possible bases of power which may be distinguishable, French & Raven defined five power sources which have been empirically tested, supported and claimed to be valid measures of sources of influence (Thibaut and Kelley 1959, Hunt & Nevin 1974). I felt that this framework offered me the beginnings of a means of interrogating the data as it afforded me the opportunity to label certain attitudes, behaviours and beliefs. However, I was also aware that this prescriptive framework had the possibility of restricting my interpretative approach where meaning is constructed. Given my original positivist orientation and subsequent, gradual move towards interpretivism, I acknowledge that the framework was a "comfort blanket" in an area of uncertainty for me. This, in combination with my lack of experience, could have been my reason for seeking a framework on which to hang the analysis. However, I could see the limitations of the five power bases suggested by the French and Raven typology and therefore sought to augment it, as detailed later.

French & Raven (1959) identified 5 bases of social power, namely:

1. Coercive power

2. Reward power

3. Referent power

4. Expert power

5. Legitimate power

3.2.5.2 Coercive Power

Coercive power has previously been described as the power which is based upon the perception by a person in a relationship that another person has the capacity to remove rewards and/or administer punishments, e.g. in a traditional child and parent concept (Busch 1980). This power base is characterised by behaviours that are directed at forcing compliance from subordinates through threat, confrontation, and punitive behaviours that are outside normal role expectations (Mossholder et al 1998). It is the subordinate's expectation of the undesirable punishments and penalties which gives the other person the coercive power. The source of coercive power stems from a situational advantage of one person over another, (Busch 1980: 93). That is, the probability of punishment for nonconformity minus the probability of punishment for conformity, (French & Raven 1959: 257). Ideas such as "the end justifies the means" serves as an example of using and/or misusing others in manipulative, exploitive and coercive ways. May (1972) discusses exploitation, manipulation and coercion as destructive uses of power in human relationships as it indicates ploys of passive aggression, e.g. guilt and flattery, the use of gifts, favours and obligations are forms of exploitative, manipulative and coercive power which have been and are used frequently to control or force compliance in others.

3.2.5.3   Reward Power

In essence reward power can be described as the situation where one person perceives that another is able to offer a valued reward (Buchanan and Huczynski 2004). Reward power is the negative contingency to coercive power in that it involves the person's ability to manipulate attainment of the desired outcome. An important aspect of reward power is the belief that one person has the capacity to control rewards that the other person values and that compliance will facilitate the reward. If the person who controls the rewards, which are of perceived limited value, then the reward power is negated. However, if the person believes that worthwhile rewards may be forthcoming in the future, then reward power is established. Additionally Raven (1990) proposed that reward power can also be seen as including relational facets, such as personal approval, praise, respect and autonomy. Researchers have noted, (Liden & Mitchell 1988; Raven 1990; Mossholder et al 1998) that ingratiating tactics are frequently used as a means of building reward power by creating an impression that the individual cares about the welfare of the other and appreciates and values their opinion. The strength of the reward power increases with the magnitude of the rewards that are perceived to be possible by one party to another.

3.2.5.4   Referent power

Referent power can be described as the situation whereby one person identifies with the other, that is, s/he feels at one with him or desires to identify with him or her, (Huczynski & Buchanan 1991). Referent power thus depends on the personality and attractiveness of the leader, as perceived by the followers. French and Raven (1959) conclude that the greater the attraction, the greater the identification, and consequently the greater the referent power. Therefore, referent power has the broadest range of cover as it is not a calculative form of action but one which operates through persuasion and emulation (Scott 2001: 139).

Referent power is frequently viewed as the "charisma" power base as it relates to the relationship aspect between the two parties (Buchanan & Huczynski 2004).

3.2.5.5 Expert Power

Expert power can be described as the power where one person perceives the second to have some special or expert knowledge. It can be perceived that the person in the power relationship has valuable knowledge, information or skills in a relevant area which can give that person and/or group the ability to speak with authority. Wherever expert power occurs it seems to be necessary for both to think that the "principal" knows and for the other to trust that the "principal" is telling the truth, rather than trying to deceive him or her (French & Raven 1959). However, the strength of the expert power varies with the extent of the knowledge or perception of the level of knowledge and is apt to be accomplished through reasoning and empowerment activities. French & Raven (1959) also indicated that there was some evidence to indicate that an attempted use of expert power, outwith their specific field of knowledge, resulted in a reduction in expert power and subsequently a possible undermining of confidence. Expertise is a source of influence that must emanate from the participant in a relationship and cannot be delegated by a third party (Busch 1980). It could be argued that the location of expert power has altered due to the world wide web and technological advances.

3.2.5.6 Legitimate Power

Legitimate power is a complex concept as it can manifest itself in many and varying contexts. It can exemplify dominance covertly when charismatic power and reward power are used to influence and manipulate others (Fennell 2002). Manipulation, exploitation and coercion manifest legitimate power and authority in situations where the goal is dominance. In essence legitimate power can be described where one person perceives that another has a

legitimate right to order him or her to do something, e.g. a person accepting a judge's rule despite his or her own views (Huczynski & Buchanan 1991) and that there is an obligation to accept this influence. French and Raven (1959) noted that legitimate power was very similar to the notion of legitimacy of authority which has long been explored by sociologists, particularly by Weber (1914) and by Goldhammer & Shils (1939). It is based on formal authority which corresponds, although not exactly, to power, responsibility and discretion over a range of sources (Ibarra 1993). Legitimacy of authority involves some code or standard, accepted by the individual, e.g. in some cultures the male or the aged have been granted the right to prescribed behaviours and therefore an acceptance of the social structure may also serve as a basis for legitimate power (French & Raven 1959). Buchananan and Huczynski (2004) describe legitimate power as the ability of a leader to exert influence based on the belief of followers that the leader has authority to issue orders which they in turn have an obligation to accept. This is also referred to as "position power" when it relates to the formal role of the individual which can be exemplified by their job title, e.g. teacher, doctor, chairperson (Buchanan & Huxzynski 2004). Goldhammer & Shils (1939: 172) identified 3 main forms of legitimate power, namely (1) legal; (2) traditional; and (3) charismatic. Legitimate power is regarded as "legal" when the recognition of legitimacy rests on a belief by the subordinated individuals in the legality of the laws, decrees, and directives promulgated by the power holder. Legitimate power is regarded as "traditional" when the recognition of legitimacy rests on the belief in the sanctity of traditions by virtue of which the power-holder exercises his power and in the traditional sanctity of the orders which he issues. Legitimate power is regarded as "charismatic" when the recognition of legitimacy rests on a devotion to personal qualities of the power-holder. "Charismatic authority" has existed across the time divide as can be seen by examples of Jesus, the prophets and Hitler. Charisma operates through specific gifts of body and mind that make an individual appear to be "out of the ordinary" in some way. Therefore, it can be said to be "rooted in the strength of the individual". An individual can also derive power from their physical strength, their attractiveness to others and their

rhetorical abilities, but they may also derive power from their income and their contacts (Scott 2001).

3.2.5.7 Developments of the French and Raven five-fold typology

Understandably as more research is conducted and time passes, researchers have added to and developed the original five-fold typology of bases of social power as defined by French and Raven (1959). In an effort to address the possible limiting nature of the use of a power framework on my interpretive approach to data analysis, I decided to use an augmented version of the French and Raven's (1959) typology, as it offered me wider scope to interrogate the data. Benfari et al (1986: 12) identified 3 additional dimension of power, namely:

- **information power** as the ability of a leader to exert influence based on the belief of followers that the leader has access to information that is not public knowledge. In an era where access to information is much more readily accessible then perhaps it is the control of the access which enables influencers to control the power base.

- **affiliation power** as the ability of a leader to exert influence based on the belief of followers that the leader has a close association with other powerful figures on whose authority they are able to act.

- **group power** as the ability of a leader to exert influence based on the belief of followers that the leader has collective support from a team or group.

Scott (2001: 13) identified two further dimensions of power, namely:

- **persuasive influence** as it operates through the offering and acceptance of reasons for acting in one way rather than another. At its simplest, this may rest upon a person's strength of personality and their attractiveness to others, but persuasiveness depends particularly on socially structured cognitive and evaluative symbols.

- **patriarchal power** is a concept whereby public and private relations are brought together in interesting and complex ways. A wealth of discussion surrounds the topic of 'patriarchalism', but, I have focused on the possible use of patriarchal power relations within the context of homework and its possible affect, if any, on the family relationships. Both Sydie (1987) and Barrett (1980) have advocated the use of Weber's (1914) concept of 'patriarchalism' as a more all-encompassing idea, noting that patriarchalism denotes the power of a father over younger men as well as women within a family. Much discussion has taken place between Weber's (1914) concept of 'patriarchalism' and feminist discussions of 'patriarchy', although in essence they both refer to that particular form of traditional authority in which a father as 'senior of the house' or 'sib elder', exercises full and complete personal power over all members of the household. It is personal power unencumbered by any formal rules and restrictions other than those of traditional custom and practice. Patriarchalism is personal power that is ascribed to a father by virtue of his position in a male blood line, and this biological aspect of power has also been emphasised in many radical feminist discussions of contemporary forms of patriarchy. Such views have often involved the idea that patriarchal power relations must be seen as biologically determined, and they have been much criticised for this explicit or implicit biological reductionism (Barrett 1980: 12).

3.2.5.8 The Interrelationship of the Bases of Social Power

Although the five power bases have been presented and discussed above as distinct sources of influence, they are conceptually related and interrelated (Busch 1980: 95). Buchanan and Huczynski (2004: 830) believe that power is dynamic, changing in form and amount as the situation around the influencer and the influencee changes. Therefore, most individuals can operate from several power bases, with the same person, using different types of power, in different combinations, in different contexts, at different times (Busch 1980). In one relationship, certain power bases may be effective, whereas in a different relationship,

others may be more appropriate. Similarly, situations change over time and it is my belief that this holds true for many facets of differing families lives associated with the homework process. For example, using coercive power leaves the individual losing referent power, while an application of expert power may mean the individual gains referent power. Huczynski & Buchanan (1991: 192) define social power as being the potential influence that one person exerts over another, whilst influence is defined as a change in the cognition, behaviour or emotion of that second person which can be attributed to the first. For analytical purposes, I decided to explore the differing power relations at play within each story, in isolation and in specific, concrete combinations.

3.2.5.9   Criticisms of French and Raven's five-fold typology

Although the French and Raven five-fold typology has proven to be a very useful framework over the last four decades, several researchers notably Thambain & Gemmill (1974), Busch (1980), Yukl (1981), Podsakoff & Schriesheim (1985), Hinkin & Schriesheim (1989) and Mossholder et al (1998) have presented critiques on varying aspects of the typology. However, it was my belief that the French and Raven's five-fold typology was an essential silo into which other research could be placed to help distil and refine the concept of power with in a modern context.

I acknowledge that this framework was not watertight and that much data, although interesting, was redundant. However, it offered me a framework for analysis that suited my needs. I believe that the framework that I used to explore the differing power relations which were uncovered throughout the discussion of homework was much improved by adding five dimensions of power to the original French and Raven (1959) typology.

3.3   Ethical considerations

3.3.1   Whole school ethical considerations

Further to determining my research topic and appropriate methodology, I sought the agreement of the Head Teacher of the establishment to ensure appropriate procedures were followed, as the research process involved pupils under the age of 16. This was carried out via a meeting with the Head Teacher to outline my proposal and to reinforce the anonymity for pupils, parents, staff and the school. The Head Teacher subsequently agreed to inform and update the school board on the research proposal, as appropriate. Permission from the local authority was sought through verbal contact with headquarters staff.

3.3.2   Ethical considerations for the quantitative aspect of the study

Initially, I visited each class to explain the research process and the activity which they would be involved in, so that all pupils had clarity of purpose and an understanding of the requirements. Explanation of the types of questions was offered and an assurance given that no person's name and/or details would appear in print, although the data would be used to develop the study. As this process was carried out approximately one week in advance of the actual activity, it offered the pupils the opportunity to discuss their involvement with their parent(s) and withdraw if they wished. I also realised that if I wished the pupils to complete the questionnaires without bias, then anonymity was important. This process was important to ensure that all pupils involved in the research process undertook the task willingly and diligently. However, this gave me a dilemma as I wished to be able to correlate the pupil and parental questionnaire, if required. At this stage of data collection, I did not know whether it would be useful and/or required but I wished to have the opportunity at a later time. Therefore I devised a system which would effectively, but unobtrusively, enable me to match individual pupil responses with their respective

57

questionnaire. On reflection this was unnecessary but is indicative of my shift from positivism to interpretivism. It did offer an easy method of data recording as no names were required to be used on the Excel spreadsheet

I decided to offer the pupils the opportunity to withdraw from the data collection, using an 'opt out' strategy of speaking generally to the class and requesting that pupils excused themselves if they so wished. I decided on this strategy because the pupils are acquainted with this system, on an annual basis, for parental permission for the use of photographs. To reinforce this, on the day of the activity, agreement was again sought, from each pupil in the class, to ensure their continued willingness to participate by verbally asking them to indicate if they wished to be excused from the research process.

In attempting to ensure successful completion of the pupil questionnaires, the meeting with the group of teachers was of paramount importance, as the teachers were required to distribute the questionnaires using the specific order of the school's computerised class register. This enabled me to subsequently correlate the class registers and the individual pupil's questionnaires, using sequential numbering.

This situation did not arise with respect to the parental permission as their permission was sought verbally and simultaneously with their completion of the questionnaire. This factor enabled me to include a section for parental name and pupil class, thereby offering clarity. Again, parents were advised that no name would be divulged within the text of the study.

3.3.3 Ethical considerations for the qualitative aspect of the study

An additional question was inserted into the parental questionnaire, asking parents to indicate if they would be interested in participating in a family conference in their own

home. At this point I considered the implications of security for myself in carrying out the interviews in the parents' home but decided that the positives outweighed the negatives. I anticipated that the family's responses would be richer if the interviews were carried out in familiar surroundings.

Twelve families initially responded positively to participate further in the research process. Each of these families received further communication via a letter, with an attached pre-paid postcard, requesting them to identify an appropriate time for the family conference. On reflection I should have detailed specific aspects of confidentiality and anonymity in this initial letter, as this may have been the reason for only five families responding positively.

On each occasion when carrying out the family conference, I initially highlighted to the participants that no person's name, address or any other identifying details would be included in the text and therefore anonymity would be assured. When carrying out the family conferences, I also considered aspects of my own safety. Initially, I took several precautions of:

- informing a friend of my exact location and approximate duration time

- I phoned my friend immediately before going in the house to carry out the family conference

- I phoned my friend immediately after coming out of the house

- I left my mobile phone on "silent" throughout the family conferences

However, at no time, did I feel unsafe; in fact it was quite the opposite, as everyone was very welcoming. Whilst carrying out family conference C, I did feel uncomfortable due to the volume and ferocity of the temper displayed by the father towards his son but was very aware that at no time was it directed towards me.

59

3.4   Conclusion

Although this research was planned with a particular logic in mind, I was aware that I would have to be flexible and adaptable to change at all times. However, I tried to adhere, as closely as was possible, to the basic framework, thereby ensuring a consistency of approach which was focused on addressing my research questions and attempted to ensure that the research did no go off at a tangent.

4.   **Data Analysis Framework**

4.1   **Quantitative analysis**

4.1.1   **Introduction**

Analysis of the data was carried out using the approach described previously. The use of formulae facilitated opportunities to explore aspects of the pupil and parental questionnaires, both within and across questions, in an attempt to distil the analysis into smaller interconnecting themes which could be explored further in the qualitative aspect of the study.

4.1.2   **Influences**

Pupil's views regarding the main factors which influence their completion of homework were sought. A parental viewpoint was not sought as this question was pertinent to the individual pupil and therefore a parental viewpoint was not appropriate.

Descriptor	% total pupil responses
The teacher who gave you the homework	60.6%
The subject the homework is for	64.9%
Whether it is easy or not	54.8%
The mood you are in when it is due to be completed	41%
Other activities you wished to do	47.9%
The room you have available at the time	22.3%
The time of day or night you have available	58.5%
Whether you could get help or not	35.6%
Dependent upon who was available to help you	24.5%
Whether your parent(s) were in or not	28.2%
Whether your parent(s) checked your homework or not	41%
The type of homework to be completed	65.4%

Table 1   Influences affecting homework

Areas marked in turquoise indicate responses with a cut off score of 60% plus of the total cohort group surveyed, namely, "the teacher who gave you the homework", "the subject the homework is for" and "the type of homework to be completed".   To explore the possibility of a relationship, a correlation of the positive responses of these descriptors was carried out, using the AND formulae. Of the positive responses to all three descriptors, 89.4% of pupils identified them concurrently indicating their significance and/or interrelationship to successful completion of homework.   This was further confirmed when the pupils were asked to rank order the most important descriptors which would make them complete their homework. In line with the findings stated earlier "the teacher who gave the homework" and "the subject it is for" were clearly identified by the majority of pupils as being the most important influences.

Areas marked in yellow indicate that approximately half of the cohort group thought that "the time of day or night you have available" and "whether it is easy or not" influenced whether or not they completed their homework.

Areas marked in pink relate to aspects of parental involvement in the homework process. 41% of the cohort group surveyed considered "whether your parent(s) checked your homework or not" as being a significant influence on completion. When considering the descriptors of "whether you could get help with it or not" and "dependent upon who was available to help you" together, due to their similarity. 60.1% of all pupils surveyed recognised that completing their homework was, in part, influenced by either of these factors. This was confirmed by the results of question 19 where the pupils were asked to respond to the posed statement of "I would find it easier if I could ask someone for help". 50.2% of the total cohort group surveyed indicated that they would *sometimes* find homework easier if they had someone to ask. This was explored further by considering the descriptors of "dependent upon who was available to help you" and "whether your parents were in or not" due to their obvious connection, indicating that 52.7% of pupils were influenced by whether someone was in to help with homework. This appeared to show that parental involvement in completing homework has the possibility of being influential, depending on the practices of the parent(s).

Pupils were asked to indicate any reason(s), other than the ones stated, which would make them complete homework. The results are shown below.

Descriptor	% of total pupil responses
So I don't get a punishment exercise	19.1%
So I don't get into trouble	9%
Parental pressure	27.1%
So I can learn more	5.8%
So I can get on with other social activities	3.7%
If I'm bored or fed up	3.2%

Table 2   Additional influences affecting homework

Pupils clearly identified "so I don't get a punishment exercise" and "parental pressure" as additional influences which make them complete their homework, although the number of responses was much reduced from the influences previously stated. However, it signalled the notion of conformity will be explored further when considering the benefits of completing homework.

4.1.3   Purposes

The main aim of this question was to explore the purposes of homework from the pupil and

parental perspectives and to look for possible interrelationships.

Descriptor	Parental responses	Pupil responses	Difference
To develop skills further in a subject	66.2%	87.2%	21%
To practice and consolidate classwork	75%	65.9%	-9.1%
To prepare for future classwork	39.7%	59.6%	19.9%
To develop organisational skills	50%	34.6%	-15.4%
To develop planning skills	44.1%	35.1%	-9%
To organise time better	29.4%	33%	3.6%
To develop good study skills	61.8%	75%	13.2%
To develop good self-discipline	64.7%	27.1%	-37.6%
To develop skills in using a range of learning resources	42.6%	35.6%	-7%
Allows you to take responsibility for your own learning	51.5%	60.1%	8.6%
Allows you to practise what you have learned	54.4%	67%	12.6%
Allows you to be ready for the next day's class	44.1%	56.9%	12.8%
Allows you to spend time with your parent(s)	19.1%	20.7%	1.6%
Gives your parent(s) an opportunity to be involved with homework	52.9%	34.6%	-18.3%
Develops ways of carrying out investigations	26.5%	35.6%	9.1%
Helps develop revision skills	64.7%	58.5%	-6.2%
Helps you do as well as you can	42.6%	58.5%	15.9%
Extends what you have learned in class	51.5%	60.6%	9.1%
Makes you want to work	27.9%	17%	-10.9%
Allows pupils to work independently	64.7%	55.8%	-8.9%

Table 3 Purposes of homework

Areas marked in turquoise indicate a significant pupil and parental response with a cut off

score of 60% plus. Coincidentally, both the pupil and parental responses identified six

main purposes of homework, agreeing on three of these, namely, "to develop skills further

in a subject", "to practise and consolidate classwork" and "to develop good study skills".
Further consideration was therefore given to each descriptor.

Descriptor - To develop skills further in a subject.

66.2% and 87.2% of parental and pupil responses respectively identified this descriptor as being a main purpose of homework. Unfortunately it was not possible to consider correlations of this descriptor across differing questions as the descriptor only occurred in one question. This was unfortunate, and perhaps a flaw in the questionnaire, but I was unaware of this when I developed the questionnaire.

Descriptor - To practise and consolidate classwork.

75% and 65.9% of parental and pupil responses respectively identified this descriptor as being a main purpose of homework. To explore this further, other descriptors relating to aspects of classwork were correlated with this descriptor, using the AND formulae. 71% and 78.9% of pupil and parental responses respectively appeared to indicate an agreement that practising and consolidating homework was beneficial as a means of reinforcing what had been said in class.

This was further confirmed when the pupil responses to question 19.7, i.e. "Homework helps me with what I am learning in class" were correlated with the above descriptor. 68% of the total number of positive pupil responses indicated that they felt that either, *all of the time* or *most of the time*, homework helped them practise and consolidate what they learned in class. When the descriptor "allows you to practise what you have learned" is added to the correlation, the percentage rate increases to 83%.

Descriptor - To develop good study skills.

61.8% and 75% of parental and pupil responses respectively identified this descriptor as being a main purpose of homework. However, this descriptor occurred in several questions

which facilitated opportunities to explore this aspect further. Correlations were carried out between this descriptors and "to develop good self-discipline". 69% of pupils and 86.2% of parents equated these descriptors as being important purposes of homework, indicating that both the pupils and parents appeared to regard homework as a means of developing good study skills which encouraged self discipline, leading to independent learning.

Descriptor	Parental responses	Pupil responses	Difference
Develops an enthusiasm for learning	85.7%	85.1%	0.6%
Prevents pupils from getting into trouble from their teacher	75%	71.9%	3.1%
Makes them independent learners	86.9%	66.3%	20.6%
Develops understanding of a topic	83.3%	73.8%	9.5%
Develops memory skills	79.4%	73.7%	5.7%
Enables them to perform to a higher standard in tests/exams	85.3%	82.2%	3.1%
Reinforces classwork	94%	68.4%	25.6%
Enables pupils to answer in class the next day	95.6%	74.8%	20.8%

Table 4 Correlation of "develops good study skills" with each of the other descriptors

The above table indicates the interrelationship which both pupils and parents recognise between developing good study skills and other descriptors, as shown by the areas marked in turquoise which indicate responses with a cut off score of 85% plus. This appeared to indicate that, pupils and parents saw developing good study skills as beneficial because it helped make them enthusiastic about learning which could enable them to perform better in class and/or in tests/exams. The parents appeared to make more connections between developing good study skills and other descriptors, particularly relating to the classroom, namely, "reinforces classwork" and "enables pupils to answer in class the next day". The parents also saw good study skills as beneficial for independent learning.

4.1.4   Types of Homework

Descriptor	% of parental responses	% of pupil responses	% difference
1. an assignment on a specific topic	22.1%	9%	13.1%
2. extension work	42.6%	29.8%	12.8%
3. research into a specific topic	22.1%	13.8%	8.3%
4. reading a piece of work	66.1%	51.1%	15%
5. revision	82.3%	68.1%	14.2%
6. developing and listening ideas on a specific topic	22.1%	18.6%	3.5%
7. listening	41.2%	28.1%	13.1%
8. watching a T.V. programme	5.9%	14.4%	-8.5%
9. watching T.V. adverts	4.4%	3.2%	1.2%
10. multiple choice questions	29.4%	15.9%	13.5%
11. essay	38.2%	23.4%	14.8%
12. free choice on a specific subject	13.2%	7.4%	5.8%
13. practical work	39.7%	40.9%	-1.2%
14. a chance to explore extra work for interest	30.8%	9%	21.8%
15. investigative work on a specific topic	32.3%	14.9%	17.4%

Table 5 Comparison chart on the types of homework

Analysis of the types of homework given to pupils on a regular basis, as shown above, indicates a clear agreement between pupils and parents with respect to reading a piece of work and revision as being the most popular types of homework, activities regularly undertaken independently and therefore further correlations were prepared to explore revision homework as a means of helping pupils to develop as independent learners.

To explore this further, descriptors which were associated with revision homework and independent learning were correlated, resulting in 85.7% of positive parental responses and 72.6% of positive pupil responses. This appeared to indicate that both pupils and parents acknowledged that revision homework could be a useful tool to assist in independent learning. However, it should be noted that areas marked in green in the table indicate the types of homework which offered pupils an opportunity to carry out homework in a format which enabled them to utilise their own strengths and/or areas of interest and/or preferred learning style etc. Noticeably, the results indicated that these types of homework were not given on a regular basis, thereby restricting creativity and individualisation.

This was further explored through a correlation between revision as a type of homework and the purposes of homework. The results of this exercise are indicated overleaf.

Correlations	% parental correlations	% pupil correlations	Difference
7.52 or 5.52 with "to develop skills further in a subject"	84.4%	87.5%	-3.1%
7.52 or 5.52 with "to practice and consolidate learning"	84.3%	71.7%	12.6%
7.52 or 5.52 with "to prepare for future classwork"	81.4%	69.4%	12.0%
7.52 or 5.52 with "to develop organisational skills"	82.4%	66.1%	16.3%
7.52 or 5.52 with "to develop planning skills"	90%	68.2%	21.8%
7.52 or 5.52 with "to organise time better"	90%	66.1%	23.9%
7.52 or 5.52 with "to develop good study skills"	85.7%	69.5%	16.2%
7.52 or 5.52 with "to develop good self-discipline"	84.1%	64.7%	19.4%
7.52 or 5.52 with "to develop skills in using a range of learning resources	75.8%	56.9%	18.9%
7.52 or 5.52 with "enables pupils to take responsibility for their own learning"	88.6%	66.4%	22.2%
7.52 or 5.52 with "enables pupils to practise what they have learned"	83.8%	72.2%	11.6%
7.52 or 5.52 with "enables pupils to be ready for the next days'classes"	90%	62.6%	27.4%
7.52 or 5.52 with "enables pupils to spend time with their parents"	92.3%	46.1%	46.2%
7.52 or 5.52 with " gives parents an opportunity to be involved with homework"	88.8%	60%	28.8%
7.52 or 5.52 with "develops ways of carrying out investigations"	88.8%	65.7%	23.1%
7.52 or 5.52 with "helps develop revision skills"	88.6%	69.1%	19.5%
7.52 or 5.52 with "helps pupils reach their full potential"	79.3%	70.9%	8.4%
7.52 or 5.52 with "extends learning"	85.7%	66.6%	19.1%
7.52 or 5.52 with "helps motivate pupils"	84.2%	53.1%	31.1%
7.52 or 5.52 with "allows pupils to work independently"	84.1%	66.6%	17.5%

Table 6 Correlation of the purposes with the descriptor "revision as a type of homework"

Areas marked in turquoise indicate the parental responses with a cut off score of 90% plus

which showed that revision homework was a useful tool for enabling the child to organise

their time better, develop planning skills and be ready for the next day's classes indicating a

recognition of independence. However, in direct contrast, they also appeared to believe that

revision homework offered an opportunity for them to spend time with their child. An area

marked in red show a wide disparity of opinion, between the pupils and the parents, when

considering the opportunity which revision homework offered, particularly relating to parental involvement and the opportunity which homework offered for parents to spend time with their child and/or be involved in homework activities.

Areas marked in pink indicate the more learning focused areas identified by the pupil whereby they indicated that revision homework helped them to develop skills further in a subject, to practise and consolidate what they had learned to help them reach their full potential.

Interestingly, when considering the correlation between revision being given regularly to pupils as homework and all the other descriptors associated with the purpose of homework, the parental correlation rate was always higher, except in the instance of "to develop skills further in a subject". This could indicate that the parental view of revision as a type of homework is more positive than that of the pupils and/or that for parents revision has different perceived advantages and/or it could be due to the lower positive response rate associated to the parental questionnaire.

4.1.5   Benefits

Parents	% of total surveyed	Pupils	% of total surveyed
1. Helps develop good study skills	84.4%	1. Prevents you from receiving a punishment exercise	73.9%
2. Reinforces classwork	75.7%	2. Prevents you from getting into trouble with the teacher	72.9%
3. Makes them independent learners	69.9%	3. Enables you to perform to a higher standard in tests / examinations	70.7%
4. Develops an understanding of a topic	63.6%	4. Makes you able to answer in class the next day	64.4%

Table 7 Comparison chart on the benefits of homework

The above chart clearly shows that the top two benefits, stated by the pupils, relate to aspects associated with preventing confrontation with the teacher and/or school's disciplinary system, although the pupils also recognised that homework could help them perform to a higher standard in tests / examinations. The notion of conformity was further explored, using the AND formulae, to correlate the descriptors of "prevents you from receiving a punishment exercise" and "prevents you from getting into trouble with the teacher", with 83.2% of pupils identifying both. Further exploration of this was possible through carrying out correlations across other questions relating to conformity. 88.8% of the positive pupil responses occurred, although these results may be skewed due to the low number of positive responses at 19.1% of the total number of pupils surveyed.   However, it is not surprising that this aspect is not mentioned by the parents as they do not have to complete the punishment exercise.

The chart clearly shows that parents believed that homework was beneficial in developing reinforcement and independence in learning.

4.1.6   Barriers

Descriptor	% total parental responses	% total pupil responses	Difference
Too much homework given to complete each day	14.7%	61.7%	47%
Home circumstances	4.4%	NA	NA
No quiet place to complete homework	4.4%	28.1%	23.7%
Teachers don't tell you how I did/ No effective feedback	5.8%	26.1%	20.3%
Don't see the point	NA	31.9%	NA
Doesn't help in class	1.5%	23.9%	22.4%
The instructions of the homework are not always clear	39.7%	72.3%	32.6%
Homework takes too long	11.8%	46.3%	34.5%
My parents are too busy to help	NA	19.7%	NA
The homework is too difficult	8.8%	17%	9.2%
I cannot be bothered	NA	38.3%	NA
They have limited time	8.8%	NA	NA
Parents both working	7.3%	NA	NA
Homework is too easy so I get bored	4.4%	22.3%	17.9%
No praise is given when homework is completed	NA	30.3%	NA
No punishments/sanctions given for not doing homework	10.3%	17.5%	7.2%

Table 8 Comparison chart on the barriers to homework

Areas marked in turquoise indicate the highest percentage of pupil and parental responses. Interestingly, although both identified the same descriptors of "too much homework given to complete each day", "the instruction of the homework are not always clear" and "homework takes too long" as being barriers to completing homework, the percentage of parental responses was considerably lower. A significant number of pupils, 72.3%, identified the largest single barrier to completing homework was the lack of clarity in the instructions. However, this was not confirmed in the results of the posed statement in question 19.2 of "the teacher clearly explains what we have to do for homework" where the majority of pupils felt that the teacher clearly explained what was required of the given

homework either *all the time* or *most* of the time. This opens the possibility of investigating this aspect further in the qualitative aspect of the study.

However, a larger disparity of results occurred with respect to the descriptors of "too much homework given to complete each day" and "homework takes too long". In each case, the pupils considered these factors to be barriers to completing homework whilst the parents did not. However, time is relative and the parents were not required to actually complete the homework, whilst the pupils were.

4.1.7   Help offered

This aspect considered who offers help, how often the help is offered and what type of help is offered.

(a)   Who offers help?

Descriptor	% parental responses	% pupil responses
1. Mother	72%	84%
2. Father	30.9%	67%
3. Brother/sister	6%	19.1%
4. Grandfather	0%	11.2%
5. Grandmother	3%	19.6%
6. Friend	1%	20.7%
7. Other relative	0%	14.3%
8. Subject teacher	3%	36.7%
9. Guidance teacher	1%	9%
10. Registration teacher	0%	5%

Table 9 Learning partners

It should be noted that pupils were able to indicate as many learning partners as they wished and therefore the total percentage possible is greater than 100%.

Both pupils and parents agreed that the mother was the initial person who would be approached to seek help with homework, although significantly, 36.7% identified the teacher as the person who encouraged them to complete their homework.

(b)   How often is help offered?

Descriptor	% total parental responses	% total pupil responses	% difference
Every night	33.8%	32.9%	0.9%
Twice a week	26.4%	18.7%	7.7%
Once a week	16.1%	14.9%	1.2%
Once a month	7.3%	14.9%	-7.6%
Never	3%	11.7%	-8.7%
When I ask / required	10.3%	6.9%	3.4%

Table 10 - Frequency of help offered

The above table indicates a consensus between the pupils and parents with respect to help being offered on a nightly basis. However, this was only indicated by approximately a third of all pupils and parents involved in the survey. Disparity grew when longer terms of time were considered, for example once or twice a week.

(c)   What type of help is offered?

Descriptor		% total parental responses	% total pupil responses
Remind them that homework requires to be completed	(R)	82.6% (1)	59.7%
Answer questions		39.1%	41.9%
Read to them		70% (4)	30.6%
Help them use the Internet		39.1%	25.8%
Provide ideas		60.8%	62.9%
Discussion partner		47.8%	79% (4)
Help to revise for a test or examination		56.5%	62.9%
Provide space to complete homework		30.4%	46.7%
Check spelling and grammar in a finished piece of work	(C)	78.2% (2)	77.4% (5)
Provide reassurance		69.5% (5)	61.3%
Check answers	(C)	73.9% (3)	85.5% (3)
Read over finished work	(C)	69.5% (5)	80.6% (1)
Set time aside each night		47.8%	62.8%
Check the homework diary each night		52.2%	51.6%
Set aside a particular time for homework		60%	53.6%
Remind them of their homework	(R)	69.5% (5)	80.6% (1)
Switch off the T.V.		35.7%	45.2%
Help organise a study timetable		50%	57.9%

Table 11 Comparison chart on the type of help offered every night by parents

The table above shows some commonalities and some disparity of opinion in responses to

the types of help offered. Areas marked in turquoise indicate responses with a cut off score

of 65% plus which could be broadly categorised into reminding and checking activities, as

indicated with (R) and (C). Checking activities were explored through correlations across

the questionnaire associated with the descriptors of "check spelling and grammar in a

finished piece of work" and "check answers". This resulted in 90.9% correlation of the

total number of positive pupil respondents and 75% of positive parental respondents,

acknowledging a parental role of checking homework. To extend this aspect further the

descriptor of "read over finished work" was added to the correlation. Analysis of these

descriptors, using the AND formulae, indicated 82.3% of the total number of parental respondents and 80.3% of the total number of pupil respondents acknowledged that this type of homework often involved some aspect of checking homework. To continue this further and to attempt to seek some corroboration, correlations were carried out of checking activities as stated in question 1 of the questionnaire. Using the AND formulae, 51.9% of positive pupil responses indicated that their parents checking their homework was a significant factor for successful completion.

The supervisory activity of reminding them of homework was evident, although confusion may have been created by the similarity of the descriptors "remind them that homework requires to be completed" and "remind them of their homework". On reflection it may have been better to include only one of these descriptors due to their similarity. 69.5% of parents and 80.6% of pupils identified "remind them of their homework" and 82.6% of parents and 59.7% of pupils identified "remind them that homework requires to be completed" as being the main type of help offered. The AND formulae was used to attempt to gain clarity within these two descriptors, resulting in an 85.4% correlation of the total number of parental respondents and 84% of pupil respondents. This appeared to support the supposition that the closeness of the descriptors caused some confusion whilst acknowledging the supervisory role for parents of reminding pupils of their homework.

4.1.8   Conclusion

In conclusion, an overview of the analysis of all aspects of the quantitative data drew together a range of recurring themes, namely:

1. Influences. There appeared to be several distinct influences which encourage pupils to complete homework, namely,

- school influences of the teacher, the subject, the type of homework and the threat of punishment exercises

- home influences of the time available and the help available

2. Good study skills. It appeared that parents perceived that when pupils developed good study skills it enabled them to develop self-discipline which would enable them to take responsibility for their own learning.

3. Independent learning. It appeared that throughout the correlations, the impression given by pupils and parents is that it was advantageous to have a type of homework which enabled and/or encouraged them to become independent learners whereby the pupils took responsibility for their own learning.

4. Classwork. The analysis of the data appeared to clearly indicate that pupils, and to a slighter lesser degree the parents, thought that homework was a suitable vehicle to help pupils practice what they have learned in class and to enable them to be ready for the next day's class.   This could be interpreted, in part, as pupils being prepared to take responsibility for their learning and or take the consequences if they are not prepared.

5. The role of the parents. The results appeared to indicate that parents do not take an active part in the actual completion of homework but rather see their role as a supervisory one rather than a proactive one.

6. The role of the teacher. The teacher appeared to have a significant influence/role in getting pupils to complete their homework, either by requesting to see it and/or checking it on a regular basis and/or the teacher making helpful comments on the completed homework. These factors appear to be important to prevent the pupils from getting into trouble and/or receiving a punishment exercise.

4.2   **Qualitative analysis**

4.2.1   **Introduction**

The qualitative data analysis is derived from five unique stories, contained in the family conferences, which demonstrates facets of differing themes contained within each story. On the surface the stories demonstrate pupil and parental perceptions of the nature of homework, whilst beneath the surface aspects of power relations were uncovered. It is said that power is ubiquitous because it permeates human relationships; it shows many faces and takes many forms (Fennel 1999: 31) and therefore can be considered as a phenomenon that is inextricably connected with the relationships which exist between people, within households and family structures. Therefore, these can be considered as crucial contexts in which interpersonal power is honed, exercised and practised, producing patterns of power.

Initially each story was read, focusing on the surface traces of the text and then on the silent but salient traces which existed beneath the surface of the text, thereby helping in the formation of larger topics. Common thread(s) may exist and/or emerge from the stories told in the five family conference stories. I am aware that the collection of my research data was a snapshot of the family situation and that my observations were a gaze from outside the family circle with my perceptions attributed to certain behaviours. Therefore I am aware that another researcher could translate the data in a differing manner, using their own unique gaze into the family situation. However, through these observations of the families, I got a sense of the following power relations being played out by differing members of the family at different times throughout the family conference.

Power is a complex relationship that is at least two-way in nature. Power also exists, however, in a whole range of interpersonal situations where individuals significantly

influence each other. Interpersonal power is rooted in face-to-face contexts of interaction (Scott 2001: 27). Scott (2001: 136) quotes Eichler (1981) who considered that while interpersonal power relations are diffused and often fluid, they can also be remarkably enduring and are embedded in larger structures such as class, ethnicity and gender. Scott (2001) quotes Weber who recognised that power existed in a whole range of interpersonal situations throughout society, "in the drawing room as well as in a market, from the rostrum of a lecture-hall as well as from the command post of a regiment, from an erotic or charitable relationship as well as from scholarly discussion or athletics". It is the power inherent in the relations of parents to children, the relations of playmates, lovers, friends and acquaintances (Weber 1914: 943).

Interpersonal power is at its strongest in the proximal contexts of face-to-face encounters, but it is not limited to these. More important than physical presence is the temporal and spatial availability of others in a locale, even though they may not currently be physically present (Giddens 1979). Household and family structures are the crucial contexts in which interpersonal power is honed, exercised and practised, producing patterns of power that differ markedly from those arising in the formal, public relations of the State and the economy that they, nevertheless, articulate with in determinate ways (Scott 2001: 137).

4.2.2 Family A

Family A live in a modern 4 bedroom detached villa on a newly built estate on the outskirts of the town. The father answered the door and I was shown into a very modern lounge where the mother and son were sitting. During the initial conversation and pleasantries, it emerged that the father and myself had been brought up in the same town, approximately eight miles away, and in fact we had gone to the same primary school, at approximately the same time. This engaged us in an "all our yesterdays" discussion, sharing information on differing people and the paths which their lives had taken. The discussion also highlighted several commonalities and in fact the family were going to the same 80th birthday party as me the following week-end. However, in the era of selective education, we had attended different secondary schools where there was considerable division and academic snobbery between the two schools. At this point, the mother didn't enter the conversation although this could be attributed to varying possible reasons, for example because of the obvious commonalities of background between the father and myself and/or shyness and/or a lack of confidence.

4.2.2.1 "Parent prompts are good"

When discussing differing types of homework, the mother and son agreed that they liked when departments introduced parent prompts into their homework programme as it facilitated opportunities for involvement,

> "*parent prompts are good. I prefer to do the type of homework where you have to ask your mum or dad to get you things and that. I prefer those than sitting writing*".

This was further highlighted when Child A warmly indicated support from his mother with respect to consolidation booklets in Mathematics. The mother suggested that they were very useful because,

> *"it had the answers. I must be honest, it was a good help for me because you get away from it all and it's different from when we were at school. It's quite useful to be able to double check and make sure that he's understood it and if he's stuck and you're going to help him, that you're getting it right"*

which suggested a reduction in her 'expert power' as she was looking for help through the answers being provided in some format.

When discussing types of homework and differing support mechanism which were available to support learning, Child A identified several, namely,

> *"if you are stuck with something in class and you put your hand up and you still don't get it then a consolidation booklet normally tells you what to do"*

and

> *"In home economics you get a recipe sheet, information sheet and homework sheets. The information sheets are like consolidation sheets because they tell you what to do and how to work it out in your homework sheet"*

which had been put in place by teacher(s) and/or departments to help pupils complete their homework effectively, whilst offering support to parents, thereby increasing the teacher(s) 'position power' which is bestowed on them by virtue of their professional capacity.

However, this 'position power' was reduced when the parents discussed disquiet about the practices of the teaching profession with respect to the homework process and how it had negatively impacted on Child A's progress. The parents expressed a strong opinion that the lack of homework at primary school had significantly affected their son as *"he hasn't been used to the volume of homework"* and that, in their opinion, there was a significant *"mismatch between the results he was getting in primary seven at primary school and when he arrived at secondary school"*, which has led them into *"having a mistrust of the system because we were told our son had reached certain levels and he hadn't really reached them"*. As a practising teacher, I frequently found a mismatch in levels between the

primary and secondary sectors but as an educationalist, I find it difficult to address and/or justify this issue. However, the father admitted that perhaps they were also to blame as they had taken all the information from primary school at face value and only now were they beginning to realise that "*there are certain weaknesses there in his learning*" as they discovered when attempting to help him with his Level D mathematics and "*he couldn't answer basic things, yet he was supposed to have reached this level*". This appeared to uncover the sensitive topic of the gulf, or not, of parents and schools working together, in partnership, to ensure that all pupils are given a full opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability to enhance lifelong learning.

However, the parents did not appear to feel confident in contacting the school, as the father considered it to be an imposition on the teacher,

> "*if we did have a concern, we can contact the teacher and probably get 10 or 15 minutes of their time but parents don't because perhaps it is imposing a bit*".

This was repeated by the mother who had withdrawn from contacting the school on several occasions, even when she was concerned about Child A's lack of progress in the secondary school, "*it's been like that a couple of times, I've thought maybe I should phone the school and then I've thought "no, I'll not bother."* This attitude was replicated throughout the family conference as both parents appeared to suggest that they had an underlying disappointment in themselves as they didn't know how to access the education system effectively to bring about change and/or to access help and information from either the primary or secondary sectors. This lack of understanding perhaps sits in tandem with the fact that both parents' left the education system at sixteen years of age and could be responsible for both parents' apparent reluctance to contact the school. This could be the reason why the parents' felt the need to source information from the parents of Child A's friends, in deference to contacting the school directly.

4.2.2.2 **"Time is the biggest issue"**

Initially, when I entered the room, I observed that the mother was sitting on one three seater settee and her son on the other, offering the possibility of differing groupings. However, the father took the initiative and immediately motioned for me to sit beside his son whilst he sat beside his wife, perhaps indicating an initial impression of "connectedness" between them and/or perhaps they assumed I was not a threat to them or their son and/or they had no perceived notions about the family conference and/or it was just coincidence. The position of Child A, however, gave the initial impression that he was outwith their "connectedness". Interestingly, he chose to remain seated beside myself even when he could have moved into their area of "connectedness" by sitting on the floor beside his parents. This could perhaps be explained by the fact that I had previously taught him for 6 months and therefore had an existing good relationship. For this reason and at this stage, I felt it incumbent upon me to explain that I was there as a researcher and not as a teacher or as a school "snoop" to attempt to assist in ensuring the reliability for the data collection process. At this point, I observed that Child A's demeanour and tone of voice appeared to indicate that he was excited at the prospect of being involved. The parents "connectedness" permeated the family conference and was particularly evident in their continual use of the pronoun "*we*" when talking about decisions that had been taken within the family with respect to Child A's education and especially associated with homework in both the primary and secondary sectors,

> "*We are realistic about him. We've got to be I think. I think a positive sign is, if we are encouraging him to do his homework, we are hoping that eventually it is going to rub off on him and he will want to do it himself*"

This "connectedness" could loosely be described as 'group power' whereby the parents could exert a common influence as Child A would be aware of their common goals and "connectedness". This "connectedness" between the parents also revealed a very

supportive and caring environment which appeared to have been engendered between and amongst members of the family. When discussing each participant's understanding of the term "parental participation" in homework and the main purposes of homework, there was a cohesion of ideas from all members of the family whereby the mother considered its main purpose was *"to try and ensure that you [Child A] have understood"*, the father considered it *"helps everyone, it helps you [Child A],* and Child A considered it *"helps you to learn the stuff you've just done"*, indicating 'group power' through a cohesion of a common goal.

Throughout the family conference there were frequent instances of "connectedness" and/or 'group power' demonstrated through this cohesion of opinion, especially between the parents. I have no way of knowing whether or not this was pre-determined by the parents as to their parenting philosophies or whether it has emerged as the family progressed through their lives. Family cohesion was apparent when discussing the disparity in the frequency of homework between the primary and secondary sectors. The family all believe that this disparity had seriously affected the manner in which Child A performed the homework tasks set in secondary school which subsequently, they believed, meant that he struggled with the concept and volume of homework. Child A offered the justification that *"everyone sees a difference in homework, it's a lot for us because we were never used to doing it"* as well as using it as a justification for his controlling ways of attempting to go outside to play instead of completing his homework as *"I prefer going outside because we didn't get as much homework in primary"*, endorsed by the father's opinion that *"through the circumstances at primary school, he struggles to cope with it all the homework"*.

Throughout the family conference there was little disruption to the family cohesion, with the exception of the thorny issue of time management for members of the family. When discussing the main factors which stopped families being involved in the homework process, the father clearly acknowledged, on several occasions, that *"time is the biggest issue"* to enable parents to effectively be involved as *"if we're participating in it and we've*

both been working, its just trying to get the enthusiasm to help him". Time management issues also featured for Child A throughout the family conference as he admitted that he conducted his homework in a rushed manner, which appeared to displease his father, for example, *"he wants to get it over with as quickly as possible"* and *"its been an ongoing problem"* but at no point did the father appear to consider that he may have a role to play in helping his son with the homework and/or encouraging him to complete it at an appropriate time.

The father/son relationship appeared strained at times, for example the father peppered the discussion with comments which appeared to put his son down through negativity, *"it's as quick as he can do it"* and *"I don't even think he's that bothered whether its right or not as long as he's got it done to get back out the door"* and by sarcastically responding to his understanding of the term "parental participation" with *"he gets stuck a lot"* and yet at no point elicited how he [the father] could have helped his son. Instead he identified where everyone else was at fault for his son's lack of educational progress, including his son. This had the effect of reducing the father's 'referent power' as Child A and his father appeared to have a disconnected relationship in the area of homework. However, the mother attempted to rectify the situation through building a caring, supportive relationship with her son and hence built 'referent power' based on a common understanding between mother and son. However, it should be acknowledged that throughout the family conference there was little apparent evidence of the different facets of possible relationships within the family, although this could be due to the strong separate identities which were exposed.

4.2.2.3 "We've both been working"

During the informal discussion at the beginning of the family conference, the father took the opportunity to inform me that he felt that he had *"done very well for himself after leaving school at 16"* and that he had *"achieved in life regardless of having no*

qualifications", perhaps exposing the possibility of an "inferiority complex" which could have emanated from the initial informal discussion and the uncovering that he went to a junior secondary in the days of selective education when his brother and I had gone to the same local senior secondary, where there was a lot of rivalry and academic snobbery between the two schools. He pointed to his achievements in life by indicating the surroundings and proudly told me about the two cars in the drive and that the family had visited countries worldwide, giving the example of the families previous holiday to South Africa. He was openly proud of what he had achieved and the *"good quality of life"* which the family had. Interestingly, these factors all focus on the father and at no point did he suggest that his wife had contributed to the good quality of life. This is perhaps indicative of his 'patriarchal power' which was ascribed to him by virtue of his position in the family. His demeanour and manner of constantly taking the lead is central to this traditional authority.

The apparent tension between father and son was cited, by the father, as a reason for his non-involvement in the homework process as he felt that,

> *"he [Child A] just starts getting upset if I get involved"* as it *"can cause rows. He gets upset, XX [mother] gets upset, I get upset and we end up having a three way chew at one another"*,

setting aside his responsibility for homework. The father continued to blame others and/or other establishments, hence perhaps indicating other instances where he relinquished his responsibility for his son's lack of academic progress. His apparent need to blame others turned towards the primary school when considering the positive and negative aspects of parental participation in homework because he felt that the local primary school had a tremendously negative impact on Child A as *"he was in a very, very big class, over 30 pupil, with a lot of troublemakers, all the way through primary",* and *"I'm probably blaming the system and/or the management of the school"* and

> *"I don't know but it seems to be that the people that are more naturally intelligent get sort of looked after better than others"* and *"I'm not blaming the teacher(s), I'm probably blaming the system and/or the management of the school"*

but at no point does he reflect on the notion that parental and/or home influence could have a positive impact on his son's progress and/or the notion that the parents could contact the primary school to raise and discuss these issues and/or that they had the opportunity to raise these issues at the primary parent's evenings. He "blamed" work commitments as *"we've both been working"*. He "blamed" the transition period between primary and secondary because of the mismatch of levels achieved, in either sector, as indicated by Child A's report cards. He "blamed" the secondary school as he questioned *"How often do the teachers actually check homework"*, and *"do they look at certain pupils and categorise them or say "he's struggling a little bit, I'll just check his homework to make sure"*, thereby transferring the blame onto the teachers for their apparent lack of communication and/or for teachers not being able to track the performance of individual pupils. He highlighted the secondary school's lack of communication with respect to their homework policy and felt that it was *"really just to cover the school"*. As discussed previously, he even blamed his son which had a detrimental impact on their relationship. The uncovering of an apparent need to blame others, perhaps served to uncover a possible latent resentment towards academia from the father, based on his previous comments about academia although I have no means of corroborating this. However, at no time did the father appear to be actively involved in the homework process, perhaps because he was unwilling to expose himself, although he acknowledged that he had *"A lack of confidence in knowing how to do it, even in 1ˢᵗ year"* indicating a concern in his ability to be able to cope with the level of homework required. His reasoning was that *"it just seems that long ago since we were at school, we've lost touch"*, thus reducing his 'expert power' as Child A seldom asked his father for help with his homework.

However, there was a different reaction from the mother who demonstrated love and understanding, "watching over her son", shepherding him to achieve to the best of his ability and ensuring that he was brought up in a caring and supportive environment, whilst hoping that by instilling better homework practices that it would eventually *"rub off on him and he will want to do it himself"*. 'Referent power' was exposed in the mother/son relationship where they appeared to be available for one another, although some would consider this to be a natural maternal instinct. Child A appeared to understand his mother's reasoning for attempting to operate an effective homework routine, as he was aware that it would encourage good habits for future employment and that *"if you get something from work, or something like that, you'll do it straight away"*. Power appears to lie with the mother who organised the homework system which controlled whether he got *"out to play or not"*, thereby exerting influence over him. The mother was attempting to change, over time, the homework practices of Child A through continual demonstration of care and support, thereby affecting Child A's attitudes, beliefs and/or behaviours. However, all of this took place within a supportive framework where the mother "watched over" her son, helping and continually monitoring her son's progress as she acknowledged that she now had *"a better idea of what Child A's standard of work is now than I did at primary school"* as *"he very rarely got any homework at primary school, hardly anything at all"* which made his progress very difficult to monitor. These monitoring techniques enabled the mother to appear to take control of the homework situation for her son, hence building 'referent power'.

Offering constructive suggestions, as to support mechanisms which teachers and/or departments had devised to help pupils effectively complete homework, was perhaps indicative of the "pleaser/charmer" identity which Child A portrayed whereby he attempted to support all persons involved, in some way, and hence suggests why he frequently found himself in conflict with himself, seeing both sides of a situation and/or issue. Interestingly, Child A was the only pupil involved in the family conferences that I had actually taught and

therefore he had the opportunity to be more acquainted with aspects of my professional practice. By using the exemplification of the effective homework system of the Home Economics department, as stated earlier, he was perhaps reinforcing and displaying his "pleaser/charmer" identity as he knew that he was talking about my own subject background and a system that I had personally devised within the department. In this instance, Child A was, unwittingly, perhaps using 'referent power' with myself in the form of flattery, identifying himself with my professional practice. He very proudly spoke about his disciplinary record, *"I haven't had many punishment exercises, only a couple in primary school"* and wanted *"to try and keep a clean sheet at high school"* but was also aware that *"homework helps you to achieve"* but that *"going outside was fun"*. This self-awareness was also evident when discussing aspects of the benefits and frequency of homework in conjunction with an emerging theme of a lack of confidence in his ability to complete all the homework, regardless of the support mechanisms offered by either his parents and/or the school. This apparent lack of confidence and/or "pleaser/charmer" identity enabled Child A to take control of the situation through manipulation. He appeared to be caught between the juxtaposition of a desire to conform to some of his parents' wishes versus his desire to go out to play.

4.2.2.4   "Hurry up, the bells gone!"

Child A appeared to be keen for his parents, especially his mother, to be involved in the homework process especially when the homework was of a practical nature, giving the mother the opportunity to hold the balance of power within the homework process as she was responsible for attempting to establish a homework routine of *"Child A is told to try and do his homework when he comes home from school"*. At this point the mother used her 'legitimate power' to influence, although the balance of power appeared to shift mainly due to the manipulative tactics employed by Child A and by the fact that the mother allows him to manipulate the situation to suit his own needs and/or wants and/or desires.   When

discussing the frequency of homework and the apparent disparity found by Family A between the primary and secondary sectors, the issue of when homework was carried out came to light. The mother instructed Child A that he had to complete his homework immediately after he came in from school but he was able to manipulate the timing of completing his homework because his parents were out at work, using the excuse that he preferred *"having someone there in case I get stuck or something"*, thereby reducing the mother's 'legitimate power'. However, the father felt that it was because *"he was lazy"* as Child A knew that they would, *"help you and you will get it done quicker"* and because *"they tell me how to do it and give me the answer sometimes. They explain things to me sometimes"* reinforcing the notion of laziness. Again this notion of the father continually putting his son down reduced the father's 'referent power', demonstrating the fragmented nature of their relationship associated with homework.

In contrast, and in line with her shepherding identity, the mother believed that Child A *"goes out to play"* because he wished her to be present whilst completing his homework, indicative of his *"lack of confidence"*, thereby exposing a disparity of opinions between the parents. This disparity of opinion offered Child A the opportunity to manipulate the situation because there was a time gap between Child A coming in from school and his parents arriving home from work. However, in line with the "pleaser/charmer" identity portrayed by Child A, he attempted to compromise between the two opinions, offered by his parents, as he suggests that *"it doesn't matter whether it's mum or dad but I just prefer doing my work whilst someone is there",* and hence gains the balance of power. However, his apparent lack of confidence and/or self awareness could also be translated as a convoluted means of not completing his homework. *"Child A won't do his homework when he comes home from school"* as *"he doesn't like doing his homework unless I'm [mother] in"*, thereby successfully altering the homework process to enable him to complete it at a time which suited himself and offered him the opportunity to *"go out to play"*.

Child A also appeared to participate in misleading tactics which perhaps enabled him to influence his mother to achieve his desired needs and/or wants of completing his homework when it suited him. Ultimately, influence is, of course, about getting one person to do what another wants and Child A successfully manipulated the situation to enable him to complete his homework at an alternative time from his mother's routine, when he asked *"can I finish this off after?"*. Manipulation can be viewed as one of the three major forms of power which can be distinguished in terms of the type of influence brought to bear upon the individual. The power holder, in this case Child A, exercised manipulation through controlling the situations when he influenced the behaviour of others without making explicit the behaviour which he thereby wanted them to perform. This was evident when Child A successfully used his influence, as the mother allowed him to frequently complete his homework afterwards, even when she knew that he would be *"tired and grumpy"* when he came in from playing. The mother appeared to be unaware of the influencing tactics she was under, exhibiting the features of influence as described by Buchanan and Huczynski (2004: 841), as she acknowledged that she frequently allowed him to go out without completing his homework. The first that influencees will know of it is when they have supported the influencer's proposal or suggestion, or have agreed to act as requested, as is the case with Child A because his mother capitulates to his wishes and allows him to complete his homework later.

When discussing some of the benefits of using parents as learning partners in the homework question, the father clearly demonstrated resistance to helping when he abruptly and sharply interrupted the mother who was trying to make the point that she could monitor Child A's progress more closely at secondary by virtue of the fact that he got more homework. By interrupting in this manner, the father was utilising his 'patriarchal power' whereby he expected to be able to speak when he wished due to his position in the family. It was significant that this was the only occasion throughout the whole of the family conference where there was an interjection from another participant, which was perhaps indicative of

the strength of his feelings that they were totally unaware that their son was struggling academically throughout primary school. It may also be significant that most of the instances of help being offered with homework are by the mother, thereby reducing her ability to influence through reduced 'expert power' and in fact the father seldom considered this aspect, thereby reducing his ability to influence. Although he appeared to want his son to be more academic, his words and actions appeared to uncover a resistance to helping with homework perhaps due to the fact that he felt that it restricted family life, due to the pace of homework, and/or the ability and/or the keenness of Child A and/or the volume of homework. Regardless, the fathers' lack of involvement in the homework process offered others the opportunity to take control of several power bases, namely 'reward power', 'referent power' and 'expert power' and hence control the influences which could be brought to bear within the family. The parents appeared to want to know more about their son's progress but their apparent lack of confidence coupled with their reluctance to contact the school, enabled Child A to control the situation, through manipulative tactics, and thereby overshadow the reality that his progress was being hindered through his own lack of commitment to the educational process and perhaps through his "pleaser/charmer" identity which enabled him to successfully deceive.

Conflict arose within Child A, between the problem of completing the homework or not, getting a punishment exercise or keeping a clean sheet and staying in to complete his homework or going outside to play, where conflict can be described as a fundamental source governing all aspects of life. Indeed the word "problem" itself is born of conflict (Buchanan & Huczynski 2004: 791). Conflict is a process which begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected or is about to negatively affect, something the first party cares about, although in this instance the differing parties are the two sides of Child A's brain whereby he appeared to weigh up the options of each before making a decision, thereby creating conflict within himself. Typically, conflicts are based upon differences in interests and values, when the interests of one come up against the

different interests of another. However, one of Child A's main aims for being involved in manipulative tactics was to ensure that he didn't receive a punishment exercise, as he wanted to *"keep a clean sheet at high school"* as he was *"frightened of them [punishment exercises]"*, perhaps reinforcing his immaturity, as highlighted by his father, and his keenness to please his parents within his own set of boundaries.

This conflict, within himself, was also evidenced when discussing the recording of homework in the homework diary. Throughout this discussion Child A showed a considerable amount of self-awareness where he wanted to effectively record his homework in his homework diary but was also aware that, on some occasions, he was slow to record it, which resulted in the teacher reportedly saying *"come on XXXX [Child A], hurry up, the bell has gone"*. His demeanour and tone of voice whilst telling this tale indicated his concern about being slow with tasks although he was also able to offer constructive suggestions for the teacher(s) of, *"it would be better if you were told a bit earlier than when the bell goes"* and *"it would be good to be told if you had homework when you came into the class"* and *"put it up on the board or whatever so you can get it anytime"* to improve the situation for pupils to record their homework accurately. However, Child A appeared to be able to use the teachers' current practices to substantiate his action of not completing his homework because he hadn't recorded it accurately and, for the benefits of the parents, to shift the blame towards the teachers. Given the notion of blaming others which emanated from the father towards the education system, this seemed an effective means of transferring the blame away from Child A and towards the teaching profession, thereby manipulating the situation to his advantage.

4.2.2.5 **"Out to play or not?"**

Interestingly, towards the end of the interview, the parents appeared to change from using the using the pronoun "*he*" or their son's Christian name, to using the pronoun "*you*" which appeared to indicate that they were attempting to address Child A directly as a means of reinforcing the point that they are a support mechanism who are there for him alone. These support mechanisms were uncovered throughout the discussions whereby a web of surveillance was exposed. Child A's mother attempted to take control through surveillance practices when she surreptitiously and constantly monitored Child A's progress using a variety of approaches, namely, "*checking the homework diary*" and "*checking when it is to be done for*", and "*he would do his homework and I would always check it and check how he got on with it*". These surveillance practices offered her the possibility of influencing Child A to effect change, over time, in his homework practices by "*encouraging him to do his homework, I am hoping that eventually it is going to rub off on him and he will want to do it himself*". This control could be viewed as a strategy to influence her son's homework practices over time, to help him establish good working practices for lifelong learning.

These surveillance tactics are submerged throughout the transcription and the discussion on aspects of homework facilitated opportunities to uncover these surreptitious influencing tactics displayed by the mother. However, all of this took place within a supportive framework where the mother "watched over", helped and continually monitored her son's progress as she acknowledged that she now had "*a better idea of what Child A's standard of work is now than I did at primary school*" as "*he very rarely got any homework at primary school, hardly anything at all*" which made his progress very difficult to monitor. This is indicative of the 'referent power' which the mother built in order to influence her son to complete homework effectively. These monitoring techniques enabled the mother to appear to take control of the homework situation for her son and were particularly evident

when discussing differing support mechanisms which were offered either by the family and/or the school.

However, Child A was involved in a range of deceptive and manipulative tactics, which were exposed when he chose which homework to complete by virtue of the subject,

> *"if I like the period then I'll probably do it but if I think the period is boring, like I don' t like Maths and English. If it's them, I'll end up leaving it to the last minute but if it's drawing for Art, or Technical is pretty easy or I'll just do that instead"*,

thereby taking control of the situation and ensuring that the power continues to lie with himself and hence negate the 'legitimate power' of the teacher(s). Child A revealed that he controlled the homework completion through the type of homework and the subject/teacher for whom it had to be completed, showing an awareness of the teachers who checked homework consistently and those who do not. This information enabled him to manipulate the homework completion to suit his desire to "*go out to play*".

The father shared a concern regarding the volume of homework, as he felt that Child A had an excessive amount for his age. This discussion subsequently uncovered specific reasons for this as Child A "*wasn't completing it [homework] in the class, so he was getting what he hadn't done in the class plus his homework*". Although the father was aware of this issue, and appeared to be aware of his son's poor homework practices, he still appeared to take no control of the situation and didn't attempt to put any measures in place to counteract the situation and/or arising issues. This was indicative of the lack of relationship which appeared to exist between father and son, whereby the father recognised that Child A "*gets stuck a lot*" but at no point offered help or assistance. This allowed Child A to utilise varying deceptive tactics to ensure that he managed to achieve his intention of meeting his own needs and/or wants and/or desires within his own timeframe and to dominate through manipulation. It might be argued that adult social orders systematically misunderstand children, assuming them to be incompetent, (Lee 1999) which could lead the father to take

his son's practices at face value and not lead him to look beneath the surface at what else could be happening. This situation could be compounded by the lack of monitoring strategies employed by the teachers' and/or the school as Child A's deceptive homework tactics had never come to light, as the parents were never requested to attend a guidance interview.

4.2.3   Family B

Family B live in a large traditionally built red sandstone semi-detached house close to the main town. At the time of the data collection the mother had been studying for the previous four years for a sports science degree and graduated the day before the family conference took place. During the initial conversation, the mother gave me an insight into her educational philosophies as, later in life, she had become much more aware of the impact that education could have. This had focused her thinking towards an educational orientation for herself and her children. She acknowledged that this had had a significant impact in formulating her attitude towards the completion of homework and therefore she was the member of the family who was responsible for developing a structured homework routine.

4.2.3.1   "Tea and scones"

Within the family, the mother had been responsible for devising and implementing, from primary one to the present time, *"the homework hour"* whereby Child B sat down, immediately after school, with "*tea and scones*" to complete his homework. Both parents agreed that *"it is a routine"* and that they *"tended to stick to it because it has worked"*, although the father acknowledged that, in his opinion, *"all they really want is the scone and the cup of tea"*. This established homework system appeared to sensitise Child B towards an appreciation of the established and supportive system, as he equated the scone and cup of tea with homework. He felt that his mother "*set the scene*" and therefore it "*set the habit*" for him. This is in agreement with Scott (2001: 22) when he states that positions of command require explicit, overt, and sustained action on the part of the principal, as the dominant agent must, at the very least, make the order known to those who are expected to obey. This is the first instance of the mother displaying 'legitimate power' as she covertly displayed dominance through the establishment of the homework system. The homework

98

hour also offered the mother the opportunity to create a web of surveillance which enabled her to formulate quite distinct opinions associated with the frequency and type of homework Child B was being asked to complete, "*It*'s *boring*" and "*unimaginative*" and

> "*we believed that homework was a good thing, although not necessarily through this repetitive malarky typing out numbers stuff*". *Some of the stuff, it's just parrot fashion, it's repetition*".

Based on these views, and the mothers open acknowledgement that "*if learning is made enjoyable it will be lifelong*", the mother saw it as her role to make homework more stimulating because "*I think what's coming home is maybe not as stimulating as it could be*" and it appeared to be more reminiscent of "*a punishment*" and that "*perhaps a project over a term would be better, where they had to produce homework on a specific topic*", although she admitted "*how you would do that is beyond me but I'm sure teachers could come up with something. Something like that maybe quite interesting?*".

She considered that homework should be more focussed on "*experiential learning*" as it was her belief that homework "*will underline/reinforce and perhaps improve understanding*". The family conference afforded the mother the opportunity to share her opinions openly with her son, thereby perhaps raising her level of 'expert power' through sharing her perceptions of the homework system. However, discussion surrounding Child B's homework practices highlighted that he chose which homework to complete first by virtue of "*the subject that you like best before you would do the type of homework that you like best*", which perhaps reinforces the mother's comments and demonstrating a common bond in their relationship.

The homework hour also facilitated an opportunity for the mother to impact on the homework practices of her son, although she was aware that it didn't facilitate an opportunity to impact on the school's and/or teacher's homework practices. She offered

quite stringent and relevant comments about the methodologies being used for homework, by teachers at present and expressed openly her disappointment in them, *"I think it's about promoting more stimulation for the subjects you're studying."*, or *"it would be advantageous if they [the school] gave you workings of the new way of doing long division"*

When discussing the problems they were encountering with methodologies associated with mathematics, she interrupted her husband crossly, indicating her frustration that she could influence her son's homework practices but had no capacity for changing the school's and/or teacher's practices. However, she did acknowledge that,

> *"I'm not a teacher so I don't know how to teach it. It's not that I can't do it for myself but I don't know how to teach"*

but suggested that,

> *"there are a whole host of methods of teaching, so there must be a whole host of methods of homework provision. I think that innovation, inspiration and motivation and so on must be difficult, but if that's your job, that's your job, you should be inspiring".*

Interestingly, although she articulated suggestions for improvement, at no point does she harness this energy and directly challenge the authority and/or the school and/or the teacher(s).

4.2.3.2 "We've to guide you"

A significant theme running through most of the attempts to conceptualise interpersonal power is that it is a phenomenon that is inextricably connected with the relationships which exist between people, (Barraclough and Stewart 1992: 8). Therefore, it can be said that power always involves relationships; it always consists of interaction and, therefore, can never be one-sided or unilateral.

Although Family B portrayed the impression of being a very close family, where consideration is given to the views of all concerned, the discussion surrounding homework uncovered differing aspects of their relationships which demonstrated supportiveness, a "team spirit" and an aura of "connectiveness", exemplifying 'referent power' and/or 'group power' as all members of the family appeared to be "in tune" with one another. This was particularly evident when by the mother acknowledged *"I think Child B and I, and as a family we have a special relationship and we have special interrelationships and so on"*.

The discussion about homework facilitated opportunities for the family to demonstrate supportiveness for and to each other within a loving and caring environment which was evident in the warm tone of voice and manner with which each member of the family communicated with one another throughout the family conference. 'Referent power' is displayed amongst all members of the family, whereby they constantly appear to relate to each other. This atmosphere was highlighted through the palpable calmness which I experienced when I initially walked into the house, after being greeted at the door by the mother. Although there are three children in the family, ranging in age from twelve to six, the calmness was evident as there was no shouting or crying or fighting within the home. The mother initially directed me to the lounge and introduced me to the father and then excused herself. I heard her politely and calmly request Child B to come to the lounge. She waited for him to arrive outside the lounge door and then they entered together. This was my initial realisation of a strong identity and controlling influence which the mother displayed but within a culture of care and support. This appeared to be reinforced by the consideration which each member showed to one another when expressing their view, without interruption, giving the impression that everyone's views were valued.

Other instances of this supportiveness emerged in relation to the father's attempts to help his son, of which the mother said *"he [dad] tries so hard. You can see the frustration on his face",* Child B was supportive of the position his dad found himself in with outdated

methodologies as he considered it was "*just the way he learned when he was young*" and the parents were jointly being supportive of their son, as indicated by the mother's acknowledgement that "*they all try to please us, to be honest, and I hope that we do pretty well in pleasing them as well*". Child B was supportive of his mother, acknowledging the efforts she made as she took time and made an effort to learn new methodologies, whilst his father stayed with traditional approaches. This demonstrates the shifting nature of 'referent power' whereby it is dependent upon the persons involved in the relationship at the time and on the situation.

Consideration for others permeated the family conference, for example, the parents always sought the opinions of Child B and indeed requested that he read the questions and respond first. Giving their son the opportunity to initially voice his opinion was indicative of a societal shift from "children should be seen and not heard" to a more engaging one where children's opinions are welcomed. According to Devine (2002) this also implies an acknowledgement of children's voices and an opportunity for them to be considered as social actors in their own right. Such a shift has, however, important implications both for adults and for children, challenging traditional hierarchical patterns of association and emphasising the interdependencies and interconnectedness of adults' and children's lives. Eckert (2004) identified children as largely defining themselves as being regulated by adults. Eckert, goes on to argue that the children at the same time managed to present themselves as agents, that is, as people who can make choices among the possibilities presented to them. Recent advances within the sociology of childhood have drawn attention to the positioning of children relative to the dominant adult group and the implications of children's minority status for their capacity to be taken seriously within the society at large (Devine 2002). As James and Prout (1996: 42) write, the family represents a social context within which children discover their identities as "children" and as "selves". One could say, thus, that the definitions of what it means to be a child, what children should have access to and what childhood is are constantly renegotiated in

everyday praxis between children and adults. The discussion surrounding the homework process offered Child B the opportunity to demonstrate his own identity through his consideration for others, often in circumstances different to his own, and his willingness to help others. This social conscience began to rise to the surface when discussing the possibility of utilising computer technology to complete homework and his thoughts of how others would be able to complete research, undertake e-homework if the technology wasn't freely available to them. His reaction demonstrated a social awareness and consideration for others as he was aware that *"they would be mocked"* and that it *"wouldn't be nice for them"*.

This consideration for others was also exemplified in the language which was used throughout the family conference,

> *"We just think that we've to help you [Child B], we've not to tell you [Child B] the answer, we've to guide you [Child B] towards the right answer but not actually do it for you [Child B], to support you [Child B]",*

thereby reinforcing their "connectedness" and/or "team spirit". I also observed a time lag throughout the family conference, in so far as the parents allowed Child B to make the initial response and was not inclined to respond until after he had done so, giving him a clear uninhibited voice within the family conference structure. This "team spirit" appeared to exist amongst each member of the family grouping, as was demonstrated by the mum's acknowledgment that Child B would,

> *"help the others as well (younger siblings at primary school). They are quite good at helping each other. They are siblings but they are friends"*

and used this knowledge to assist the appropriate member of the family in a clearer understanding, thereby reinforcing the message of a culture of supportiveness where learning is a valuable tool and relationships are important. This shows a link between 'expert power' and 'reward power' whereby Child B was displaying his expertise to his younger siblings whilst receiving 'reward power' through his good relationships with them.

Although consideration for others permeated the family conference, all were aware that homework could disrupt their equilibrium by creating a tension, especially around mathematics methodology. The mother stressed that *"we want to be comfortable with his academic achievement. We want him to enjoy it"*. This could be viewed as a type of 'reward power' being displayed by the parents where they communicated the view that if homework was completed then the reward of educational advancement may be possible. However, all members of the family were equally aware of the stresses associated with the mathematics methodology and its effect on the equilibrium of the family as it created tensions,

> *"If someone came to me with a problem, whether its maths or chemistry or whatever I would tend to do it the way I was taught"*.

Discussion regarding mechanisms, which the school could provide to help support parental participation, facilitated an opportunity for the mother to demonstrate the same "connectedness" whereby she expressed her willingness to learn a new methodology from her son, thereby offering Child B the opportunity to display 'expert power',

> *"when we[parents] haven't been able to do an example [homework] their way [school's], then you have to listen because maybe XXXX [Child B] has been doing it all day and then he has brought more home and he wants to do his homework and he's trying to explain their way"*.

This facilitated opportunities to engender mutual respect and trust through the combination of 'expert and referent power' bases, whilst at the same time reinforcing their "connectedness" as the mother acknowledged that Child B may know more than herself.

During the family conference the mother indicated that her recent experience of studying contributed to the "team spirit", as everyone had a job to do in the house but was also a factor in contributing to the family volunteering to participate in my data collection, as she was very aware of the difficulties associated with attempting to get willing volunteers in the research process.

4.2.3.3   "Different roads"

The father's identity emerged distinctly through the discussions surrounding the issue of mathematical methodology and its impact on homework and family relationships. This discussion offered the opportunity to uncover sensitivities surrounding the topic and the father's apparent resistance to address the new methodologies. The father readily admitted that he learned mathematics via a completely different methodology and hasn't had the time, or the inclination, to learn the new ways,

> "*I have no great experience of the new way, I still tend to do it the way I was taught at the school in the 60's. There are different ways of getting there, different roads to go to get at the answer*"

The father's resistance to change is discussed later in more detail.

At the time of the family conference it appeared as if the mother was the major influence, as she dominated the homework system, although I have no way of knowing if this agreement had been made earlier in the parental relationship. The mother's influence and control over the homework process was recognised by the father when he acknowledged that "*it was a routine, which was started by XXXX [the mother] as I was out working*". Therefore, the mother appeared to be recognised as a leader in the establishment of the family homework system, thereby possessing a particular gift of personality, which allowed her to exercise extraordinary skills of leadership over an extended period of time, as the homework regime had been in place for at least the previous seven years. This display of 'referent power' through her charismatic leadership style may have allowed the mother to pursue her personal "mission" of ensuring the best possible educational opportunities of advancement for her son. The leader "seizes the task for which he is destined and demands that others obey and follow him by virtue of his mission" (Weber 1914: 1112). Thus, a charismatic leader exercises domination that is justified "by virtue of a mission believed to be embodied in him" (Weber 1914: 1117) and could be allied with the 'family fixer' identity of the

mother through her relationships with other members of the family and her acknowledgement that a main task for her within the family is to "*get involved in school work*".

'Affiliation power' emerged as the father showed a close association with the views of the mother on whose authority he acted within the context of homework. For example when discussing the role of parents in the homework process, the mother immediately agreed with the view offered by her husband, that parents should be used as *"the sounding board. A support mechanism but to encourage him as well",* thereby allowing her philosophy to surface, reinforcing the view of the "family fixer" and her need to influence through change. Although the discussion of homework uncovered the mother's apparent identity of the "family fixer", it also uncovered her strong use of 'referent power' whereby she engendered consideration for others and her desire/need for all to work together to help and support one another and to establish a culture where learning was valued. It was noticeable throughout the family conference that the mother tended to focus on the pronoun "*I*", in fact she used the pronoun "*I*" six times within a six line response, which may be an initial indication of the mother being the main power source and/or decision maker and/or dominant member of the family and/or authoritative voice within the family with respect to aspects associated with homework. This attitude may have emanated from her "fixer" identity and/or her educational values which could have been formulated and/or reinforced and/or highlighted from her recent studies, although I have no concrete evidence for this assertion.

The mother appeared to use homework as a means of enabling her to broaden her own knowledge of curricular materials, thereby influencing her own learning capacity, successfully increasing her 'expert power'. As part of her "fixer" identity, the mother continually attempted to ensure that she had applicable knowledge of the topic and methodology to enable her to assist her son with his homework. Expertise as a form of

domination occurs when cognitive symbols are structured into organised bodies of knowledge in terms of which some people are regarded as experts and others defer to their superior knowledge and skills. This type of power is based on trust in a principal's specialised knowledge or skill rather than the specific social position that they hold in a structure of command (Scott 2001: 22). Within this aspect of expertise, the mother openly acknowledged that her expertise is ever expanding through learning with her children,

> *"as they are progressing through the high school it suits me great because it takes me back to basic chemistry and subjects like that. So I'm re-learning things that I have taken a wee bit for granted but by the new methods".*

This additional learning enabled her to create dominance through a combination of 'expert and referent power' bases. Busch (1980: 99) stated that 'expert and referent power' bases help to build trust in a relationship and help develop an open relationship, evident in Family B, where the mother willingly demonstrated her keenness to help her son's academic progress.

Throughout the family conference the compliant nature of Child B emerged, perhaps brought about through the use of 'coercive power' being deployed by his mother and/or father and/or teachers. For example, Child B appeared to need to seek the approval of his parent(s) and/or teacher(s) through the effective use of his homework diary to record homework,

> *"I used to just put how long I thought it would take so that I could fit it in with what I would be doing that night. I like where you can record achievements, so that I can let my parents see them".*

This is indicative of the possible use of 'coercive power' being deployed through Child B's belief that the school and/or the teacher(s) have the capacity to administer punishment(s) for non-completion of homework, thereby forcing compliance.

The use of 'coercive power' can been viewed through Child B's use of his homework diary, for example,

> *"I use my timetable at the front pages, just to see what I am in. I read the saying at the bottom of the page. Sometimes I just record my achievements that I've done in a day"*

but in each of these instances it could be interpreted as his parents, the school system and/or his teacher(s), making effective use of 'coercive power' to ensure compliance. Child B conformed to this use of 'coercive power' through his belief that the participants had the capacity to administer punishment(s) and therefore chooses to capitulate and comply with their will. However, his compliance could also be the consequences of the mother's persuasive influence, through her "fixer" identity, where these influences are unobservable to both the influencee and the observer. The influencee's first awareness of it will be when they have supported the influencer's proposal or suggestion, or have agreed to act as requested. People will do things for others without knowing exactly why, but will feel good about it as displayed by Child B in his demeanour of pleasure, constantly smiling in the direction of his parents, when sharing his efficiency in completing his homework diary and discussing his achievements chart at the back of the homework diary. The discussion regarding homework practices appeared to uncover this influencing factor whereby the mother set and established practices with which Child B willingly complied, through his openness to agree the value of the established system within the home.

Child B's homework recording practices uncovered a possible need in him to seek the approval of his parent(s) by willingly offering his diary for their scrutiny,

> *"they see my homework diary, so if they see that I've not wrote it down then they will just say "why have you done maths homework and there's not maths recorded on this". Mum and dad sign my homework diary every week and check it",*

This further indicates Child B's compliance.

4.2.3.4   "Stuck in a time warp"

When Child B was initially asked to indicate positive and negative influences of parental participation in the homework process, he appeared very reticent to answer, as there was a long pause in the conversation, perhaps because he was sensitive to his father's resistance to change, even when it caused him confusion.   Finally, Child B identified his father's resistance to change as a negative influence because,

> *"when dad tries to teach me different things and then I go into class the next day and they are doing it a different way, I get confused and then sometimes I just don't know what to do",*

offering his father a justification for his reluctance to be involvement in the homework process, although justified through 'affiliation power'.   Throughout the family conference there are many instances where the father appeared to be reluctant to be involved in the homework process, especially when of a mathematical nature.

The discussion surrounding the father's apparent reluctance served to reinforce differing aspects of the combined power bases of 'legitimate, referent, expert and reward powers' which the mother held in the dynamics of family life.   Influence may have been exerted on the father as the family acknowledged that he was trying and that perhaps the influence of the mother, with her views of educational issues, were beginning to alter his predisposition, but only with respect to computer literacy because,

> *"we recognise that without being computer literate we are not moving forward at the rate of knots that we could. XXXX [father] has come out of the dark ages and he is learning and wouldn't be without it [the computer] now as well".*

Although, in this instance, Child B used 'expert power' to reverse the traditional roles by helping his father to become more computer literate, whilst acknowledging that this is likely to never be the case with respect to educational methodologies as he is *"quite*

resistant to change". However, it should be remembered that power is rarely one sided as each participant influences the other, resisting their power to a greater or lesser extent.

Varying contradictions were uncovered throughout the discussion, especially concerning the father's resistance to learning new methodologies even when he knew that it caused a tension and confusion between himself and his son. Child B acknowledged that he had developed his own coping strategies to deal with the dilemma,

> *"I usually just listen to what the teacher says but what my dad says I tend to try it his way but usually just do it my way"*

which was in direct contrast to the compliance identity surrounding Child B. Throughout the discussion on methodologies, the father's resistance to change was evident in his attitude towards attempting to help his son,

> *"I can't understand the method that has been adopted or that Child B has been taught in class, so I tend to say right here's how I did it 30 years ago. It will still give you the same answer but the workings are different"*,

or

> *"There are different ways of getting there, different roads to go to get at the answer just different methods".*

thereby reducing his 'expert power', and subsequently the 'referent power' of the father.

However, he recognised that this wasn't helpful to his son's learning and/or his engagement in the learning process of homework and that the methodological situation impinged on him being able to offer help and support to his son, thereby reducing his 'expert power' further,

> *"I think we [dad and Child B] realise as well that we can create confusion. We're at loggerheads, different views although we are still trying to get to the same end point with the same solution but we just go down different roads to achieve/get that result. It's not really fair on Child B".*

Child B and his mother demonstrated many instances of 'referent power' through the "connectivity" which existed between them, whilst the father and son's "connectivity" appeared to be very much marginalised in the discussion surrounding homework, although I have no way of knowing whether this is the case in other aspects. The mother screwed up her face, showing an expression of disapproval, when the father admitted to being "*stuck in a time warp*". This disapproval was continued when the mother openly admitted that the father's lack of willingness to learn new methodologies, especially in mathematics, was a position which she just could not adopt and which caused a tension between all three members of the family.

The mother increased her 'referent power' as she clearly indicated her willingness to learn to help and support her son's learning in a framework which he understood and which caused him less confusion,

> *"we want him to enjoy it, we don't want him to be sitting thinking "what's my teacher saying" "what's my mother saying", "who is right?"".*

The mother admitted that she had attempted to engage the father in these new methodologies but, regardless of the pressure exerted by other members of the family and/or the obvious involvement of the mother in Child B's learning, the father offered the notion that,

> *"I think they all have tried to convert me but I am quite resistant I think to change because I know what worked for me because that was what I was exposed to",*

reinforcing his resistance to change.

4.2.3.5   "Who's right?"

Fennell (1999: 24) quotes Giddens (1981) who commented on the double-sided nature of 'legitimate power'. On the one side he acknowledges that 'legitimate power' can be used to coerce or constrain, whilst on the other side he acknowledges that it can be used to

liberate or transform, and to create and maintain orderly, productive environments. This was evidenced throughout the family conference where the mother displayed controlling influences through her "fixer" identity and through a web of surveillance, spreading its tentacles across differing aspects of the homework process. Initially, the mother set up the homework regime as a means of establishing a systematic homework plan, ensuring that the homework of all her children was being completed within a suitable timeframe but also displayed an apparent need for her to be more involved in and hence offering her opportunities to influence the learning process. This demonstrated aspects of 'coercive power' which, if noticeable, can be viewed as destructive uses of power in the human relationship. However, the "homework hour" offered her a means of manipulating and controlling situation(s), need(s) and want(s) by ensuring compliance with the family's established aspirations and values.

The mother's thirst for learning was built on her gaining 'expert power' through the premise that she would be able to help and support her son, it also afforded her the opportunity to survey the work he was involved with and to establish what was happening in his school life, by asking, *"what new thing did you learn today?"*, and/or *"what did you learn in German today?"* and/or *"how was school today?"*. This afforded her the opportunity to strengthen her 'referent power' by opening dialogue with Child B as she liked *"to know what they have been doing all day when they are out of the house"*, fulfilling a need within her to survey differing aspects of schooling and hence control of the situation.

The indication throughout the family conference was that the mother was the dominant force with respect to educational issues, and established a controlling system of the homework regime which nurtured educational advancement within a climate of supportiveness, thereby strengthening her 'legitimate and referent power' bases through the use of charismatic authority. Scott (2001: 20) describes "authority" as existing 'whenever

112

one, several, or many people explicitly or tacitly permit someone else to make decisions for them for some category of acts'. Influence appears to be exercised by the mother in a variety of differing situations, for example the mother appeared to strive to continue to maintain control over the situation(s) arising from homework through her "fixer" identity, *"I get involved in school work"*, and/or *"I ask them how he is getting taught it [any subject] and I then either learn or seek further information on how to do it"* and/or *"It would be great to get more information of how to do the homework."*

The homework regime also facilitated opportunities for the mother to set clear expectations for Child B, with respect to homework practices, offering the mother an opportunity to exert 'expert power' and hence build 'referent power' through her obvious interest in educational issues. According to Emerson (1962: 32) this power is rooted in relations of dependence. A principal dependent upon another whenever the attainment of his/her goals is facilitated by certain actions on the part of the other. The actions of organising the homework hour were instigated by the mother as *"Yeah, it's a routine. A routine that was instigated by me because I was here"*. Emerson (1962) argues that typically a social relation will involve the mutual dependence of the participants to a greater or lesser extent, where Child B gained the expertise, help and support from his mother and his mother gained a compliant son who appeared to acknowledge the value and worth of education and the homework process per se.

Scott (2001:139) describes 'reward and coercive powers' as being closely related, being the two sides of the same phenomenon of calculation. However, Weber (1920) also related this to charismatic domination where the attention is focused on the strong emotional bond that exists between charismatic leaders and their followers, for example, mother and son respectively. The followers have "faith" in the charismatic leader, they "surrender" to a quality of personality and personal magnetism in the leader, and they express this surrender in extreme personal loyalty, most typically in commitment and enthusiasm. It is important

to note that it does not matter whether a person actually has some personality trait that sets them apart from others. What is crucial is that others believe him or her to have these characteristics. The dominant or charismatic power of the mother, through the use of the interpersonal power source of influence, can be exemplified in the dependence of Child B to conform to the homework regime, although he also appeared to understand the benefits to himself in completing his homework immediately as it gained him the reward of being able to "*watch telly after*" and to participate in other "*evening commitments*", as a reward and/or a negotiated promise. This homework regime offered the mother the opportunity to create a web of surveillance through her charismatic power as Child B never appeared to deviate from the homework routine, "*we tend to stick to it because it has worked. We think, we do not too bad. It's psychology*".

Hidden beneath the surface of the text were a range of surveillance strategies employed by the mother, to enable her to control the homework practices of the family. These fingers of surveillance appeared to offer the parents, especially the mother, the opportunity to surreptitiously monitor their son's homework practices to ensure conformity, for example asking "*what did you learn today at school?*" as the mother is always "*quite curious to know what and how they are getting taught*", checking his homework diary on a daily basis as a "*checking mechanism*", reviewing his homework jotters/books so give them the opportunity to "*chart his progress in various subjects*" and "*lets us see what he has been doing throughout the day*", which began to rise to the surface when discussing the role of parents in the homework process and the effectiveness of the school's homework policy and practice. However, his capitulation and/or subordinate attitude of compliance could have emanated from an ingrained habit of "*family homework time*". Child B reiterated, on several occasions, that he thought homework would "*help you learn*" which may be indicative of the silent nature of the influencing and the positive feeling that he has been primarily acting in his own best interests, helping himself to achieve his own goals, rather than acting for the benefit of the influencer, i.e. his mother. It was the mother's belief that

the school had control over the learning process as *"It's [homework] expected to be done. It is given out by the authority of the school and it's expected to be done",* indicating the school and/or teacher(s) use of 'coercive power' as a means of subtle control/influence over the learning process.

4.2.4   Family C

Family C live in a traditionally built, detached bungalow in an area close to the main town, where the housing is entirely traditionally built and privately owned. Immediately after the introductions, the mother shared details of the family structure which was complex in so far as the father has 2 distinct families, one adult daughter from a previous marriage, who now lives outwith their home, and a son and daughter from this marriage, who are of an age that they live with their parents in the family home. The mother highlighted that she felt lucky that the family could financially afford for her not to work and therefore stay at home to *"bring up the family"*. She acknowledged that she considered this to be advantageous as it meant that *"they could give the children a very secure and family orientated environment in which to be brought up"*. This initially highlighted the basis of the family philosophy and indicated an agreement with Scott (2001) and Vogler (1998) who suggested that cultural discourses of masculinity and femininity, the patriarchal family, and the male as the breadwinner established the basis for the dominant pattern of male strategic control in marital households, though female and joint systems of strategic control also exist. This set the scene of how the family operated, especially in relation to the homework process.

4.2.4.1   "Teachers' should check"

Throughout the family conference the mother indicated distrust in the school's procedures associated with the topic of homework and, at points, laid the blame squarely at the door of the school. She appeared to believe that the school was failing in its duty to effectively deal with her son's homework as it was her belief that *"the school's homework system doesn't seem organised",* that *"it should be a more structured thing"* and that the parents were ill-informed and/or mis-informed about their child's homework practices. She gave several exemplifications of aspects, which she felt, required to be addressed by either the teacher(s) and/or the school's homework system, namely,

116

"I feel that homework is probably a good thing but I think that it should be done on a more regular routine basis because if not regular I think children don't know whether their coming or going, whether they're doing homework tonight or what they're doing".

and

"There appears to be no specific instructions on any of his homework exercises which doesn't help us if we are trying to get him to complete his homework correctly",

and

"I feel that the homework diaries should be checked. I know it's not practical but it should be checked or there should be a threat of their guidance teacher checking them".

and

"Again, it's maybe not practical but teachers should check what should be in the homework diary and if it's not there, they're [the pupil's] in trouble. There should be a deterrent to help them fill it in".

This belief on the practices of the teacher(s) and / or the school's homework system permeated the family conference, indicative of a reduction in 'legitimate power' and/or 'expert power' of the teacher(s) from the mother's perspective. However, the mother also offered possible areas for development which could be adopted to help teachers improve their practise, namely,

"I think homework should reflect classwork and not new work and it should be reinforcing work which has already been explained to them and not new or different work. This puts a pressure and tension into the house as neither knows exactly what is required",

117

The parents appeared to constantly seek to blame others, perhaps as a means of relinquishing themselves of the responsibility for homework, having the effect of deflecting blame away from themselves as they gave limited consideration to the roles which they could play in the homework process. This could be the reason why there was limited input from the family conference on the nature of homework.

4.2.4.2 "Sibling rivalry"

The relationship between the siblings had a significant impact on the discussion surrounding homework. On my arrival, Child C's sister, who was two years younger, was hovering around the conservatory door, openly enjoying engaging me in conversation and asking pertinent questions about my visit. The younger sibling appeared to have a detrimental effect on Child C as she was very open and confident, even when communicating with a stranger. Examples of differing sibling relationships permeate all of history from biblical times to modern day, where they vividly portray the characteristic sibling themes of power, struggle, rivalry, solidarity, caring, nurturing and ambivalence. History is littered with similar stories of sibling rivalry, e.g. Cain and Abel which could be comparable, to a very minor extent, with the situation between Child C and his sister. Abramovitch et al, (1980) and Abramovitch et al (1986) considered sibling interactions to be quite unique and for that reason they cannot and should not be compared directly with other relationships, e.g. peer relationships, as siblings tend to play unique roles in each other's lives because they live in the same household, are constantly present in that household, are involved in continual interaction and sharing, as well as having the influence of a particular set of parents. Siblings are also unique because they have had no control over their choosing, they have a relationship by nature of their status. As suggested by Furman and Buhrmester, (1985b); Maccoby, (1992); Boer and Dunn, (1992), same-sex siblings report greater companionship, intimacy and affection than opposite-sex siblings, which was demonstrated by the reaction of Child C when the mother sought my agreement,

shortly after the family conference commenced, for the younger sister to be present throughout the family conference as she was hovering nearby, perhaps in an attempt to be included. This had a detrimental affect on Child C, as initially it had been agreed that he would read the questions but when his sister joined the family conference Child C appeared to become withdrawn and non co-operative, especially when he appeared to become self-conscious about his reading ability by stammering over several phrases and/or words in the first two questions. As a researcher I felt particularly uncomfortable as this point and felt sympathy for Child C. His self-consciousness was compounded when the mother asked the younger sister if she would like to read the questions instead of Child C and again I felt uncomfortable for the situation that Child C found himself in. Ross and Milgram (1982) suggest that simple sibling rivalry involves a sibling making a derogatory comment or action on an aspect of a sibling's character. This can lead to "feelings of inferiority" and are frequently linked to parental favouritism and involvement. It is perceived from studies of siblings that rivalry originates from the parents (Ross and Milgram, 1982) and creates comparisons which appear throughout childhood (Pfouts 1976: Bryant 1982). In the company of Child C, the parents and myself, the younger sister read the questions proudly and fluently and, considering she was still at primary school, read the question cards more fluently than Child C. The actions and demeanour of the younger sibling exemplified "showing off" in front of others, highlighting the competitiveness which appeared to exist between the siblings. The sister's fluency in reading the questions appeared to cause Child C to be uncomfortable and from then onwards he refused to read the questions in deference to his sister, even when he was specifically requested to. To reinforce his disengagement with the reading process, he handed the question cards to his sister to read on several occasions. Throughout the family conference Child C's sister appeared to have an affect on his demeanour, he could be seen "wilting" and becoming more and more withdrawn and disengaged as the family conference progressed. In contrast, as the family conference progressed, the daughter read more and more of the questions and enthusiastically offered her opinion, continually growing in confidence and displayed an exuberant and bright

disposition. From that point onwards Child C had to be consistently prompted to participate in the family conference and it left me wondering if he felt as if the rest of the family had closed ranks on him. In direct contrast, however, the younger sibling was more than willing to express an opinion, although no questions were directed towards her. The parents appeared to be unaware of the "competing for attention" which appeared to exist between Child C and his sister and the gulf of "separateness" which may be created. Any of us who are siblings can remember and recognise this type of comparison in the home environment and outside in the wider community. It is not just the comparison; it is when it becomes more that rivalry ensues. In the study carried out by Ross and Milgram (1982) they found that 71% of participants had experienced rivalrous feelings with a sibling at some point in their lives, although mainly in childhood or in adolescence and that rivalry amongst siblings is also recognised as a form of attention seeking, where one sibling is vying for the parent's attention, as he or she wants to be recognised and loved.

The mother, perhaps unwittingly, reinforced this "separateness" by explicitly organising a system for homework that meant that there was no opportunity for the siblings to build a good working relationship and/or understanding of their differences and/or an awareness of their relative strengths and development needs, perhaps meaning to give them each her undivided attention without being aware of the possibility of divisiveness,

> "*when his sister comes in from primary school, I try and get her to do her homework straight away so that I can spend time with Child C*".

This could be viewed as a divisive system where there was no opportunity for building and bonding between the siblings and/ or the family and/or an opportunity for the siblings to assist one another in aspects of peer assistance, in a co-operative or formative or informal manner. However, it should be remembered that sibling relationships are never static, they alter dependent upon the stages of development of the siblings, changes in the family structure, and the fact that it is not being conducted in a social vacuum. Sibling and family relationships are complex and different in many ways to peer and non familial relationships

because of the frequency and amount of interaction possible due to the nature of the relationship, existence of ascribed roles, accessibility and the common experiences which exist between siblings and families. However, the homework system did facilitate an opportunity for the mother to spend time with each child individually, although Child C appeared to indicate a mixture of feelings towards this homework system as he expressed both positive and negative viewpoints, *"I probably enjoy the time that I spend with my mum",* although *"I don't like it when she sits there, I just like help. She doesn't do it for me".* It is recognised that rivalry can be used in a constructive way, as a motivator, to encourage a better standard of performance as well as being a destructive influence. The mother appeared to miss the opportunity of using homework in a constructive way by devising this particular type of divisive homework system.

It was noticeable that at the beginning of the family conference both mother and son spoke to each other using the terms *"mum"* and *"XXXX" [Child C],* although this appeared to alter as the family conference progressed, and as Child C became more and more restless, to *"she"* and *"he/him".* This could be indicative of some of the reactions, tensions and information which were being uncovered through the discussion about the homework practices of the family and indicated a possible tension in their relationship. As will be discussed later, the sub-text seemed to suggest that the mother and son appeared to have a turbulent relationship in many and differing ways and perhaps the use of the pronouns *"he"* and *"she"* was the initial indication of this aspect of their relationship.

This was perhaps compounded by the father's position in the family whereby the mother appeared to defer to him, reinforcing his 'patriarchal power'. Power is an abstract and therefore can be a difficult topic to conceptualise. However, the strength of the father's position was demonstrated during the introductions when the mother very quickly apologised that the family conference had to take place later in the evening as her husband *"is very supportive but admits that he frequently works long hours and is never in when the*

children come in from school". The mother appeared to prioritise the family's homework activities to take account of the father's patriarchal position and openly acknowledged that,

> *"not as much time would be given to homework if it was completed after dinner due*
> *to other family pressures and commitments and it means that we can do other*
> *things together or separately"*

because

> "*I believe they [father and son] don't get enough social time together. I am the one*
> *who makes sure that the homework is done whereas XXXX [father] gets to golf with*
> *XXXX [Child C]. He gets all the good bits"*.

The mother appeared to be happy that she got to spend time going shopping with her daughter, normally if son and father were on the golf course, although she acknowledged that they spent some time together.

Although the mother was keen for the father and son to spend time together, there appeared to be a strain in their relationship which was particularly evident through the short discussion on the frequency of homework. This uncovered a direct conflict of opinion, between father and son, which was evident as the father thought that there should be "*much more of it [homework], 2 or 3 hours a night, and for a Monday, after the weekend, even more"* whilst Child C offered no timing but responded verbally with gasps, sighs, squeals and screams at the very thought of what was being suggested by his father. However, the demeanour of Child C throughout the discussion confirmed the father's 'patriarchal power' as Child C conformed and bent to the will of his father due to the his position as 'head of the household'. In contrast, the mother attempted to protect her son by suggesting a more moderate frequency of,

> "*spending at least 30 minutes every single night as it would allow him and us to*
> *socialise but more importantly he would know that he had it to do every night*"

whilst reinforcing the fathers 'patriarchal power' and simultaneously increasing her own 'referent power' as she attempted to identify with her son through moderating the frequency whilst not altering the father's concept of homework each night.

4.2.4.3 "Be quiet, please"

On several occasions the father politely interrupted Child C, reinforcing his 'patriarchal power' through demonstrating his authority over the family by using a very formal but strident voice which appeared to command respect as others became quiet and allowed the father to speak, even when he had interrupted. This appeared to uncover the patriarchal role which the father demonstrated and used in a calm and sublime manner to control the discussion whilst attempting to alter participant's opinions. The mother made use of this referred power through the effective deployment of 'affiliation power' which reflects the ability of a leader to exert influence based on the belief of followers that the leader has a close association with other powerful figures on whose authority they are able to act. When Child C started to make a derogatory comment about the level of expertise which his parents could offer, with respect to completing his homework, the father immediately interrupted with *"XXX [Child C] be quiet please"*, and hence controlled the discussion. Although the father politely said *"please"*, he placed an emphasis on the word and used a very strident and clipped tone, perhaps indicating that he was to be obeyed, again reinforcing his influential use of 'patriarchal power'. As suggested by Scott (2001: 9) domination through command rests on the idea of the right to give orders and a corresponding obligation to obey. There was a willing compliance on the part of Child C because of the commitment to the legitimacy of the source of the command, not because of an independent and autonomous evaluation of its content. Throughout the family conference there was a sense that the father was an important figure and that most members of the family were aware that he was "to be obeyed" by the use of their body language, constantly looking at him when he spoke, and the manner in which they deferred to him,

thereby giving him authority. This suggests that power can be affected, then, without being exercised. This conclusion is central to the argument that power is, at root, a capacity. To have a capacity is to be in a position to do something (Morriss 1987: 81), and any capacity may remain latent without ceasing to be a capacity. This was demonstrated throughout the family conference as I observed that the mother would look towards her husband at the beginning of each question and did not freely make comment until after an opinion had been expressed by her husband. On the occasions when she did speak freely, her eye movements were addressing her husband, perhaps reflecting the point made by Scott (2001) when he considered the actor with the potential to exercise power can, at any moment, choose to realise this potential by affecting the actions of others.

When discussing whether or not homework had an effect on family life and/or relationships, the mother openly acknowledged that the father had,

> *"traditional male values and therefore it is perceived to be my [mother] job to make sure that the homework gets done. I am in the house all day and feel that the homework should be complete before XXXX [father] comes in from work"*.

This positional power, emanating from the parents' traditional views of their roles within the family relates to "patriarchalism" i.e. the particular form of traditional authority in which a father as 'senior of the house' or 'sib elder', exercises full and complete personal power over all members of the household, is demonstrated throughout the family conference as the father spoke infrequently but when he did, the rest of the family paid attention. This was evident when the father interrupted Child C when he appeared to be unhappy with his son's reply when discussing the impediments to the family being more involved in the homework process. Child C indicated that a "*lack of understanding*" was a major impediment, reducing the father's 'expert power' and the father immediately interrupted, perhaps assuming that his 'patriarchal power' was being attacked through his son's negativity. His demeanour and strident tone, as well as his reply of "XXXX [Child C] *be quiet please*" immediately indicated that he was unhappy with the reply, exercising

his 'patriarchal power' which has been ascribed to a him by virtue of his position in a male blood line, (Scott 2001: 145). Such views have often involved the idea that 'patriarchal power' relations must be seen as biologically determined, and they have been much criticised for this explicit or implicit biological reductionism, (Barrett 1980: 12). However, seldom was the father's position ever challenged by any members of the family, which reinforced his 'patriarchal power' which was particularly evident when Child C immediately deferred to his father, acknowledging his 'patriarchal power' and immediately became quiet. The mother also acknowledged the place of the father by attempting to explain to Child C why he had been wrong and hence justified the actions of the father, sublimely acknowledging his 'patriarchal power',

> "*I think that doesn't really apply here because you (Child C) haven't been stopped in being involved in the homework process, where some families are. I think he is very fortunate and we are both very involved in the homework process, so it doesn't really apply*".

The actions of the father appeared to reinforce the view portrayed by Wrong (1979: 9) where he considered that if an actor is believed to be powerful, if he [sic] knows that others hold such a belief, and if he encourages it and resolves to make use of it by intervening in or punishing actions by the others who do not comply with his wishes, then he truly has power and his power has indeed been conferred on him by the attributions, perhaps initially without foundation of others. It could be viewed the 'patriarchal power' displayed by the father hindered the opportunity for Child C to openly express his opinions and hence demonstrates an identity of a suppressed individual.

When I arrived, Child C was in the back garden riding his bike round and round in slow, methodical circles with his head down, giving the impression of being a withdrawn and/or a coerced participant and/or a shy young gentleman who could have been apprehensive. This is reminiscent of Wartenberg (1990: 85) who suggests that acts of power occur when principals are able to restrict the choices that subalterns are able to make: the greater this

restriction (the more limited the range of choices available to subalterns), the greater the power of the principal. Examples of these acts of power occur throughout the family conference, for example, *"my mum packs my school bag"* and *"my mum checks my homework diary"* and *"my mum makes me re-do my homework if it is wrong"*. This could be viewed as a 'mothers instinct' and/or influencing through the use of 'coercive power' because it is viewed and acknowledged, by the family, that the mother had responsibility for the homework system and therefore could be viewed as having the capacity to remove rewards and/or administer punishments for non-compliance. These activities and the words expressed, for example *"makes", "checks"* etc appeared to suggest that Child C was under strict instruction which resulted in him, at times, being very quiet, withdrawn and subdued throughout the family conference. As the family conference progressed it became more and more evident from Child C's behaviour and demeanour that he was just "itching" to get away and play on his bike again, his demeanour giving the message of being *"bored"* and *"fed up"* as he held his head in his hands, had a very sad face and frequently looked longingly out of the window. He was not particularly keen to give answers as he realised that it was prolonging the process for him and therefore he used controlling and manipulating tactics of intervening at every possible opportunity by asking if he could read the next question, instead of his sister, even when it was inappropriate. This tactic had the desired effect of disrupting the flow of thought and/or answers from the appropriate person and so drawing the family conference to a more immediate conclusion. However, the fact that he was present and had not disappeared to his room or out with his friends appeared to indicate that, on this occasion, the parents had successfully restricted his choices. He appeared to be conforming to their wishes, enabling them to influence his behaviour through the utilisation of 'coercive power' and/or 'legitimate power', although I have no way of exploring this further.

The mother appeared to alter her opinion depending on the topic and the person talking, for example she shared her belief that homework was beneficial because,

> *"Child C is learning as homework reinforces classroom learning and teaching. I think that his homework lets me see what he has been learning at school, which in turn means that on some occasions, I learn. It lets me see what is expected",*

and

> *"I think we can check his homework or help him to correct it if it is wrong. At least give him a chance. I think it is my job to try and help Child C to understand but not to do it for him".*

However, when the father voiced his opinion on the benefits of homework, the mother appeared to shift her position towards the father's position,

> *"I always thought that homework should be done in school, that should be their school time and then they come home and then that is their home time and that's the time when you should have to think about school and vice versa. It's not a bad thing".*

However, she re-iterated this type of negativity towards homework on several occasions, especially after the father had highlighted aspects of his dissatisfaction with the school's homework system. This suggested a deflecting of the blame away from herself and towards Child C and/or the teacher(s) and/or the school's homework system, thereby reducing their 'legitimate power' and/or 'expert power', or perhaps revealed a defensiveness arising from her own lack of confidence. This lack of confidence emerged through her response to the type of homework which she preferred,

> *"definitely one where the answers are also provided, whether at the back of the book or in the text, so that as a parent I can actually help and I am not swimming around in the dark and sometimes taking David's word for it which could be wrong"*

This had the effect of subsequently reducing her 'expert power' as Child C appeared to be aware of his mother's unwillingness to be involved in the completion of homework, although she established the family's homework system. On several occasions, and in several ways, the mother stressed the need for the school to ensure that pupils recorded their

homework accurately and had much stricter structures of time allocations for each subject. If this was the case it would allow the mother the opportunity to waive her responsibility for homework within the home, as it would make,

> *"a better routine and then it would not become such a 'big thing'. It would allow*
> *him and us to socialise but more importantly he would know that he had it every*
> *night".*

perhaps indicative of a lack of confidence in her ability to cope with Child C's homework as she appeared to rely on him for answers.

Interestingly, the father had little or no comment to make on the timing of the homework or on the system which the mother has instigated. The mother's system appeared to have been organised to ensure that the father was not home from work at the time when homework was being completed, although he had very clear and fixed ideas on the frequency of homework and when his son should speak and be spoken to. This was perhaps indicative of her attempts to protect her family from the "traditional" views of the father when he admitted that he had,

> *"a very Conservative view of education. When I was a lad I would just get 6 of the*
> *best. There was a lot more discipline in school but I'm sounding like an old*
> *fashioned Tory but there is no doubt it has got worse"*

4.2.4.4 "Fighting a loosing battle"

The discussion surrounding homework uncovered the manipulating and controlling tactics being employed by mother and son, highlighting the "cat" and "mouse" game being played by both parties. Both Child C and his mother appeared to see themselves in control of the homework process thereby continually affecting each others ability to influence through the effective use of 'coercive power'. This appeared to cause a tension within the family, which both were aware of, but with which both persisted,

128

> *"All of this causes tension in the house at homework time as I [mother] feel as if I [mother] am fighting a loosing battle and because I [mother] am unclear as to what is expected of XXXX [Child C] as he has now moved into S1. This has caused added hassle and tension".*

In the instance of homework practices, it would appear as if neither the mother nor the son were positively influencing each other, as neither had changed the others behaviour or actions as each other were still participating in the same manipulative practices to satisfy their own perceived goals and needs. By continuing in these entrenched practices, the mother appeared to miss an opportunity to positively influence her son's homework practices and continued to attempt to coerce him into the existing system.

The discussion surrounding homework appeared to uncover a contradiction for Child C where he displayed a mixture of feelings and reactions towards his mother's control through the use of her established homework system. He appeared to abide by the system, although reluctantly stating "*because you have to do it*" and "*I just have to learn it   I suppose it helps you get prepared for class, helps you learn more and perhaps get a career*" demonstrating that he realised the worth of homework in the learning process, whilst finding his own way of manipulating the system to ensure that the frequency of homework was controlled by himself and not by his parents. Although a homework system had been established by the mother, Child C appeared to have effectively and constructively established a means of reducing the task through deception tactics of,

> *"there is frequently a dispute between myself [mum] and Child C about the extent or amount of homework that he has to do because he is not good at putting the homework in his diary, which makes us dubious about what he really has to do. The hassle is really caused by this as we have a "clarity gap" whereby we don't really know what has to be completed"*

thereby enabling Child C to transfer the control of the situation to himself. He appeared to successfully manipulate homework by offering the parents a means of setting aside their

role in the homework process and manoeuvring the responsibility towards the school, hence reinforcing their possible belief that the blame for the situation and/or control of the situation lies with the school,

> *"He sometimes says that the work in his homework wasn't covered in class or that the words are too difficult for him or that it is too hard for him and we have no way of knowing what the reality actually is".*

In some respects Child C appeared to be in conflict with himself, manipulating the homework system against himself, as on occasions he acknowledged that his mother could, *"help me understand the questions more, if I ask them"* and/or *"check my homework"* and/or *"make me re-do it if it is wrong".* In contrast he admitted that *"sometimes, perhaps half of the time I forget to record my homework in my diary"* which had the adverse affect as his mother was not aware of the homework to be completed and therefore was unable to help and support him in the homework process.

4.2.4.5 "Lying by omission"

Areas of conflict became particularly evident when discussing the issues surrounding the effective recording of homework. In his own way, Child C had effectively found a way of manipulating the situation by reducing the amount of homework he had to do by lying by omission and as such took control of the homework process. Child C admitted that he didn't know why he didn't complete the homework diary accurately in class and stated that *"he just forgot"* or *"didn't have it with him".* He suggested that he could *"just remember what he had to do"* indicating that he felt that he didn't require to record it as an aide memoire. Child C admitted that he frequently *"omitted some subject from my homework diary"* and/or *"don't record the full amount of homework in my diary".* However, the non-completion of some aspects of his homework diary offered him the opportunity to be in control and/or manipulate the situation as he knew that his mother would check and sign the diary, considering this to be the full extent of his homework allocation. If he didn't record

it efficiently his mother had no way of knowing the homework which was required to be completed. This allowed Child C to appear to conform to, and abide by, the wishes of his mother, although he was manipulating the situation to suit his own needs and/or wants and/or desires, whilst making full use of 'reward power' through the perception that compliance facilitated reward – the reward of Child C being to give his mother the perception that he had completed his homework but within his own parameters.

Lying by omission was an effective tool in the armoury of deceit and hence control, as he was aware that his mother would "*always makes me complete the homework in my diary*". This was indicative of the conflict engendered by both parties as there appear to be differences in their interests and values. In this instance the mother cares about the homework which should be completed by Child C as she perceives that it will open up opportunities for him to achieve in school. Child C interrupted his mother to highlight "*but that's because you [mother] want to go to college*" and therefore she wanted to encourage her son to achieve, thereby engendering the emerging conflict between the parties.

4.2.5 **Family D**

Family D live in a council house within the main town. When I arrived at the house, the father opened the door to me and directed me to the lounge. He then shouted to the other members of the family that I had arrived.

4.2.5.1 **"If it's hard or not!!"**

The effects others have on us, unintended or even unknown to them, may influence us more profoundly and permanently than direct efforts to control our sentiments and behaviour (Wrong 1968). The effects others have on us, for example the school, may be an outside influence on whether or not Child D completed his homework. He indicated that the nature of homework influenced his attitude towards completion, for example, "*if it was enjoyable to do it*" and/or "*if it's hard or not*" and/or "*if it was the subjects that you liked*" and/or "*the type of homework*". He suggested that he liked differing kinds of practical homework as in Home Economics where,

> "*I [Child D] could make mum and dad a toasted sandwich for supper, or something. Then mum or dad would sign it to say that I had successfully made the toasted sandwich and then washed up*"

and

> "*in science, you get diagrams and then you have to draw them yourself and then you have to work it out*", *and puzzles. We've just done one with light and the lamp from the lighting in a girl's eye, but it was wrong and you had to work it out yourself*".

and

> "*I like developing puzzles and crosswords and the like because I am good at it, on differing topics, for example in History on the 2nd World War*".

Child D articulated differing types of homework systems and offered his opinion that integrated homework booklets offered him opportunities to complete the homework more successfully because,

> *"if there is help of information sheets etc then it's easier to do and isn't too much as you are basically lifting information and/or giving more of an explanation to that information"*

rather than in other subjects where *"I've to copy out a paragraph and fill in the blanks"* because *"it's boring"*.

Throughout the discussion on the nature of homework, Child D demonstrated an awareness of the possible benefits of involving his parents in the homework process and could offer exemplification, for example: *"in my reading, as I could read it through a few times and then read it to them [the parents]"*. However, in contrast with this, Child D appeared to have organised effective avoidance strategies to enable him to control the completion of homework at a time convenient to himself, as discussed later.

Ambivalence occurred throughout the family conference, especially in relation to Child D's attitude towards the nature of homework and its completion. Child D admitted that *"if a teacher asks me to get it [homework] signed, I'll get it [homework] signed, but if they don't ask, I won't"*. However, he was prepared to take the risk that the teacher(s) would not ask for the homework as he knew that his parents were unlikely to ask if he had any. In front of his parents, he openly admitted to *"playing the system"*. He was aware that his mother, and certainly his father, had made no attempt to contact the school, even when his school report indicated that he was not completing his homework satisfactorily. Child D was very aware that the school had not attempted to contact his parents regarding his non-completion of homework and that his parents were out working and therefore the school would have difficulty contacting them verbally, thereby reducing the teachers' 'coercive power'. This appeared to offer reinforcement as frequently there were no apparent repercussions from the

teacher(s) and/or school and/or parents(s), although he was aware of their capacity to exercise 'coercive power' to remove rewards and/or administer punishments to hopefully ensure compliance. This also had the effect of negating the 'legitimate power' of the teacher(s), as it relates to the formal role of the individual exemplified by the job title, as Child D was effectively utilising his experience and observations of the teacher(s) homework practices to determine his course of action with respect to his completion of homework.

4.2.5.2 "I'm too soft"

Fennell (1999: 24) highlights the findings of Giddens (1981) that power relations between individuals are basic to all social interactions. Power is exercised by all members of Family D in very different ways, for example, the mother who attempted to influence subliminally through caring in various guises, the father who portrayed the demeanour of "he who should be obeyed" and the child who demonstrated resistances often through manipulation.

When I arrived at the house, the father of the family opened the door to me and from the moment I stepped inside, I could feel the tension resonating within the home, especially when the father shouted extremely loudly, using a stern tone, upstairs to Child D that I had arrived and he was required to come downstairs immediately. His tone stressed the word "*immediately*", giving an indication that he was to be obeyed. From upstairs I could hear Child D muttering under his breath but my impression was that he had said it loudly enough for others to hear. The father's reaction left me with the initial thought that he was attempting to and/or subliminally demonstrating an air of authority from the outset, giving an initial indication of his use of 'patriarchal power'. I was shown into the lounge by the father, where there were no other occupants and the father shouted loudly towards the kitchen door from where the mother emerged. The father made no attempt to introduce his wife to me, but instead started to remonstrate loudly and forcefully, that Child D had been

caught truanting from school the previous day, indicating his displeasure in the situation. Therefore, the tension surrounding this event played a significant part in the snapshot provided by Family D.

By the time Child D arrived in the lounge, his parents were comfortably ensconced on the settee, perhaps giving an initial impression to me of the parents' "connectedness", although I acknowledge that this could perhaps be where they always sat. Child D chose to sit beside me rather than attempt to sit beside his parents, either on the floor or on the seating, perhaps indicating an awareness by Child D of his parents' "connectedness". However, this was reinforced as neither parent attempted to suggest that Child D could sit beside them and/or made any movement towards him. Due to the parents' possible aura of "connectedness", I attempted to put Child D at ease by explaining that I was carrying out research for my own development and that the family conference was not associated with my "day job", i.e. his teacher. Throughout the family conference he made no reference to our school relationship and therefore I have no means of determining whether it was a factor or not in his responses. The parents' "connectedness" was reinforced throughout the family conference as the mother continually deferred to the father, waiting for his reaction to questions before committing an answer herself, strengthening his 'patriarchal power' whilst displaying 'affiliation power' to her husband. In many instances her responses reinforced the points made by the father, without indicating an independent thought or response, for example when discussing aspects of parental participation with homework, the mother indicated that Child D *"does most of his homework upstairs",* whilst the father immediately interrupted her to offer *"he [Child D] hasn't had homework for ages though, has he?".* The mother immediately altered her response to reinforce her husband's opinion by saying *"I know, that's how I was wondering",* again demonstrating 'affiliation power' which existed between husband and wife.

The dominance of the father through his continual use of 'patriarchal and coercive powers, the subservience of the mother demonstrated through her 'affiliation power' and the apparent connectedness of the parents, appeared to have a significant impact on Child D. When Child D arrived at the lounge door, his head was down although there was an aura of stiff resolve and/or stubbornness and again I could feel the tension between the participants, through the demeanour and body language of each of the family members. He huddled in the corner of the settee, was quite cowed and was positionally on the opposite side of the room from his parents. He also frequently only responded monosyllabically when spoken to, although on several occasions appeared to show his feelings by means of gestures and the use of sarcasm. I got a sense that the parents were giving him a clear message of their disappointment, with respect to his truanting. The reason for this may be complex but throughout the family conference I got a sense that the parents at no point considered breaking their bond and relieving the situation for their son as they made no attempt to alter their positions on the settee at any time throughout the interview and/or to offer their son any sign of physical or emotional comfort and/or throw him any "lifeline" of comfort. In fact, very sadly, the father appeared to use the family conference on homework as a means of manoeuvring the discussion points to continually reinforce his disappointment in his son's behaviour. As a researcher, this left me feeling very uncomfortable and regretful that I had facilitated an opportunity for Child D to be exposed to this type of public castigation.

Through my observations of the family conference I got a sense that in Family D's household the father assumed the status of "head of the household" and as such appeared to take the stance of "he who should be obeyed", thereby assuming the status of power-holder. A parent exercises interpersonal power over a child, but also has certain legal rights that a child may grow up to accept and that will be recognised by others. For example, when discussing the role of the parents in the homework process, the father immediately responded loudly and in a stern tone, that he felt that it was important to *tell you to dae it and that, make sure you dae it",* perhaps indicating/reinforcing his position in the family

and as such attempted to bring about a specific action and/or effect from Child D of completing homework through force and/or fear. On each occasion when the father responded, he stressed the word "*dae*" very vocally to perhaps reinforce his position. Throughout the family conference, it was noticeable that there were frequent instances where the father countermanded what another person was saying, and/or shouted directly to the person in an extremely loud tone, giving him an appearance of domination, whereby he expected others to obey/submit to his demands. This apparent domination through command rests on the idea of the right to give orders and a corresponding obligation to obey. However, other members of the family appeared to submit to this domination through compliance.

Several other examples of 'patriarchal power' were highlighted throughout the family conference which resulted in a strained father/son relationship, for example when discussing Child D's report card and his non-compliance of homework. This non-compliance infuriated the father who expressed his rage verbally and through the effective use of body language where he leaned forward, shouting directly towards his son in a threatening manner and waiting for a response from Child D. This was indicative of the father's combined use of 'coercive and patriarchal powers. The father's behaviour, on this occasion, brought about a forcing of compliance, from Child D, through the use of threatening behaviour and/or confrontation, reinforcing his patriarchal power. The father's patriarchal status was further reinforced as the mother continually deferred to the father, for example "*he [father] gets on to me saying 'I'm too soft', I let him off with murder*" and when the father challenged her with "*well you do*", she capitulated to him, saying *"I know, I know, I do"*, reinforcing the message of obedience to the head of the household and his 'patriarchal power'.

Throughout the family conference, discussion of differing aspects of homework uncovered small glimpses of a desire for Child D to have a relationship with his father. For example,

when discussing the advantages of involving parents in homework, Child D indicated that he sometimes completed his homework "*because my dad gets angry*", whilst acknowledging that his father "*wants the best for me*". In direct contrast with this, Child D appeared to attempt to antagonise his father. For example, when exploring the role of parents and the use of the homework diary, Child D shouted towards in father in an aggressive manner "*I've got homework tonight*", gaining his attention and receiving the reaction of "*you've got what?*". It was noticeable that the son initially replicated the same manner as the father when talking and/or shouting. The father responded typically by the use of aggressive body language, leaning forwards towards his son and shouting directly into his face. Child D responded in exactly the same manner when eliciting the answer of "*Aye, homework the night*", thereby increasing the tension. At this stage it appeared that both the father and son were exercising their use of 'coercive power', each attempting to make the other conform to their will through the use of threatening behaviour. By using the same tone it appeared as if Child D was purposely attempting to enrage his father and push him to the edge of his temper by exacerbating his existing anger. Benfari et al (1986: 16) suggest that conflict is an everyday occurrence and that the key to conflict resolution is the ability to negotiate. However the use of threats, i.e. 'coercive power', can lead to long-term conflict. Conflict is a process which begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected or is about to negatively affect, something the first party cares about. Conflict is a state of mind and has to be perceived by the parties involved (Buchanan and Huczynski 2004: 791). Conflict was evident between the father and son, especially through the manner in which they communicated, the body language exhibited by both and the direct opposition of opinions expressed by both, for example the father wanted Child D to complete his homework without any help and/or encouragement from him, whilst Child D stated "*I really can't be bothered*".

The topic of truthfulness appeared to uncover a different dynamic within the family. The connectivity between the parents, which was evident from the beginning of the family

conference, began to crack and the parents appeared to reverse roles as the mother didn't believe her son with respect to whether or not he has homework, whilst the father believed what his son told him, thereby defending him [Child D]. Although the father was dogmatic in his manner, adamant about his role, and appeared to have no conception of any existing school systems which were in place to assist his son with this task, i.e. a homework diary supplied by the school, he still defended his son's position which was diametrically opposed to the mother's. Interestingly, the mother would like Child D to be compliant with his homework practices and made excuses for his behaviour, but due to past behaviour the mother appeared to have no trust in her son as,

> *"I'll ask him if he's done his homework and he says "he's not got any" and then his*
> *father asks him and he says "he hasn't any" but at times he has had homework but*
> *he's forgot".*

However, this revealed a disparity of opinion between the parents as the father defended his son, stating "*take it that he is telling the truth*" when asked what he would do when his son responded that did not have any homework.

4.2.5.3   "Take his things away"

The discussion surrounding homework offered opportunities for the separate identities of the individuals in the family to emerge, the father as head of the household, the mother in the "buffer zone" through controlled naivety in varying situations and Child D as the manipulator demonstrating 'persuasive power' to ensure that his needs and/or wants, and/or desires were satisfactorily met.

As discussed earlier the father's identity emerged through his strong and continual use of 'patriarchal power' which can be described as personal power that is ascribed to a father by virtue of his position in a male blood line (Millet 1970; Firestone 1971). Scott (2001) reinforces this view of patriarchalism, displayed by the father, as a specific form of

traditional household relations. This could be viewed throughout the family conference as the father interjected and interrupted conversations, at will and without consideration for others, to enable him to express his point of view at a time which suited him, thereby attempting to reinforce his 'patriarchal power'. On most occasions the mother and/or son capitulated to his will, thereby reinforcing his legitimacy for his acts. Most power-holders, in this case the father of Family D, claim legitimacy for their acts, i.e. they claim the "right to rule" as they do. If the legitimacy of the exercise of power is acknowledged by the subordinated individuals we speak of 'legitimate power'; if it is not recognised we call it coercion (provided, of course, that the intention of the power-holder is realised).

The father used bullying tactics, both verbal and through the use of threatening body language, which reinforced his use of combined 'patriarchal power' and 'coercive power' and ensured compliance. Throughout the interview, the father sat very erect which gave him a presence of authority within the room, especially as he was over six feet tall and had a broad physique. It is undeterminable as to whether or not the father was aware of the use of his physique as a threatening gesture but it was heightened when he deliberately leaned forward towards his son, talking loudly and stridently to reinforce his point. The use of 'coercive power' had the required effect of making Child D shrink into the corner of the settee where he was sitting, having the appearance of trying to get away from the pressure, capitulating and conforming to his father's will. This is in line with Scott (2001: 4) who suggested that a power relation, at its fullest, involves the deliberate, intentional intervention of a principal in the course of interaction so as to produce a specific and particular effect on the other person. Such an exercise of power comes closest to the everyday understanding of social power as an agent [the father] who has this capacity to affect others [the mother and son] may, however, be able to achieve this without actually having to do anything at all (Scott 2001).

The identity of the father exposed a very traditional, patriarchal view of fatherhood because, at no point, did he attempt to try any negotiation strategies to engage Child D in his education but complained when it was discovered that Child D had not conformed to normal practices. Contradiction was brokered between intention and action whereby the father considered the main role of the parent to be "*to tell you to dae it and that, make sure you do it*". The intention emerged in many aspects throughout the family conference whereby the father demonstrated his patriarchal viewpoint but at no point ever demonstrated an action of "*make sure you do it", as* he left this task to his wife. The father considered that the most effective means of ensuring that Child D completed his homework would be to "*take his things away from him, his television, personal computer etc or being grounded*" but interestingly when asked how often this had happened he replied "*never as far as I know*".

Given the situation within the family where the father was dominant, it left the mother occupying a "buffer zone", as she appeared to recognise the status of her husband as head of the household. Throughout the family conference the mother demonstrated 'affiliation power' towards her husband as she constantly capitulated to his will, whilst attempting to give emotional support to her son. This was exemplified when discussing the topic of the main purposes of homework and whether or not homework affected family relationships. The father very stridently, sarcastically and harshly indicated that Child D tended to try and manipulate the situation by saying that he had no homework but then started to do his homework at 9 o'clock at night, which tended to cause a tension within the home. Again, the mother in her "buffer zone" attempted to keep the peace through offering, in a very quiet and soft tone, the opposite opinion to support her son, although this couldn't be termed 'referent power' as there is no real evidence of desire for unity. However, throughout the family conference there are many instances of the mother attempting to fill the gap between father and son, affiliating herself to each at differing times depending on the circumstances. For example, during the interview an argument occurred between the

father and his son about the recent truanting incident and it was the mother who intervened and attempted to calm the situation by shifting the topic of conversation in another direction.

The mother was perhaps playing an interesting game of "bluff" whereby homework was a vehicle which facilitated opportunities for her to allow the father to display his identity as head of the household through his exercising of 'patriarchal power', whilst at the same time displaying apparent controlled naivety where she lets some things go to prevent more friction and tension between her husband and son. For example she suggested that Child D completes his homework but at no point checks if it has been completed and/or the quality of the product. Therefore as suggested by Scott (2001: 3), power relations involve the possibility of conflict, but only the exercise of power needs to involve actual conflict, however minimal. Aspects of conflict could be viewed through the interaction of the identities of the family members, for example the mother admitted to finding difficulty in keeping up with the curriculum "*I don't understand his Mathematics. It is too hard for the likes of me*". This was in direct conflict with the father who tended to show that he was unwilling to help with the homework due to his son's lack of interest in educational activities.

4.2.5.4 "He's not got any"

As suggested by Lee (1999: 456), we might argue that adult social orders systematically misunderstand children, assuming them to be incompetent and that prejudicial views of children are to be countered, or at least counterbalanced, by more positive views of children. Perhaps the discussion of homework had uncovered the hesitancies experienced by Child D whereby he really was striving to seek the attention of his parents through his actions of not completing his homework through a subtle and reverse use of 'coercive power'. It is possible that by not completing his homework Child D draws the parents'

attention towards himself thereby administering the punishment, to the parents, of non-completion of homework. However, the discussion surrounding homework exposed varying contradictions within the identity of Child D, which he utilised to manipulate situations to suits his individual needs and/or wants and/or desires, for example conformity versus deception, introverted versus rebellious. Child D appeared to wish to conform to completing his homework as he was aware that his parents had the capacity to *"force him to dae it"*. However they did not take that opportunity and therefore he was able to manipulate the homework situation through coercion and utilising varying deceptive tactics. This opportunity was extended for Child D as both parents worked and were not home until later in the evening, allowing him the freedom to complete his homework, or not, as there was no adult present to ensure completion.

'Coercive power' appeared to permeate aspects of the family conference and generate a feeling of alienation and hostility as on other occasions Child D showed resistance to his father's will and took the route of controlling the situation for himself by not having a homework diary and therefore his parents having no awareness of the type of homework, quantity of homework or the frequency of his homework. At no point did the mother appear to put any measures in place to counteract this position as she considered that *"he must learn to do it himself. I was always helping him at primary school but he needs to learn to do it himself"*. Child D acknowledged that his parents *"give in to me all the time"* and that on some occasions he used it to his advantage, giving the impression that the mother and father were relinquishing responsibility for their son's actions, which left the parents losing any form of 'expert power' as Child D appeared to never ask for help and the parents seldom appeared to offer help. Child D's awareness of this situation allowed him to capitalise on these types of situations, thereby negating any offer and/or possibility of negotiation.

On some occasions, Child D showed resistance to his father's will and took the route of controlling the situation for him through varying actions. The discussion surrounding Child D's lack of satisfactory progress in his learning, through the non-completion of homework, was indicated through the guidance contact, i.e. the school report card of which the father was unaware. This evidenced the father's lack of understanding of his son's homework practices and as such reduced his 'patriarchal power' which offered Child D the opportunity to try, on some occasions, to rebel against this authority through manipulative tactics to attempt to gain control. However, power is rarely one sided as each participant influences the other, resisting their power to a greater or lesser extent. Fennell (2002: 97) quotes Miller (1992) who defined power as the capacity to produce change, as with Child D who, in his own inimitable and passive way, appeared to be able to manipulate the middle ground within the relationship(s), bringing about change to suit his own needs and/or wants and/or desires.

Throughout the family conference the actions, gestures and body language of the father gave the impression that he was in control of each situation through the explicit use of his 'patriarchal power', although there were frequent instances where either the mother and/or the son used their capacity to produce change through manipulative tactics to resist the father's will. For example, when discussing how aspects of the relationships between the participants facilitated opportunities for capitulation, Child D acknowledged that his parents "*give in to me all the time*" and that on some occasions he used it to his advantage, with the knowledge that it "*causes tension, unease, and friction between mum and dad?*". These manipulative tactics, created by Child D, tended to give him the opportunity to intervene in the parents' relationship and create a tension from a very minor situation, thereby enabling him to take control.

When exploring the family's perceptions of the main purposes of homework, the mother indicated that both parents, when available, would *"ask him if he's done his homework"* but

he says "*he's not got any*", thereby offering Child D the opportunity to seek control of the situation. This opportunity to manipulate the situation was also highlighted by the fact that Child D *"doesn't complete his homework diary"* and that when asked about his homework, no-one took time to check its completion and/or check the homework diary. The mother clearly demonstrated this opportunity for Child D to manipulate situations when she indicated that he always says *"that he's not got homework and then he goes up into his room and it's as quick as XXXX [Child D] can do it"*. Both parents indicated through their sarcastic comment of *"aye, if he's got it [the homework diary] filled in"* that Child D frequently omitted to complete the homework diary accurately, an admitted deception tactic employed by Child D, to enable him to manipulate the homework situation to suit his own needs and/or wants and/or desires and hence take control of the situation. Although Child D appeared to successfully manipulate the homework process as his father frequently offered an explanation in defence of his son by saying *"he's not got it [homework diary] anymore"*, whilst the mother offered a differing opinion of the situation. This disparity between the parents allowed Child D to use deception tactics to manipulate the situation to suit his own needs and/or wants and/or desires. It could be that he was attempting to replicate the 'patriarchal power' base demonstrated by the father as a means of challenging him.

Interestingly, on many occasions, the relationship between the father and son appeared to be fraught with tension, whilst on other occasions Child D attempted to replicate his father's behaviour towards his mother through non-compliance of her wishes, compounded by the fact that she doesn't take control of the homework process, thereby transferring control to Child D,

> *"Well, he'll ask me if I could come and help him. I've gone up and helped him a few times but he's like that "mum, I know"*

surreptitiously enabling Child D to exercise control, over his mother through manipulating the situation to suit his own needs and/or wants and/or desires. In some senses this was

reminiscent of the way in which the mother capitulated to the father but in these instances it was Child D who was manipulating the situation to ensure that his wishes/needs were being met through dismissing his mother's requests and carrying out his own agenda instead, in the knowledge that the father, on some occasions, may support him. Child D appeared to use this to manipulate the homework situation effectively.

The completion or non-completion of homework uncovered a triad of tensions within the family whereby everyone appeared to have diametrically opposed ideas of what was happening within the family situation, with respect to homework. However, it appeared as if Child D was in control of the situation as he freely admitted that *"sometimes I get caught by the teacher for not handing in my homework, as not all teachers check the homework"*. He was prepared to "take the risk" but when caught he capitulated and completed it for the next day. When the teacher(s) requested that the homework be signed by his parents, then he capitulated. In other words, he was complying with the school system when necessary but taking the risks at other times to enable him to do other activities. This implied that some teachers have more control over Child D's homework practices than either of his parents whereby he complies with their wishes. However, he still attempted to control and manipulate the situation(s) by identifying which teachers check homework regularly. When stipulated by the teacher, Child D cleverly manipulated the situation by getting his mother to sign the homework piece, thereby negating the use of the homework diary and hence the parents did not know of its existence and/or benefits. Interestingly, the father assumed the position of head of the household given to him by virtue of his blood line but at no time attempts to reinforce this position through the use of other power sources, for example through 'reward power' where Child D could perceive the father to have valued rewards of any kind, tangible or otherwise or 'expert power' whereby Child D could perceive his father to have valuable knowledge, information or skills in an area of study.

4.2.5.5   **"Naw, you don't know!!!!"**

However, on several occasions the topic of homework appeared to uncover a tendency for relationships to be strained, perhaps due to the differing but similar identities displayed, where the father was perceived to be head of the household but Child D also manipulated situations to surreptitiously gain control of the central ground. These opportunities were offered to him through his father's acknowledgement that "*I have no interest in doing homework with XXXX [Child D]*" and by the fact that both parents worked. Therefore Child D had to enter the house by himself from school and was frequently left alone until the mother came in from work at 8pm as "*I dae a lot of late shifts at Safeway's, so I'm not always here the biggest majority of the time*", offering him further opportunity to gain control of the central ground as neither parent was available to engage with him in the homework process. This also resulted in the parents' lack of 'expert power' being exposed as Child D attempted to complete his homework independently, without the help of his parents.

Another example of Child D gaining a more central role in the family was exposed when a scenario of,

> "*if you've got to go out and visit someone and Child D comes in and says 'can I go to my pals? I'll do my homework at 9pm when I come back'. What would happen?*"

was offered to the mother. It became apparent that she had a tendency to be compliant to her son and "give in" to his wishes as she admitted "*I'd let him do that and go out with his pals*" offering Child D the opportunity to control the situation. As suggested by Wrong (1968: 677), it is only because a mother exercises socially approved power over her children that she may unintentionally shape their personality along lines that are repugnant to her and defeat her most cherished hopes. The mother's capitulation towards her son meant that, regardless of the situation, of which several were offered, she would always

allow him to go out with his pals, even when she knew that he had homework to complete and that Child D was aware of this, opening up opportunities for him to control the situation. He uses this scenario to ensure that he could organise his activities to suit himself, capitalising on his use of 'coercive power' to ensure that he controls the central ground. However, Child D's satisfactory completion of homework was also affected by other factors, for example the type of homework, the teacher, the subject and/or how difficult he perceived it to be.

The mother allowed Child D the space to manipulate and control the middle ground as he knew that she wasn't going to check his homework because she admitted that once she'd actually asked him to do his homework then she didn't request to see it, well "*no really, not often*". Child D capitalised on this further by admitting that "*he didn't have it [homework diary] anymore*" and therefore his parents had no true awareness of the homework which was required to be completed. As a safety mechanism, Child D developed a range of avoidance strategies which ranged from ignoring the fact that he had a homework diary, not completing the homework diary fully, forgetting to get his parents to sign the homework diary, to telling direct lies, face to face with his parents, about whether he had homework or not. These manipulative tactics allow Child D opportunities to control the homework process and fulfil a need within himself to carry out tasks as it suits is own needs and/or wants and/or desires.

Throughout the family conference Child D indicated that he was aware that, due to his actions with respect to the non-completion of homework at an appropriate time and in an appropriate manner, that he was the cause of a lot of the arguments and subsequent tension in and amongst the family members. However, at present, he seemed to be incapable of verbalising and/or understanding his emotions with respect to these tensions perhaps due to his lack of maturity and/or being linked with the relationships between himself and his parents and therefore persisted with his controlling mechanisms to ensure that he was

successful in maintaining his apparent philosophy that homework should fit into his own priorities and gain control of the central ground. He successfully manoeuvred his homework completion by virtue of the types of homework, the teacher, the subject and/or how difficult he perceived it to be. The opportunities for Child D to control situations through manipulation had been opened up to him through the attitudes of both his parents, whereby the mother capitulated, although she acknowledged that she would like him to,

> *"just stick in at school. Not for us always to get onto him and ask him "have you done your homework". I would like for Child D to come in and say "mum, father, I've got homework",* although the father's realism instantly retorts with *"but he doesn't then do it"*

This offered Child D the opportunity to take control of the homework process as the parents appeared to relinquish their role in the homework process. At no point throughout the family conference did the father give any indication of help and/or subject knowledge and/or information and/or skills knowledge. This lack of 'expert power' was also replicated through the mother's capitulation towards her son. The father's ability to set aside his involvement in homework could be aligned with his apparent need to control situations through effective use of 'patriarchal power'.

Throughout the family conference, the father made effective use of his 'patriarchal power', portraying an identity of "he who should be obeyed" through his actions, gestures and demeanour, for example there were frequent instances where the father countermanded what another person was saying, subsequently ensuring that they submitted to his will by altering their opinion; where the father effectively used his physique, tone of voice, sarcasm and demeanour to ensure compliance. When discussing the role of parents in the homework process, the father used sarcasm effectively to reinforce his position whereby Child D intimated that *"I've got homework tonight"* and the father asked politely *"How come you've got homework the tonight? You've no had homework for ages and ages and ages!"*. However, this quickly degenerated into a heated discussion whereby the father

demonstrated his 'patriarchal power' by using sarcasm effectively to deflate his son by copying his son's replying but filled with a sarcastic tone of voice, saying "*naw, you don't know!!!!!*" reinforcing his position. This exemplification and others offered in differing aspects of the story gave him an appearance of domination, whereby he expects other to obey/submit to his demands. This apparent domination through command rests on the idea of the right to give orders and a corresponding obligation to obey. However, other members of the family appeared to submit to this domination as there was a willing compliance, offering the father the opportunity to control situations even when he is not directly contributing to the effect.

4.2.6　　　　Family E

Family E live in a modern, privately owned, semi-detached villa which forms part of a large estate on the outskirts of the town. The door was answered by the father who showed me into the lounge where the rest of the family were waiting. The father introduced me to everyone and indicated a vacant seat. During the introductory conversation the father shared with me some of the family history, in so far as he had another daughter from a previous marriage, who was now 28 and married and therefore "*didn't live with **this** family*". His use of the term "*this family*" could be significant in suggesting that the two families operate independently, although he admitted that aspects of his daughter's education at school led him to form views and opinions which subsequently affected his dealings with the education system and the homework practices with respect to Child E.

4.2.6.1　　　　"Read a broadsheet"

When discussing the differing types of homework, the mother acknowledged that, although she got a lot of enjoyment from the television as an avid watcher of soaps, she believed that television could be used, by the teaching profession, as an effective learning tool to make homework more stimulating and interesting,

> "*I don't mind Child E watching television; I think he will learn a lot from watching television. If you're sitting just doing worksheets and worksheets and worksheets then it's boring*".

as Child E believed that "*it sort of brightens up the homework*". Child E suggested that practical homework was preferable because, for example, "*we are told in like modern studies to watch the news and come back the next day to discuss a bit of it*" or "*to start reading a broadsheet newspaper once a week*" hence opening the discussion on differing types of appropriate homework. The parents acknowledged that some subjects prepared homework which facilitated opportunities for parents to easily be involved in the homework

process whereby the teacher(s) and/or departments provided an integrated pack which included information sheets to which the homework had been related. This type of homework offered the mother an opportunity to create a very caring and supportive environment when she discussed the attributes of some homework programmes where parent prompts had been included by some departments, for example Home Economics, even when she acknowledged that *"the last time I had to go into the cupboards I was really annoyed because I didn't want to do it but never mind"* and *"I was just tired that day but never mind"*. The phrase *"never mind"* appears to indicate a very caring and supportive aspect to her identity as she became involved in the homework, even when obstacles obstructed her involvement, for the benefit of her son.

Parent prompts appeared to offer the parents opportunities to keep abreast of the curricular knowledge as it allowed them to follow it more easily,

> *"the more information you have about the homework from the school then the easier it is for you to follow a pattern or follow the way they want XXXX [Child E] to learn it".*

These forms of homework had enabled the parents to assist in completing the homework satisfactorily without having to search for information from differing sources, for example the Internet, thereby assisting their son whilst, at the same time, increasing their 'expert power' as the parents, but especially the father, were keen to keep abreast of curricular developments.

However, although the parents both showed an enthusiasm to help their son, they also indicated a concern with respect to the disparity of frequency within the homework structures of differing curricular areas which meant that they found it difficult to monitor their son's homework. In the father's considered opinion, students should be completing a standard amount of homework, for example, *"¾ hour a night as, after that, you are bound to have lapse of concentration"* and that the monitoring procedures of the teachers were

suspect as confirmed by Child E when he shared that *"there is one teacher that we've got that never checks our homework"*

However, throughout the family conference the father was extremely keen and proactive in being involved in the learning process, although he was also apprehensive about his son's rate of learning and his possible inability to continue to help him, as he doesn't want to appear to lose his influence over his son *"I suppose an adult doesn't want to be shown up by a child. You don't want to admit it"*. This could have reduced the level of 'expert power' attributed to the father, although this was negated by his continual exemplification of ways in which he attempted to keep abreast of curricular developments and/or changes, thereby retaining his 'expert power'.

4.2.6.2 "Careful how you do it"

In the initial few minutes my observations of the individuals gave me a feeling that they were warm and attentive individuals who had a close relationship with each other, as all members of the family were seated closely together, whilst I sat in a separate chair on the opposite side of the room. I have no way of knowing whether the seating arrangements had been discussed and/or organised before I arrived but it appeared to suggest a "connectedness" between all members of the family. Several instances of family "connectedness" were evident, for example, the continual use of the pronoun *"us"* throughout the interview, by all members of the family, and the happy, calm, natural and serene conversation which was taking place between the mother and son when I entered the lounge. This could be indicative of 'group power', in a way that would enable all to use their "connectedness" to influence the other members of the family. At differing times and in differing situations, different members of the family could influence through 'group power'. Throughout the family conference it was noticeable how each member of the

family showed consideration for one another as each was permitted to express their point of view without interruption and/or disquiet.

During the introduction, the father shared that he had a daughter from a previous marriage which offered him the opportunity to draw comparisons. During his daughter's education, the homework practices of the family appeared to be different,

> *"a lot of the time she just went up the stairs and shut herself in her room and you never seen her again until it was finished. I can't remember too much but I don't think there was so much signing of the homework so she could actually come back downstairs with the homework finished and we wouldn't see the homework until the end of that school year or unless she was really looking for some help".*

In contrast, the parents appeared to indicate a wish to be involved in their son's education by attempted to ensure supportive homework mechanisms had been put in place to support Child E's learning,

> "*it's different with XXXX [Child E] because there is a bit more involvement for us and also we have to sign and see what the diary says and so on. It's definitely more involvement this time, I think".*

indicating a supportive family relationship.

Power also exists, however, in a whole range of interpersonal situations where individuals significantly influence each other through the effective use of 'legitimate power', for example, the father appeared to influence the mother in the family and appears to direct the homework practices,

> *"I enjoyed maths and I quite enjoyed the problems with Child E but with English, and things like that, I wasn't too good so then I kind of push them onto mum. XXXX [mum] does letter writing etc, i.e. English, as a job and therefore as far as I'm concerned that's XXXX's [mum's] department".*

It was noticeable within the family that the mother appeared to "tread a middle path", displaying compliance/subservience whereby she capitulated to the wishes of her husband and/or son and frequently demonstrated agreement with both of them, without offering an opinion of her own, for example, *"I agree with what Child E said"*. This was reinforced throughout the family conference as the mother frequently "added to" the statement made by others in the family without giving any original ideas herself. This could be indicative of the influence that the father could deploy through his 'patriarchal power' or it could be indicative of a mother who lacks confidence in either her ability and/or her discomfiture in communicating with a stranger and/or shyness but I had no way of determining this. The father and son appeared to have a mutually supportive relationship, based on the father's keenness for their son to achieve, as he saw his involvement in the homework process as beneficial. In this instance the father demonstrated that power is the property of the relationship and not of the individual, as Child E appeared to be aware that his father was assisting him by setting up effective homework practices, which he adhered to, thereby showing that it is not necessarily rewards that are required, but it's being *perceived* to have rewards of whatever kind (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004). However, this influence was positively acknowledged by Child E as he thought that parental involvement through the homework diary and learning together afforded everyone the opportunity to,

> *"know what happens at school. If you need any help in anything they [the parents]*
> *should be able to know all the answers because they [the parents] know all the stuff*
> *you've been doing at school"*

acknowledging the 'expert power' of his father.

The father appeared to continually build his 'reward power' by reinforcing his supportiveness through demonstrating that he cares about his son's education and valuing his opinion. This supportiveness was further demonstrated during the discussion surrounding the schools policy on providing homework diaries to every pupil. The parents appreciated the school's provision of homework diaries, as it offered them a tangible means

of monitoring aspects of Child E's school life. It also afforded them the opportunity to monitor types and frequency of class work as well as homework, enabling them to judge Child E's progress in differing curricular areas, for example,

> *"to keep you in touch with what is happening with XXXX [Child E] at school and to me [father] that is the main thing".*

The father/son relationship appeared to show this mutual respect whereby the father allowed his son to have responsibility for his own homework practices and learning but offered a supporting role when requested by Child E,

> *"I don't think you need to be involved all the time. I like it quite a lot of the time when Child E does it all himself and he's solved it and finished it and it's good but I think if needed there is someone there to be involved in it".*

This allowed his son to have the responsibility of identifying where and when he needs help and who is best placed to help, *"Child E starts the involvement. I think Child E decides who he involves between the 2 of us or both sometimes".* This facilitated opportunities for 'referent power' to move between father and son as they appeared to identify with one another and had a common goal associated with homework.

However, the father also demonstrated a balance between wanting the homework completed,

> *"I think the thing is that you instil in him to get his homework done. So you have to push it to get it done but just careful how you do it"*

and showing consideration for the needs and/or wants and/or desires of his son by directing him towards completing his homework. He considered that it offered Child E good habits for lifelong learning in either a career or at university. Child E appeared to be tempted by the material rewards of help, support and consideration for his welfare offered by his father with respect to his homework, confirming the relational view of power, as suggested by French and Raven, as he perceives his father has access to rewards, sanctions, and/or expertise by his awareness of what is happening to his son at school through the use of

varying surveillance tactics, "*my mum and dad know what happens at school. They know all the stuff you've been doing at school*", although the father clearly engenders a culture of help and support to his son through tangible mechanisms within the established homework routine, for example, "*if it was affecting him we would consider changing that*" or "*if he was getting ratty most of the time by doing it later rather than earlier, then we would have to think about a move but it doesn't seem to be like that*".

When discussing the role of the parents in the homework process, and throughout the interview, many tangible support mechanisms were uncovered to help reinforce their son's learning. For example, the mother highlighted "*to ask him every night if he's got homework*" or "*to make sure he does the homework*" or "*make sure that he's not looking at the television too much because the television gets switched off regularly*". The father's role appeared to be much more focused on the actual mechanics of offering help, for example, "*a clue of help or by telling him [Child E] how to work it out*" or "*XXXX's [Child E] got to be encouraged by sitting with him*", perhaps due to the increased 'expert power' as the son appeared to lean towards asking for help from his father. The discussion about homework demonstrated facets of the parents' relationship with their son, especially the father/son relationship, and uncover, for Child E, the embodiment of power as a property of the relationship and not of the individual, as the father was aware that,

> "*You have to be careful how you do it because you don't want to put it down as a chore "I must" "your not going to get out unless" because then it becomes a punishment exercise and you don't want that instilled. I don't want to make Child E feel as if he **must** come in from school and **must** get my homework done**, must** do this before anything else happens. So you have to push it to get it done but just careful how you do it*".

To assist in creating a supportive and caring family environment, the father made a real effort to accommodate the school and the changes in the methodology associated with

Mathematics, to support Child E's understanding and to support him by being able to check his homework effectively. They acknowledged that, on some occasions, he can,

"*do it all himself and he's solved it and finished it all and it's good but I [father] think if needed there is someone there to be involved in it*".

This collaborative approach opens up opportunities for the family to work together to solve the mathematical problems. The father is aware of the possible conflicts which could emerge between himself and his son, and between his son and the teacher due to the differences in approaches which have taken place since the father was at school, with respect to mathematical methodology. However working together, teaching each other through offering each other support in learning the different methodologies, has offered the family ways of dealing with the possible minor conflicts. When discussing the differences in methodology and aspects of mathematical problems, it emerged that compromise was reached by each doing it their own way and then cross checking that the answer was correct. If a discrepancy occurred, they could double check their working until the error was located, bringing about a "win-win" situation for both father and son and hence fulfilling a need in both to achieve and dispel any possible emerging conflict. This method of conflict resolution also offered Child E the opportunity to continue to fulfil a need within him to please others, especially his parents and teachers, which served to reinforce the 'referent power' which existed between father and son through their mutual respect.

Both father and son appeared to have a common understanding of what each other expected and each could clearly articulate their roles associated with homework, as the father indicated that,

"*It means Child E is bringing what he is getting at school home, where we can understand what's happening at school, then we can follow what he is doing right through the year. I mean if he was just coming home and saying nothing or the homework wasn't related to the school then anything could be happening at school and we wouldn't know anything about it but if the homework is related to his school*

work then we get informed. To me it keeps you in touch with what is happening with

Child E at school and to me that is the main thing".

Child E reinforced the same philosophy when he stated,

"*I think it is good for my parents to be involved because they get to know what*

happens at school. It's good because if you need any help in anything they should

be able to know all the answers because they know all the stuff you've been doing

at school.

This joint responsibility illustrate caring and supportiveness which permeated all aspects of the family's discussions about homework, again reinforcing the concept of 'group power' within and amongst the family. Each member of the family appeared to constantly consider the needs of others and appreciate others viewpoint, including Child E who shows a maturity and realism in his awareness of the importance to attempt to complete his homework himself and not always consult his parents, otherwise, "*if your parents were involved in everything you would seem to ask them a lot for the answers and it wouldn't really be your work*". This appreciation and consideration for others can also be viewed through the eyes of Child E, who showed an awareness that his parents were a useful tool in helping him to improve his learning through spending time with him "*to look at it and tell you what's right and what's wrong with it*" because "*sometimes the teacher in class doesn't have time to look at everyone's work in detail*", whilst offering him opportunities to feel connected to his parents, thereby reinforcing involvement through emotional and tangible help and support. As mentioned earlier, the parents offered several instances of emotional support, for example in instilling good homework habits to assist with future career pathways, the acknowledgement from the father that,

"*Child E's got to be encouraged. I think that it is part of education that he has to*

be encouraged to do his homework, that's it. It's as straight forward as that as far

as I'm concerned",

and the reinforcement that the parents will help and support Child E, as it "*keeps us as a family*", strengthening the family "connectedness" and team spirit.

4.2.6.3 "Great believer"

The father demonstrated an awareness of the importance of homework "*I am a great believer in homework*" and "*I still think that homework's part of their education*". However, the father showed an awareness of the possible stress and/or tension which could perhaps be caused by being dogmatic about the completion of homework,

> "*I think the thing is that you instil in him to get his homework done. You have to be careful how you do it because you don't want to put it down as a chore "your not going to get out unless" because then it becomes a punishment exercise and you don't want that instilled*".

The family did not openly portray the impression of the father being the "head of the household" but subliminally there were small indications of his status, for example, on arriving at the house the father appeared to take charge of the situation by answering the door, directing me to a seat and introducing me to the family, demonstrating 'legitimate power'. He then began to share information about the family without me asking any questions. The father's influence was evident throughout the interview as the mother would wait until the father had answered the questions and frequently started her response with "*I agree with XXXX [father]*" and then expressed her opinion. Although the father was not domineering, he surreptitiously influenced the behaviour of others as it was noticeable that the father frequently responded first to the questions and was allowed to by both the mother and son and therefore, on several occasions, I attempted to direct some question away from the father and towards the mother and son. Interestingly the mother would nearly always look towards the father when speaking and/or finished her response with "*isn't that correct,*

XXXX [father]?". The father influenced his son's behaviour by making explicit what he wanted him to do, hence a form of subtle domination. Scott (2001) acknowledges that a parent exercises interpersonal power over a child, but also has certain legal rights that a child may grow up to accept and that will be recognised by others, reinforcing the father's power base. However, the father is supportive of education as can be seen by the vision which he offered for his reasoning in establishing a routine for Child E so that his habits continued into his future pathway,

> *"if you want to go further in education or if you go into industry and you're sent to courses, then a lot of the stuff you have to do by yourself at home. It's getting him started to know that you have to do things at home as well as at college or wherever",*

This belief, engendered by the father, has established a regime within the family which is acknowledged by all, indicating a culture of emotional support as the father is hoping to engender appropriate homework habits to assist in his son's future career pathway regardless of its direction. As suggested by Goldhammer and Shils (1939) a person may be said to have power to the extent that he influences the behaviour of others in accordance with his own intentions and therefore the father appears to hold power as the "influencer" because he appeared to have the ability to influence the practices of others, namely his son and wife, to achieve his intention of *"getting him started to know that you have to do things[homework] at home as well as at college or wherever"*, as Child E appeared to willingly comply with the homework practices that have been established by his father.

Child E appeared to accept his father's claim to legitimacy for the established homework practices,

> *"he always waits until after dinner before he does his homework. He will come in from school, go out to play, come back, have his dinner and then start his homework. If he's got homework he just gets on with it and does it and he knows that if he does it he can go and do what he wants to"*

161

This uncovered Child E's compliant nature as he conformed to the wishes of his parents. This could be due to the belief that his father had 'reward power', whereby he held the capacity to control rewards which Child E valued, for example their special relationship of mutual respect and support. Interestingly, although the father had the capacity to remove tangible rewards, he at no point attempted to use this as a means of bringing about compliance. This was particularly evident in the process of getting the homework diary signed, without being asked to do so. Both parents acknowledged that,

> *"Child E is very good at handing you over his homework diary. We don't have to ask for it really. Now and again, not every week but occasionally it's the next week and he says "I forgot to give you my diary"* and in return they duly *"sign it"*

which offers them the opportunity to monitor the level of homework, the type and frequency as they *"see what the diary says and so on",* as well as affording the father the opportunity to turn his vision into a reality through ensuring that the homework practices were established, reinforced and adhered to. This may have been possible due to the reality that his father is his legal guardian, thereby acknowledging 'legitimate power'.

The mother portrayed the identity of the "watcher" of the homework regime which was established by the father, based on past experience with his daughter, whereby she monitored the situation, *"I quite often ask him if he's got homework when he comes in from school but he always waits until after dinner"* and where she considered the role of the parent was,

> *"to make sure he does the homework. To make sure that he's not looking at the television too much otherwise the television gets switched off regularly".*

However, the mother appeared to carry on this monitoring role through 'affiliation power', based on the belief that she was acting on behalf of the authority of the father who retained 'legitimate power'. Although the mother appeared to monitor the situation, by her own admission, it was generally the father's help which was sought, when she suggested that *"I*

usually say 'go and ask your dad'". Both mother and son were aware that she was not available to help with homework when television soaps were on as she denied Child E's requested for help with the reply "*no, I'm watching XXXXXXX ",* which further assisted in reducing her 'expert power'. This discussion uncovered a fundamental hidden difference in beliefs/attitudes between the parents whereby the mother appeared to show uncertainty and blame others whilst the father was interested in what was best for his son which could reduce the mothers 'expert power' and simultaneously increase the father's 'expert power' and 'referent power'.

However, Child E's identity emerged as a compliant young gentleman who was eager to please. Having instilled good homework practices, the parents appeared to reap the benefits, as Child E was given the responsibility of engaging the help of his parents whenever he required it. These practices appeared to enable Child E to have a sense of connectedness to his learning experience. This reciprocity was also demonstrated in Child E's attitude towards his parents, where he showed an awareness of who to ask for help with what and when. If his mother was watching television, he would seek the help of his dad and will also ask his dad for help with mathematics and science and his mother with home economics. He appeared to perhaps hold the balance of power within the family through his quiet, compliant mannerisms although he also demonstrated surreptitious aspects of rebellion which were alluded to by his mother when discussing the disparity between methodologies employed in schools at present and the methodologies she was acquainted with. She alluded to his rebellion when she said,

> "*I think XXXX [Child E] would say "but that's not the way we were shown".*
> *That's one of the usual things we get flung back at us.*

Child E's compliance permeates the transcription where he appeared to wish to please his parents by involving them in the learning process, whereby he *"starts the involvement".* Through his compliance he uncovers several instances of his apparent need to please others, for example

> *"he knows that if we're going out that he either has to do it in advance or before he*
>
> *goes out", "sometimes I'll have to wait until they finish doing something but that's*
>
> *ok because I can move onto the next question or something or the next piece of*
>
> *homework and come back to it"*

and

> *" XXXX [Child E] is very good at handing you over his homework diary".*

Similarly, there appeared to be a need within him to please his teachers, as they [the teachers] held 'legitimate power' through the position which they hold. This 'position power' is recognised as the authority [the teachers] to issue orders which they [the pupils] in turn have an obligation to accept. Even when he was aware that,

> *"there is one teacher that we've got that never checked our homework and I feel*
>
> *that I could have been doing other stuff instead of doing that homework",*

he still completed the homework in case *"the teacher might turn round and check it one day",* indicative of his compliant nature. However, within his need to please others through compliance, he did express a view that the *"system was unfair"* but *"I felt as if I had to do it",* recognising the 'legitimate power' of teacher(s) through their position of authority.

4.2.6.4   "Flung back at us"

The discussion surrounding homework uncovered a small resistance to homework, which was subliminal, whereby Child E showed some ambivalence towards the help which his parents offered. The mother revealed how he sometimes *"flung back at us"* the differences in the methodology associated with mathematics homework between home and school. On many occasions Child E openly declared his appreciation for the help offered and chose which parent to ask depending on their skills. Even when Child E knew that his parents' methodology for long division was different from his own, he still sought their assistance with homework but was aware that it could cause tension within the family, *"so*

occasionally there are things which we just don't understand and we tend to fall out about it which can cause tension".

During the discussion surrounding mathematics methodology, it came to light that Child E had kept the consolidation booklets, which had been prepared by the mathematics department to reinforce learning, from his parents. However, the mother became confused by the terminologies of 'homework' and 'consolidation', which Child E used to his advantage on several occasions. This enabled Child E to take control of his learning at home and allowed him to seek help when it suited him, thereby giving him control over the situation. However, this appeared to happen on very few occasions and, as an observer, you have the feeling that this area of deception will not continue now that it has been uncovered.

4.2.6.5 "Child E decides"

Throughout the family conference, there was an impression that it was the father who was in control of the homework situation, acknowledging his 'legitimate power' as both his wife and son acknowledged his capacity of power holder as the mother deferred to the father and Child E throughout the interview. Emerson (1962) sees the relative power of each individual as directly reflecting their overall dependence on each other in their relationship. However, a balance of power is rarely one sided as each participant influences the other, resisting their power to a greater or lesser extent. The son appeared to believe that his parents, especially his father, were in possession of rewards and/or sanctions and/or expertise through an understanding of their team work coupled with the son's compliant nature and hence facilitated 'reward power'.

In many instances Child E appeared to perhaps hold the balance of power within the family through his quiet, compliant mannerisms although he also demonstrated a small number of minor, surreptitious aspects of rebellion. This conflict between compliance and taking

control of situations was uncovered in several guises, where Child E took control through making specific choices affecting his homework diary practice and when deciding on parental involvement with his homework. Whilst discussing the school homework policy, the father acknowledged that "*homework diaries are a good idea*" as a means of surveillance and that they found that they "*didn't have to ask for it really*", thereby transferring the means of control to Child E. Child E had found a means of controlling the situation by occasionally conveniently forgetting to "*hand over*" his homework diary to his parents, offering him the choice of complying or rebelling and hence transferring the power to himself.

Child E also takes control through making decisions associated with the helping process, as acknowledged by the father who stated,

> "*Child E starts the involvement. Child E decides who he involves between the 2 of us or both sometimes but it's Child E who decides*".

This enabled Child E to take control of the situation by deciding who and when to involve, depending on the nature and/or subject involved, weighting up their strengths and then targeting accordingly.

> "*I think my mum is a lot better in the home economics side and I think both of them for English, maths and science, because there's different bits to it, some things are harder so I might go and ask my dad or some things that I think my mum may have done at school, I'll ask her*",

thereby affording him the opportunity to transfer control, and hence power, to himself. This conflict between compliance and taking control of situations also emerged when discussing the main factors which influence pupils to complete their homework. A significant influence on the homework practices of Child E appeared to be the school and in particular the teachers. Child E complied with the teachers' wishes to complete the homework, based on their 'position power', but was resentful when the completion wasn't acknowledged and praise wasn't offered by the teacher. His compliance was influenced by

"*the fact that you are going to get punished for **not** doing it*", whilst his resentment was built up towards teachers because, in his opinion, "*there's not a lot of teachers that will praise you for doing it [homework]*". These factors assisted in reducing the teacher's 'position power'. Even when Child E knew that the teacher never checked his homework, his compliance overtook his conflict as he completed his homework regardless as **"*I feel as if I have to do it*"**. Child E's compliant identity appeared to influence him in abiding by the school systems and structures even when he knows that "*there is one teacher that we've got that never checks our homework*", thereby reducing the 'position power' of the teacher(s) and/or school. Child E completed the homework issued by this teacher "*because the teacher might turn round and check it one day*", even when he realises that "*it isn't fair. I feel that I could have been doing other stuff instead of doing that homework*". This appeared to be engendered through a fear of the possibility of being caught, which appeared to influence Child E into completing the homework regardless of the negativity associated with its completion and/or the impact it could have on the family's social activities.

5. **Overall conclusion**

In this chapter I attempt to reflect on several facets of the thesis from the emotional roller coaster of my research journey whilst completing this doctoral thesis, which was full of surprises, unanticipated twists, ups and downs, reversals and recoveries, to the threads of the family conferences which hold the thesis together.

Eisner (1998: 35) describes qualitative inquiry as a means of penetrating the surface where *description* can be thought of as giving an account *of*, while *interpretation* can be regarded as accounting *for*. Therefore, in the family conferences I was interested not only in making vivid what I had experienced but also in explaining its meaning. It was my hope that whilst writing this thesis, the reader would be transported back into the individual family conference, giving the reader the opportunity to don the shoes of the families and to visualise and participate vicariously in the events described. This is reflective of what Eisner (1998: 36) calls an "educational criticism" and Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003: 4) calls "a portrait".

Using this as my basic premise for the thesis, I now attempt to draw together the collage from each of the stories told into a coherent picture and then frame them under the following themes:

5.1   The borderlands of the home-school interface.

5.2   The homework terrain.

5.3   Reflection on the design process.

5.4   What does the future hold?

5. 1   The borderlands of the home-school interface.

Initially my thesis focused on the notion of homework but through the reading, memoing and classifying stages of the data analysis framework, I became aware that social relationships appeared to play a significant role in the homework discussions and patterns of power were exposed through the family's story of their engagement, or not, in the homework process. I found this to be a much more interesting focus to the research and therefore my thesis departed from the notion of family dynamics as serving to illuminate the issue of homework to homework as a catalyst to examine family dynamics, the power relations at play and the relationships exposed at the borderlands between home and school. Weis and Fine (2000: xi) suggest that there is relatively little known about life at the borders of school and community, much less the stories of youth as they sojourn between them, whilst Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003: xi) suggests that there is no more complex and tender geography than the borderlands between families and school.   The discussions surrounding homework offered the opportunity to build a picture of the relationships exposed between the parents and teachers and/or the teaching profession, uncovering several areas of disquiet.

The families within the thesis became involved in the research process through self-selection, and therefore I was surprised and delighted at the diversity of cultural location which lay across them and which directed their behaviour and organised their experiences. As suggested by Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003: 3) each of us, individually and collectively as a family, have our own autobiographical scripts constructed by the broader cultural and historical narratives that inform our identities, our values, and our sense of place in the world and therefore ghosts of our own making surround us continually. This can be further complicated by the number and diversity of versions of social reality contained within each family conference. This brings into focus the cultural, social and historical location of social constructionism and gives us a quite definite view of the world as we view the world

through a lens of our making as a result of a number of environmental factors. As such, we all hold a number of constructs to enable us to make sense of the world. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003: 38) suggests that it is not only that they are "listening on many channels", which carry the sound waves of generational connection; they are also experiencing – at least subliminally – their "historical legacies". Therefore she suggests that the subtext is defined by both autobiographical scripts and generational echoes, and by resonances from the broader cultural and historical tableaux. The ghosts are hovering over the family nursery and embedded in the cultural scripts and historical legacies (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2003: 39) and therefore negotiating family – school borders is at best an imperfect and delicate enterprise.

Exemplification of this was evident in each family conference: for example, during the initial conversation and pleasantries of Family A it emerged that the father had gone to a junior secondary school in the era of selective education where there was considerable division and academic snobbery between the two sectors which appeared to have affected his view of education. He was adamant in sharing his opinion that *"he had done well for himself"* having attended a junior secondary school as he now had a white collar occupation, owned his own home and was more concerned with his son having a wider educational experience than school and therefore they had many foreign holidays to far away places. Family B's approach to homework had been affected by the mother's recent foray into education where she had been studying for the previous four years for a sports science degree and graduated the day before the family conference took place. During the initial conversation, the mother gave me an insight into her educational philosophies as, later in life, she had become much more aware of the impact that education could have and *"the doors which could be opened with an education"* and that her parents had not had that opportunity. This had focused her thinking towards an educational orientation for herself and her children. She acknowledged that these autobiographical scripts had had a significant impact in formulating her attitude towards the completion of homework and

therefore she was the member of the family who was responsible for developing a structured homework routine. These examples reinforce the notion of autobiographical scripts and generational echoes as portrayed by Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003).

Interestingly, given the diverse mixture of autobiographical scripts, generational echoes and cultural influences, a number of common themes were uncovered which perhaps begins to give us an understanding of the relationships exposed in the chasm between the borderlands of home and school. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003: xxi) suggests that parents and teachers should be allies and partners as they are both engaged in the important and precious work of raising, guiding and teaching children, although this research highlights poor communication, disparity of provision, a lack of parental confidence and changing social situations as factors which appear to inhibit parental involvement, regardless of the power relations which existed within the families, opening an enormous chasm between the borderlands of home and school.

The homework which came home from school with the pupils served as a catalyst to expose the pupil and parental views of the teaching profession and/or the school and/or education per se and began to highlight the divide which appears to exist across the borderlands of home and school. Homework appeared to serve to develop perceptions of each group across the divide involving schools, parents and teachers, offering the pupils the opportunity to manipulate the situation and create an even greater divide to suit their individual needs and/or wants and/or desires. This was evidenced when discussing aspects of the school's homework policy as it came to light through the family conferences that teachers appeared to set homework tasks but that parents frequently found that the instructions were unclear and/or there were no specific instructions for the homework and/or it was set on new work. This frequently caused a tension in the family and reinforced the divide between home and school. North and Pillay (2002) suggest that current practices in dealing with homework tend to be labour intensive and that there is

little advice for teachers on how to apply methodological principles to homework. To make matters worse, while a teacher can turn to a textbook for help in planning lessons, very few textbooks include materials explicitly designed for homework, or provide guidance on how to adapt activities as homework tasks (North and Pillay 2002). Eisner (1998) offers the view that teaching is a professionally isolated enterprise as they seldom co-teach or have the benefits of *sustained* observation and feedback, resulting in *secondary ignorance*, a term which he uses to explain the state of being in which we do not know that we do not know. This could be a reason for teachers' apparent lack of awareness of the pupils' and parents' experiences of homework. This notion is reinforced through my present post where I have responsibility for the preparation of the continuous professional development programme for my local authority and have recently become aware that the programme appears to focus on the day-to-day classroom practice only. Unfortunately, no teachers' views were sought as part of the data collection to corroborate or challenge these findings but, as a teacher, it would appear that homework is not always effectively checked and/or marked.

Tensions in the relationship between parents and teachers was further evidenced as all parents highlighted that they felt uncomfortable in making contact with the school, even when they had concerns about their child's schooling. In fact, one family had had very serious concerns about their son's academic performance as he appeared to be struggling, particularly in Mathematics and English, but they were reluctant to make contact with the school. This was evidenced when the father of Family A suggested that *"perhaps we should have been up at the school sooner to check his progress"*, whilst they also noted that the reverse was similarly true, for example when discussing the child's progress the father stated *"I think I would have liked them [the school] to contact me";* this serves to demonstrate the divide in the relationship between home and school through the parents feeling detached from the school system and intimated that they had little means of breaking into what they perceived to be "*the school system*". As the chasm widened

between home and school, the pupils filled the void to enable them to take control and hence manipulate their homework practices to suit themselves in the sure knowledge that their parents wouldn't contact the school.

The chasm grew even wider when several families drew attention to their disquiet about the monitoring procedures of the teacher(s), as they shared stories of their children's experiences. On several occasions a family member shared an experience which indicated that they had a teacher(s) who never checked homework, for example the father in Family A was strident about this aspect and suggested *"how often do the teachers actually check homework? they [the teachers] don't!"* and the father in Family E also suggested that *"teachers don't always mark the homework",* reinforced by his son who offered *"our teacher told us she would mark it but she hasn't ever marked our jotter".* This practice, if it occurs, and I have no way at present of verifying or denying this, could lead to a disparity of opinion between the pupils, parents and teachers, leading to a further gap in the relationship between home and school. However, when I was a practising teacher, I have witnessed this type of behaviour from colleagues outwith my department. It could lead to disquiet about the teaching profession as the parents may feel that teachers are not carrying out their job effectively based on the shared stories from their children.

The family conferences offered me a very rich source of understanding from the pupil and parental perspective but unfortunately word length and time prohibited me from obtaining the teachers' perspective and therefore this thesis offers a very limited understanding of how teachers and/or the teaching profession views parents in the process. However, I believe that this could be a very rich area for further research. Eisner (1998) describes the isolated nature of teaching with a lack of quality reflection through sustained observation and feedback. He suggests that once teachers internalise the routines and procedures and learn the content they are to teach, their ability to cope is assured and with it the need to grow as teachers diminishes. To be sure, there are individual teachers who set their own

professional agendas and who continue to grow throughout their careers, but they may work in institutions that do little to make such growth possible or even to reward it. Eisner (1998: 114) suggests that most teachers are too close to themselves to secure a decent perspective and therefore are perhaps never aware of the effects their practices have on pupils and parents. This, in combination with a lack of understanding of each others situations, leads to a mismatch in expectations from both sides of the borderlands whereby teachers claim that their training never gave them the tools and techniques, the practical guidance that is helpful in communicating and working with parents. However parents appear to have limited understanding of the pressures for teachers and/or the complexity of ensuring consistency across all departments, with respect to aspects of homework, in a secondary school, all of whom tend to work autonomously. Lacking the conceptual framework, the valuing of parental perspectives, and the practical tools for productively engaging them, teachers are likely to feel ill prepared to face what many consider the "most vulnerable" part of their work – building relationships with parents (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2003: 7).

As a reflective practitioner, I am aware of the value of partnerships of all involved in the learning process but perhaps teachers and parents compartmentalise their situations which can lead to misconceptions, disquiet or divisions, in spite of the political will at present to attempt to lessen the divide in relations between home and school. I support MacBeath et al's (1986: 83) contention that the absence of homework could effectively isolate the parent from what was happening in school and could cut off their one potential avenue of educational involvement. Getting together with children to do homework could, in some instances, have educational and therapeutic benefits for the parents or for the whole family but it requires the teaching profession to be diligent in the quality, quantity and type of homework offered as it is a main communication conduit between home and school. If schools wish to use homework in this way, then it should be incumbent on them to be more diligent in informing and explaining their current homework policy and procedures to

parents but also to ensure the practices of the teachers are consistent and equitable. MacBeath et al (1986) suggested that keeping in touch with your child's life at school can be difficult for parents for whom the school is inaccessible or threatening. This is especially so when any communiqué from the school is seen to be "bad news" and yet, two decades later, it would appear as if we still haven't resolved this situation. There is a need for effective dialogue between parents and teachers. Homework has the potential to either build or seriously affect relationships across the borderlands between home and school. Kravolec and Buell (2000) suggest that in the end the quality of our relationship with our children is enhanced by those moments of participating in the activities of daily life. They are the transforming times in our relationship with our children, and without them, we lose touch with each other. We inhabit the same space without knowing one another. In essence, the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 attempts to address the issue of involving parents in the educational process of their children but perhaps it could be assisted through exploring the experiences of good practice in other countries and/or to carry out research into the area of home – school borderland, otherwise it could be in danger of becoming a paper exercise with no teeth. If we are looking to work in partnership with parents then perhaps we want to make it in more productive ways and be clear in our expectation of parents, taking account of societal changes. Parents can hardly be classed as partners in the learning process if all their involvement focuses on homework and a single report, issued by the school, and one – or at best two – interviews a year with the teacher(s).

Kralovec & Buell (2001: 39) suggest that parents say that teachers require homework, whilst teachers say that parents demand more of it. Perhaps homework could be used as a means of bringing parents and teachers together as a means of engaging the pupils rather than allowing them opportunities to manipulate the homework situation to suit their individual needs, wants or desires and to self-select their homework.

5.2   The homework terrain

Initially, I was interested in the topic of homework because, as a practising teacher at the time, I would have dogmatically agreed that homework was beneficial and essential. In my naivety I believed that there was an assumption within educational establishments that schools set homework and children did it or not but the multifaceted nature of the topic was only highlighted through carrying out this thesis. Initially, I had no notion of the complexity of the topic but the diversity of possible avenues led me to the conclusion that the situation is hugely more complex and involves numerous interweaving factors.

5.2.1   The curriculum may have changed but has homework?

Noticeably, in comparison with other areas of research, in the 21st century there appears to be a dearth of research materials on homework which was reinforced when I carried out an Internet search of the British Educational Index from 2000 to the present day. Only fifteen articles included "*homework*" in the title and on closer examination only four were relevant to my area of research. This reinforces my notion that homework is a forgotten area but one which is imposed on teachers, parents and pupils without adequate thought or training. Kralovec and Buell (2000) suggest that although homework causes much anguish in many homes, not only for children but also for their parents, it is one of the most entrenched institutional practices. Despite periodic attempts to lighten the load or redistribute the burden, few efforts to reform homework have been met with any real success.

MacBeath (1996: 21) suggested that while learning in school had apparently become more varied, more differentiated and more imaginative, learning outside of school seemed to be stuck in a time warp where they have insufficient regard for the needs of the learner. Learning inside the classroom has become, for a significant number of teachers, much more

creative, as I have witnessed in my present employment. Although the profession appears to have made a shift inside the classroom, alas, a decade later, there still appears to be a considerable amount to be done outside the classroom to replicate these innovative practices as parents and pupils were clear in their responses that the types of homework being distributed by teachers were "*uninspiring*", "*old fashioned*" and amounted to "*filling in the blanks*", contrary to the principles of A Curriculum for Excellence (2004), a new Scottish curriculum for the 21st century.

Research over the previous four decades has continually suggested that students find it difficult to reconcile the demands of homework with other extra-curricular and social activities (Wildman 1968; Warrington and Younger 1996; Cooper 2001; North and Pillay 2002). The findings in this thesis replicate this notion which is perhaps not surprising if learning outside the classroom is not stimulating and engaging. Pupils took the view that homework was a necessity, but it was accorded low importance, and 'fitted in' around other more important aspects of their daily lives. Therefore, over the preceding four decades, teachers as a profession have allowed social activities the opportunity to overtake homework due to its nature and lack of engagement of the teachers, pupils and parents. However, it is important for the teaching profession to be aware that learning takes place everywhere and therefore homework should be only one of many approaches we use, along with football and scouts.

Gaining an understanding of the place of homework over the decades was something which I enjoyed enormously but also found frustrating. Although it was recommended that I ran my data collection and analysis in parallel with my literature review, I became so engrossed, sourcing more and more literature that I did not do this. On reflection, this may have happened due to my natural instinct to compartmentalise information and complete them systematically one after the other, something I now consider detrimental in this

instance. Looking back, I believe that it would have been beneficial to run these in parallel as, in the end, I had to go back and source more recent homework texts.

Regardless, this very brief foray through the decades appears to show that there has been little shift in the discourses surrounding homework. Therefore, two big questions remain. "Who is in control of the homework process" and "How do you make homework engaging for all partners in the process? Engaging homework could be considered similar to the Holy Grail whereby everyone is searching for it but unable to find it.

5.2.2   Who is in control of homework?

Bastiani et al (2002) talk about a mutually supportive triangle, described as the power of three, whereby pupils, parents and teachers are required to work together for effective learning to take place. But sometimes this is easier said than done as this thesis highlights that, perhaps as professionals and parents, we have not been aware of the extent to which pupils take control of the homework process by effectively monitoring the practices of their teachers and their parents.

The findings of the research show that the subject/teacher was the biggest single determinant for completing homework, in advance of their social commitments, indicative of the importance of the teachers' practices. Pupils capitalised on their observation of teachers' practices as they had clear knowledge of which teachers requested to see the completed homework on a regular basis or not, which teachers checked it on a regular basis or not and which teachers made helpful or obscure comments on the completed homework. This effectively allowed the pupils to self-select homework based on their observations.

Pupils capitalised on their observations of parents' practices as all pupils, even the most compliant, devised a whole range of imaginative and creative ways in which to gain control

of completing their homework to suit their own perceived needs and/or wants and/or desires. None were earth shatteringly new but were cleverly devised to suit their individual circumstances, for example, Child A didn't fully record the homework which he required to complete using the excuse that he was slow in class; Child B didn't record his homework accurately by omitting the subject and/or the full quantity; and Child E made use of the fact that he willingly handed over his homework diary, of his choosing, building up a trust with his parents which enabled him to not hand it over on some occasions. MacBeath (1994) identified similar excuses for pupils not having done their homework and it would appear a concern if, as a profession, we have not identified these practices and/or attempted to alter and/or improve the situation in the last decade.

When I was a practising teacher, I would have vehemently challenged the assertion that pupils were in control of the homework process but this doctoral study has made me question my own perceptions and beliefs of homework and the profession. It has taught me not to take things at "face value" and that it can be beneficial to consider things from differing perspectives, even ones alien to myself. I now believe that, in some instances, the teaching profession is doing itself a disservice by allowing these practices to continue as homework could be termed the *"public face"* of classwork and because we are in a time of enormous educational change. This could offer the profession an opportunity to rectify or amend the situation for the benefit of all concerned in the education of children. A Curriculum for Excellence (2004) clearly states that the educational process itself is changing and that there is growing understanding of the different ways in which children learn and how best to support them. Therefore, as a profession are we offering young people the best educational opportunity by offering them homework which is *"boring"*, and *"uninspiring"*? If homework persists in the present format, then we are doing our future citizens a disservice and not aspiring to a significant principle of a major educational initiative, *"to make learning active, challenging and enjoyable" (*A Curriculum for Excellence 2004: 10)*.

5.3   Reflections on the research design

I found reflecting on the research design very illuminating as I could trace the developments in my journey and how this had affected both my personal and professional life.

I acknowledge that the exploration of existing meaning was limited in the quantitative aspect of the thesis, although the answers provided by the participants were their understanding of homework from their perspective at that moment in time and that I brought a lack of appreciation of their social world to the questionnaire. I spent an inordinate amount of time analysing the quantitative data through writing formulae to explore possible linkages and interrelationships. I very much regret this as I later found the qualitative data to be very rich and interesting and, on reflection, I wish I had attempted to analyse this data first but I was unsure of my abilities.

I chose to use a similar research design to that of MacBeath et al (1986) when planning the family conferences by locating them within the family home in an attempt to create an environment conducive to discussion as it offered the participants a more natural setting in which they felt comfortable and in which I hoped they would find it easier to interact. The families whose voices and experiences fill the qualitative aspect of this thesis were generous in welcoming me into their midst, open in revealing to me their insights and perspectives of homework, and brave in allowing me to witness their conversations when discussing the questions posed in the family conferences. Initially I thought the family conferences would enable me to consider the homework practices, in more depth whilst adding a family dimension. However, in reality, I believe that the family conferences became a much richer and interesting source which portrayed a different picture as they offered me the opportunity to observe meaning being constructed through the interactions of the participants. The family conferences also enabled me to be consistent with my

epistemological stance as the 'social' in social constructionism is about the mode of meaning generation where it is developed and transmitted within an essentially social context and because the interpretivist approach looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world. Therefore, within the family conferences I became much more interested in interpretation and meaning making, by considering what the interviewees were saying, how they said it and/or get to say it and their behaviours and attitudes and much less concerned with accessing specific facts surrounding homework. This is reflective of the notion of epistemic seeing as described by Eisner (1998: 68) where episteme refers to knowledge, and epistemic seeing is the kind of knowledge secured through sight. My emphasis on seeing should be regarded as a shorthand way of referring to all of the senses and the qualities to which they are sensitive. Awareness of the qualities of voice, manner, movement and visual environment, at the very minimum, provides knowledge of those qualities per se.

I accepted wholeheartedly the notion of the social world being constructed by individuals through their social practices and therefore accepted the notion that we all view the world through a lens of our own making as a result of a number of environmental factors. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003: 219) describes this as our "autobiographical scripts" – haunting laments of the psychic ghosts - fuelled by broader historical and cultural narratives which shape the way we view the world and are often unconscious replays of childhood experiences in families and in schools. Similarly, Eisner (1998: 36) expresses the opinion that humans learn; they bring with them memories and interpretations of past events. What they experience is, in part, shaped by their personal history. As such, each family held a number of constructs to enable them to make sense of the world. However, the construction of meaning was not fixed within the families but altered in their daily lives as they created and recreated their versions of reality. What we think of as "true", therefore, is not some external reality, but what is currently accepted as such and therefore I was aware of the transient nature of the construction of meaning. Therefore, it can be said that the families

produced their own meanings based on their interactions but also on their historical and cultural location.

In agreement with MacBeath et al (1986) and Eisner (1998) my guiding principle for the family conferences was to put the participants at ease, encourage and stimulate discussion as I felt that it was important to allow the discussion to flow and not impose a structure, rather to offer suggested questions if required. This supports Eisner's (1998: 183) view that conducting a good interview is, in some ways, like participating in a good conversation: listening intently and asking questions that focus on concrete examples and feelings rather than on abstract speculations, which are less likely to provide genuinely meaningful information. I felt that I was warmly received by all the families into their homes and in fact the parents appeared to welcome the opportunity to talk about topical issues surrounding homework and/or the school. However, on some occasions being in the family home made me feel uncomfortable but I accepted it as part of the process. I felt particularly uncomfortable when I walked into an already charged atmosphere between Child D and his parents and felt responsible for exacerbating the aggression displayed between the family members, as it had come to light that Child D had been caught truanting that day and therefore the timing of the family conference was not ideal, although I had no way of knowing this in advance. The father continually shouted and used aggressive body language towards his son throughout the interview but I have no way of knowing if this is his 'normal' manner of communicating with family members. I also felt for the son of Family C when sibling rivalry appeared to have a significant impact on his behaviour and demeanour but still believe that the family conferences were a valuable means of watching meaning being constructed and contested when discussing issues associated with homework.

MacBeath et al (1986: 7) suggests that it is most important in this kind of research that the researchers are not clouded in what they see by what they already believe and therefore it

was essential for me to be aware that I also carried my own version of social reality. However, what constructionism does drive home unambiguously is that there is no true or valid interpretation. 'Useful', 'liberating', fulfilling', 'rewarding' interpretations, yes. 'True' or 'valid' interpretations, no, but what it does do is help us to make sense of our world. Therefore, I am aware that I entered the research field with an open mind but not an empty head. As a member of the teaching profession, it was important that I was aware of the frames of meaning that I, as a researcher, brought to the research process, recognising that my assumptions, values and beliefs are themselves only a version of reality, echoing, competing and colliding with the versions presented by the participants. Therefore, it was important for me to remember that there was no particular truth that would give a universal picture of the homework process and that this thesis was an interrogation of existing understandings through my explorations of the accounts of the families involved. MacBeath et al (1986: 7) offers the opinion that an indicator of the degree to which researchers are able to remain open and be cautious about their own judgements is the extent to which they find their attitudes modified in the process of the research. In the Professional Doctorate, of course, such transitions in the researcher's understanding are a necessary and important part of the process. On reflection, I believe wholeheartedly that I have been able to remain open and suspend my initial judgements as this thesis has given me a unique opportunity to explore the topic of homework, which had been imposed on my educational practice for several decades, and has now totally altered my perception of homework in many and differing ways. This was a steep learning curve which I very much appreciate and value. I only wish others would take the same opportunity and therefore I will strive to encourage many others to have the same experience.

I carried with me my own notions of homework and power attributed to me by virtue of my status as a teacher and I have no way of determining whether or not this cloak shrouded the discussions and issues surrounding homework. I have no way of knowing how the families perceived me but on the surface they appeared to engage fully in the family conference

discussions, although perhaps beneath there were more negative feelings which were carefully masked by the participants. Throughout each family conference, I attempted to distance my own view of reality and diminish my power status by asking the pupils to read the questions in an effort to stimulate the debate within the family without my interference. Also at the beginning of each family conference I always explained my position as "researcher" in deference to my position as "teacher" or "school spy" in an attempt to detach myself from their possible preconceptions and throughout attempted to stay neutral, even when I wanted to intervene to clarify an issue and/or defend a colleague. This was especially difficult for me as it was a natural instinct to defend colleagues and systems of which I was a part but believe it was necessary as a means of distancing myself and not portray a stereotypical "teacher" point of view. On reflection it was perhaps naïve of me to think that I could detach myself from these labels, through these simple practices, as the parents and children probably had a preconceived notion of my position within an educational environment and therefore they perhaps still saw me as part of that establishment. However, given that there was the possibility of them viewing me in this way, I was astonished at their interactions and engagement which emerged, their honesty in revealing their homework activities, their feelings and aspects of their lives. In agreement with Eisner (1998) I was surprised how much people are willing to say to those whom they believe are willing to listen.

When transcribing the family conferences, I became very aware, that if I had been asked these questions as a parent, I would not have revealed nearly as much as the parents and children involved in the family conferences. Although I now have no way of knowing why this was, in retrospect, I would have liked to find out how they viewed my entry into their family surroundings and whether or not it affected their terms of reference. Did I change the family environment by my entry, did they have preconceived notions of teachers, and was I typical? All of these aspects could be explored in another thesis and/or research paper.

Another interesting facet of the family conferences which I hadn't initially considered, but which could form the basis of a piece of research, was the effect that the openness and sharing of individual opinions could have on the families. For example, in Family C the mother initially described the homework system which she had devised for the family which she felt was appropriate to give each of her children an equal share of her time for homework. However, it emerged in the family conference discussions that Child C didn't like the system and took this opportunity to share this with his parents. I believe that the family conference aspect of the research design lent itself to this type of openness of which there were many instances, although I have no way of knowing if the homework practices uncovered throughout the discussions have now altered. It would have been interesting to return to this but time and word length prohibited doing so.

Looking back, another interesting aspect of the family conferences lies within the notion of power as sophisticated undercurrents which I was party to when observing the families. For example, patriarchal power was evident in several families whereby the fathers displayed differing controlling mechanisms from compassion to shouting to demonstrate their power to bring about compliance. Affiliation power was displayed by several of the mothers based on the patriarchal power of their spouse. Much greater detail of this is offered in the analysis of the family conferences. During the research process I was also aware of the active construction of meaning taking place which was dynamic, transient, surprising and which engaged at differing levels. For example all five family conferences had differing views of social reality but interestingly the same themes emerged of a lack of change in homework practices of the pupils over the decades and a lack of change in how pupils still manipulated the homework practices to enable them to control their homework process.

In conclusion, I am conscious that I could have taken so many differing paths and believe that this is due to the richness of the family conference data. I am glad I have made the shift from positivism to interpretivism as I feel that it has enhanced other aspects of my life,

apart from research, as it has helped me to consider all things in shades of grey rather than dogmatically black and white. A tremendous advantage, I now realise!

5.4   **What does the future hold?**

This thesis can in no way offer definitive evidence which could point to specific changes at local or national level. I would, however, hope that it could add to the discourses surrounding homework and its impact on the borderlands of the home-school interface and therefore provide a possible opening for educational dialogue.

In agreement with Weiss & Fine (2000), I recognise that learning takes place in varying spaces, and is lifelong, a philosophy which I now wholeheartedly believe in as I have learned so much about myself and others when completing this doctoral thesis. However, this can also apply to homework as pupils can learn in many ways and therefore I feel that we miss an opportunity by constraining learning to inside the classroom. It also opens the door for opportunities for both teachers and parents to begin to learn to understand the complexities of each others situation and consider strategies to help support each other for the advancement of more conducive relationships.

However, the diversity of the topic and the range of possible avenues left me with more questions than answers and therefore I would encourage other educationalists to participate in research to help stimulate further debate. I suggest the following questions which might be asked by parents, teachers and school managers in formulating, or reviewing, their practice in relation to homework and the borderlands of the home-school interface.

1. How can all involved in home-school relations shift their attitudes towards a more inclusive and communicative stance?

2. Why are the borderlands between home and school so diverse, delicate and imperfect?

3. How can meaningful alliances between home and school be developed and sustained?

4. What expertise or training do teachers have/need to help them develop relationships with all partners in the learning process and to begin to reduce the chasm between home and school?

5. What are teachers' perspectives on involving parents in the learning process?

6. Do children need homework or does learning take place everywhere which can reinforce classroom learning and therefore is their a role for educationalists in recognising this?

7. What are teachers' perspectives on relationships between the borderlands of home and school?

8. To what extent do children have a voice in homework processes and in home-school relations?

9. Does homework encourage a divide at the borderlands of the home-school interface?

10. Do school managers need to of the extent to which current regimes may hinder parental involvement?

As I move to a new appointment with Learning and Teaching Scotland, I would hope to be able to perhaps begin to influence others about the need to review the homework offered to pupils and the need to adopt a much more creative approach to engage all, due to the valuable contribution which, I believe, it can make to learning.

HOMEWORK

Homework! Oh, Homework!
Homework! Oh, homework!
I hate you! You Stink!
I wish I could wash you
Away in the sink,
If only a bomb
Would explode you to bits
Homework! Oh Homework!
You're giving me fits.

I'd rather take baths
With a man-eating shark,
Or wrestle a lion
Alone in the dark
Eat spinach and liver,
Pet ten porcupines,
Than tackle the homework
My teacher assigns.

Homework! Oh Homework!
You're last on my list,
I simply can't see
Why you ever exist,
If you disappeared
It would tickle me pink
Homework! Oh homework!
I hate you! You stink!

(Source: anonymous pupil)

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